

## MARKING TIME

**PRODUCERS OF TWO UPCOMING FILMS SHARE THEIR INSIGHT ON MAKING THE PROJECTS THAT EARNED THEM THE PRODUCERS MARK CERTIFICATION.**

### Lightyear

Galyn Susman, p.g.a.

Disney and Pixar's *Lightyear*, the latest spinoff from the wildly successful *Toy Story* franchise, is described as an origin story, with Buzz Lightyear and his crew stranded on a hostile planet with the mission to get them all safely home. Tim Allen, long the voice of the buff, Herculean-jawed astronaut, has been replaced by a younger model: Chris Evans. The original *Toy Story* (1995) was the first feature-length film created entirely with CGI, and it's safe to say that *Lightyear* producer Galyn Susman has witnessed the form's phenomenal growth first-hand over the years, having joined Pixar in 1990. She's a CGI pioneer in her own right, having participated on the team that created a short film on Macintosh computers in the late '80s when she conducted graphics research and development at Apple. *Lightyear* is due out on June 17, the first theatrical release for Pixar Animation Studios since Disney and Pixar's *Onward* in March 2020.

**SAVE FOR THE CHARACTERS, LIGHTYEAR FEATURES AN ASTONISHING LIVE-ACTION, CINEMATIC LOOK—ALBEIT ONE WITH THE KIND OF SPECIAL EFFECTS WE ASSOCIATE WITH THE STAR WARS FILMS. HAS IT GOTTEN TO THE POINT WHERE THERE'S NO LEVEL**

### OF PHOTOREALISM THAT CAN'T BE ACHIEVED WITH COMPUTER ANIMATION?

I'm not sure that photorealism is really the boundary condition. We have been able to achieve photorealism in FX for live-action films for some time now. I do think that we are no longer limited in the stories that we can convincingly tell with animation. We can now create worlds and characters that an audience can invest in and feel concern for, and we have the cinematic tools to apply the wealth of live-action cinematography lessons to telling complex stories. We are fortunate that, as sci-fi lovers, we have been given the opportunity to use all of these tools to make *Lightyear*.

The question really isn't "why animation?" anymore. Animation is a medium, like any other medium, not a genre.

### HOW LONG DID THIS PROJECT TAKE FROM THE INITIAL RENDERINGS TO THE FINAL PRODUCT?

(Director) Angus (MacLane) and I have been working on this film for over five years. That includes all of the time in development, script, storyboarding, etc. When you say "initial renderings," if you mean from when we first pitched the concept, that would be five and a half years. If you mean from when we started "shooting," i.e., when we began building shots in the computer with characters in environments, that would be the fall of 2020.



Clockwise from top: Alisha Hawthorne (right), *Lightyear*'s comrade in arms, voiced by Uzo Aduba, gets married to a same-sex partner and raises a biracial family; *Lightyear* with Sox (Peter Sohn), his robotic sidekick; Susman on the set of *Lightyear*

**THIS IS THE SORT OF LAVISH PROJECT WHERE YOU'D EXPECT AN ARMY OF PRODUCERS, AND YET YOU ARE THE SOLE CREDITED PRODUCER,**



### ALONGSIDE TWO EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS, WAS THIS A CASE OF FEWER COOKS IN THE KITCHEN, THE BETTER?

That's how we do things at Pixar. The executive producers are generally creatives that can be more objective partners for the director in developing the story and can wear the studio mantle for determining when creative thresholds have been met. I work closely with an associate producer, in this case Michael Warch, who is more intimately involved in the staffing and the day-to-day management of the budget and schedule, along with our production manager, Sara Wilson. As the producer, I am the director's partner for getting his vision onto the screen within constraints set by the studio. I think it's helpful that we can work this out together, that he has one point of contact for the overall strategy of the film. I certainly enjoy this model, as it keeps me as close as possible to the filmmaking.

