

ANIMATOR'S SURVIVAL KIT DVD

OSCAR-WINNING ANIMATION DIRECTOR ROB COLEMAN TALKS US THROUGH THE MAGIC OF RICHARD WILLIAMS' ANIMATOR'S SURVIVAL KIT DVD BOXSET

WORDS: FRANK GRIMSHAW

**Q You've seen the Animator's Survival Kit, what did you make of it?**

I took one of Richard's courses years ago and I read the book. I stayed in touch with Richard over the years and so I was very excited when they said they were going to do the DVD. I had no idea that it was going to be the enormous set of volumes that it turned out to be and I'm absolutely thrilled because one of the things that I was always trying to do as an animator was learn from other people's work. Richard has made it very easy for all of us because he's got all of the animations from his book in the DVD, and now we can look at them frame by frame.

**Q Would you say it's affected your work at all?** What it's caused me to do, and he's now done it to me twice – he did it to me at his initial masterclass – I went in thinking I knew a lot about animation and I came out completely distraught. It was because he forced me to go through something that he personally talks about: he was running his own studio, winning all these awards then he met some great masters and he realised that he didn't know that much about animation, even though he was in London and top of his game.

He did the same thing to me when I took his masterclass. I was directing animation at Lucas's Industrial Light and Magic (ILM), I came out of his class and for a week afterwards I was holding my head in my hands thinking, 'How did I get as far as I have? I'm an idiot, I don't know anything about this'. Now I'm having a very similar experience as I go through these DVDs. It's a wonderful refresher for – as he says – sophisticated use of the basics.

**Q Would you recommend it? Who do you think it might be useful for?**

I would absolutely recommend it for everybody. I get asked – as many people do who've been in the industry a while – young people come to me, or parents, or friends of friends, 'What should Johnny or Sally do if they want to become an animator?' I would say anyone who's interested in becoming an animator should pick up Richard's book, it's become the new bible of animation and these DVDs are an absolute complement to that. To someone starting off in animation there isn't anything more valuable than

these DVDs. I would also recommend it to professionals.

If someone is having problems with weight or with something else they can look through. What's terrific is that those who didn't have the benefit of going to one of Richard's classes can now experience that class by watching the DVDs. What you find is that Richard, thankfully for all of us, was a voracious student – he went in and found all these old guys, brought them to London and had them teach him and his team. What's terrific about Richard is that he's a natural teacher as well. He was obviously a great student but he's a wonderful teacher. He clearly and succinctly takes everyone through the various methods, devices and principles of animation.

**Q What aspects did you find most interesting? Most unexpected? Most enlightening?**

The joy of the disc for me was all of the animated examples. He had them drawn in the book, but to actually see them animated and be able to frame through them forward and backward, and to be able to look at them, that is a true treat. For example, I'm teaching my 10-year-old how to animate at the moment and those animated examples are fabulous because they illustrate the moving form in the principles that Richard is talking about. It's too hard for a 10-year-old to look at the drawing in the book. Richard is, of course, an incredible draughtsman, but it doesn't move,



but these animated examples are moving and it shows the magic behind the animation.