### LIGHTYEAR FEATURES A SAME-SEX, BIRACIAL MARRIAGE. MIGHT THIS BE A FIRST IN THE DISNEY-PIXAR UNIVERSE?

I believe we have alluded to same-sex relationships in some of our prior films. I'm not sure about biracial, though we have been definitely striving to be more diversely representative in our films for some time now. I do believe this is the first time a same-sex relationship has played such a significant emotional role in one of our films. There is so much I could say about the role of this relationship, the choices we made, etc., much of it being unnecessary spoilers. Suffice it to say that I am thrilled to show a healthy, long-term relationship that is central to the arc of our characters, and more specifically, to Buzz's arc. I hope our audiences find it meaningful.

### Day Shift

Shaun Redick, p.g.a.

The upcoming *Day Shift*, an action thriller set in the Southland that combines domestic drama, the supernatural and comedy. Oscar winner Jamie Foxx (*Ray*, 2004) plays a blue-collar everyman struggling to hold his marriage together while raising an 8-year-old daughter. His night job? Vampire killer. It marks the directorial debut of stuntman-turned-filmmaker J.J. Perry. Shaun Redick, a former literary and packaging agent who comes to the producing profession by way of WME and ICM, played a key role as producer on Jordan Peele's game-changing directorial debut, the horror feature *Get Out* (2017), and Spike Lee's provocative *BlacKkKlansman* (2018)—

both films that combined social consciousness with sly humor. *Day Shift* premieres August 12 on Netflix.

**GIVEN ITS MIXED-GENRE ELEMENTS, WHAT DID YOU ENVISION FOR THIS TONALLY? AND HOW DID YOU AND YOUR TEAM NAVIGATE THESE SEEMINGLY DISPARATE ELEMENTS?**

Our goal was to produce a fun action thriller with a buddy-comedy element. Bud (Foxx) is a character our audience can identify with. He's trying hard to save his marriage, his family and his business but can't seem to get a break. At the same time, it's a love letter to the San Fernando Valley.

**CAN YOU DESCRIBE IN A NUTSHELL HOW YOU DIVVIED UP PRODUCING DUTIES WITH YOUR WIFE, YVETTE, AND YOUR OTHER PRODUCING PARTNERS, JASON SPITZ AND CHAD STAHELSKI?**

Yvette and I develop properties together and discovered Tyler Tice's screenplay and developed it further with him. We brought it to J.J. Perry, a top name in action films, to direct. He's close friends with Chad Stahelski (the *Wick* franchise), so we all teamed up and continued to collectively develop the script around our filmmaker's vision. Our whole group built a dream cast and crew, and our Netflix team is strong, stayed close and really helped (us) producers get everything we needed. Chad and J.J. are elite action (veterans) with nonstop, wild, fun ideas.

*Day Shift* has been a blast to prep, produce and post, and the marketing campaign, starting soon, is very exciting and cool.

**WHAT WAS THE BIGGEST PROBLEM-SOLVING CHALLENGE THAT YOU ENCOUNTERED DURING PRODUCTION?**

Navigating COVID in 2021 was a big challenge, but we became very good at producing with extra safety measures in effect 24/7. Producing as well as communicating on set through zones, masks, plastic shields and text messaging to reduce contact is not easy.

**FEW ACTORS COMMAND THE SCREEN AS CHARISMATICALLY AS JAMIE FOXX. WHAT DOES HE BRING TO THE TABLE THAT YOU DIDN'T EXPECT?**

I've always been a Jamie Foxx fan since *In Living Color*, and this was the first time I got to work with him. He's a total movie star. Every day on set was like a stand-up show or a concert, and we had front-row seats. We hope to get a sequel and do it all again. ■

*Certification via the Producers Mark indicates that a producer performed a major portion of the producing functions on a specific project. Criteria, its definition, the process for earning the mark and other particulars can be viewed at [producersguild.org](http://producersguild.org).*



Jamie Foxx, left, plays a pool cleaner who moonlights as a vampire killer in *Day Shift*, on which Shaun Redick is a producer.



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