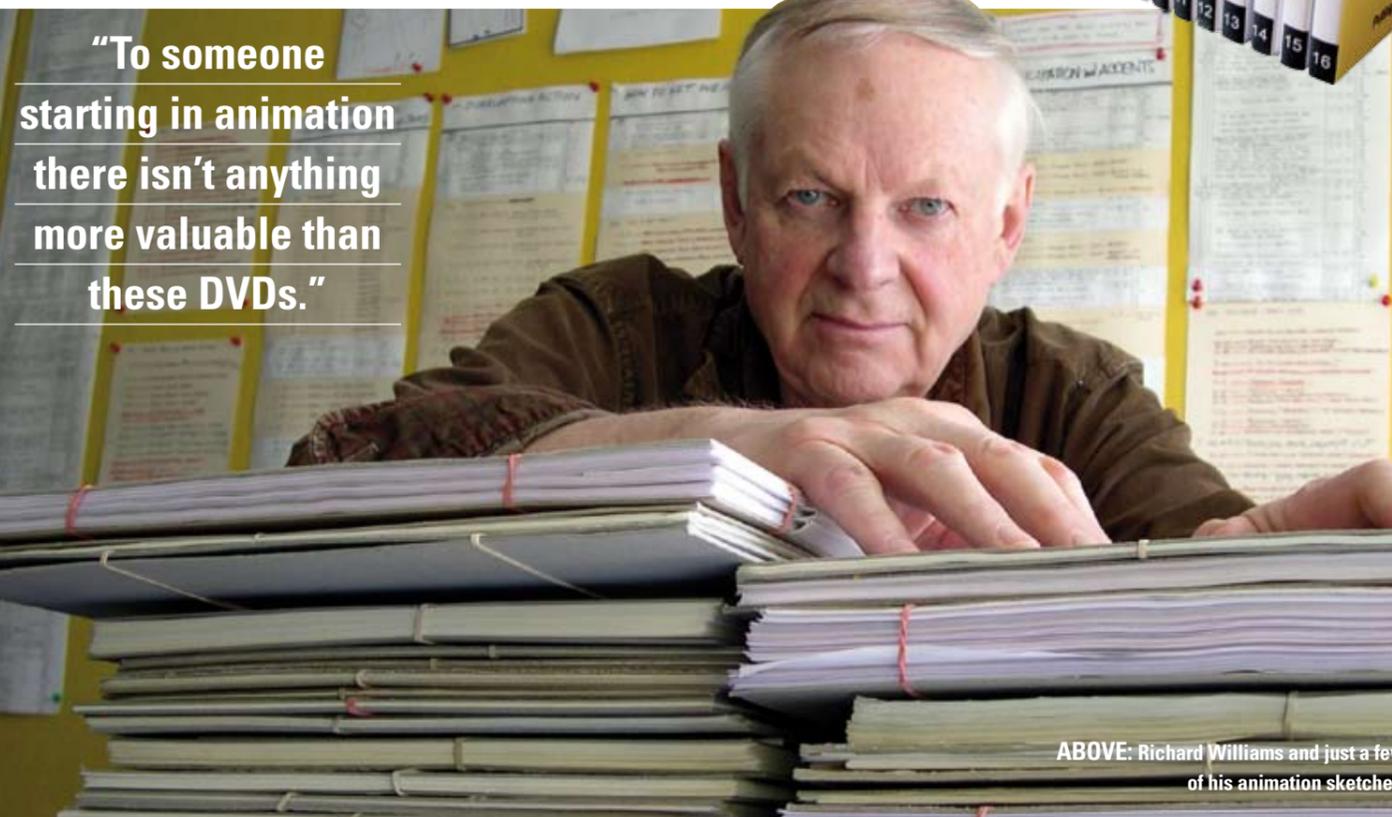
When I was hired at ILM in '93, the very first thing that I did as a present for myself is I went out and bought one of those big laserdisc players. I had taught myself how to animate by trying to stop the frames and slowly go through and that never worked and I knew that, even though I'd been hired by George Lucas, I was still learning and that's something that's very common in people that love animation, they always want to learn the tricks and how things are done. So, I bought myself that laserdisc – very, very expensive in those days – but I always wanted to be able to still-frame and now Richard has made it very easy for this generation of young animators.

**Q A more glowing reference I don't think I could hear...**

I went to film school in Montreal where we had an analysing projector, you could put 16mm on and it had a big fan so that it wouldn't burn the film when you stopped it. I remember putting some classic Disney shorts on there and tracing back what Donald or Mickey was doing so that I could learn through what the great animators had done. But after film school, from when I stopped having access to an analysing projector to ILM, when I could afford a laserdisc player, I was having to figure this stuff out on my own, there weren't a lot of great books. *The Illusion of Life* came out, and that is a fabulous book, but Richard really gets into the meat of what the great animators are doing when they're taking on the problem of weight or something. It's a fabulous resource. IMAGINE



ABOVE & RIGHT: Richard's legendary animation masterclasses are re-lived in DVD format.



**"To someone starting in animation there isn't anything more valuable than these DVDs."**

ABOVE: Richard Williams and just a few of his animation sketches.