

THE POLAR EXPRESS

A young boy lies awake in his room one snowy Christmas Eve, excited and alert.

Breathing silently. Hardly moving. Waiting.

He's listening for a sound he's afraid that he might never hear – the ringing bells of Santa's sleigh.

The time is five minutes to midnight.

Suddenly, the boy is startled by a thunderous roar. Clearing the mist from his window he sees the most amazing sight – a gleaming black train rumbles to a stop right in front of his house, the steam from its powerful engine hissing through the night sky and the softly falling snowflakes.

The boy rushes outside, clad only in his pajamas and slippers, and is met by the train's conductor who seems to be waiting just for him. "Well, are you coming?" the conductor asks.

"Where?"

"Why, to the North Pole, of course. This is the Polar Express!"



This holiday season the Academy Award-winning team of Tom Hanks and director Robert Zemeckis (*Forrest Gump*, *Cast Away*) reunite for *The Polar Express*, an inspiring adventure based on the beloved Caldecott Medal children's book by Chris Van Allsburg.

When a doubting young boy takes an extraordinary train ride to the North Pole, he embarks on a journey of self-discovery that shows him that the wonder of life never fades for those who believe.

Combining classic storytelling with cutting-edge filmmaking, *The Polar Express* debuts a highly advanced version of motion capture technology developed and tailored to

meet Zemeckis' uncompromising vision and is the first feature ever to be shot entirely in this format.

Sony Pictures Imageworks, with senior visual effects supervisors Ken Ralston, a five-time Oscar winner, and Jerome Chen, a 2000 nominee, help bring this enchanting holiday story vividly to life in full CG animation through a brand new system called Performance Capture, Imageworks' next-generation motion capture process. This innovative technique allows the actors' live-action performances to drive the emotions and movements of the digital characters in a way never seen before, throwing open the door to a whole new era of freedom and creative options for actors and filmmakers.

Castle Rock Entertainment presents, in association with Shangri-La Entertainment, a Playtone / ImageMovers / Golden Mean Production of a Robert Zemeckis Film: Tom Hanks in *The Polar Express*. Directed by Robert Zemeckis from a screenplay by Zemeckis & William Broyles, Jr., the film is produced by Steve Starkey, Robert Zemeckis, Gary Goetzman and William Teitler and is based on the book by Chris Van Allsburg. Tom Hanks, Jack Rapke and Chris Van Allsburg are the executive producers.

The production team includes directors of photography Don Burgess, A.S.C. and Robert Presley; production designers Rick Carter and Doug Chiang; and editors Jeremiah O'Driscoll & R. Orlando Duenas. Senior visual effects supervisors are Ken Ralston and Jerome Chen. Co-producer is Steven Boyd. Music score is by Alan Silvestri, and original songs by Glen Ballard and Alan Silvestri.

The Polar Express will be distributed worldwide by Warner Bros. Pictures, a Warner Bros. Entertainment Company. Soundtrack album on Warner Sunset/Reprise Records. This film is rated G by the MPAA.

www.polarexpressmovie.com / AOL Keyword: Polar Express/The Polar Express

“It doesn't matter where the train is going.

What matters is deciding to get on.”

Filmmakers Captivated by Classic Holiday Tale

For nearly 20 years, families around the world have made Chris Van Allsburg's enchanting story The Polar Express part of their holiday celebrations, as much a treasured part of the season as hanging stockings by the fire, exchanging warm wishes and coming together with friends and family.

"It became an annual tradition to read the story to my son while he was growing up and it never failed to fascinate him," says filmmaker Robert Zemeckis, a fan of the book since its 1985 publication. "The imagery has an otherworldly quality, existing somewhere between dreams and reality, which captures the mystery of a restless Christmas eve."

"There was a visceral element to the story, I hoped would find its voice for the screen," adds Tom Hanks, himself a father of four who has logged countless bedtime story hours of his own. "For years, between November and December, depending on the children's ages," he recalls, "I think I read it four times a week, twice a night, over and over again. So I've been aware of the story since my 14-year-old was three." He and Playtone partner, producer Gary Goetzman, proposed the idea of a big screen version to author Van Allsburg and producer William Teitler, partners in Golden Mean Productions, and Hanks ultimately brought the project to longtime friend and colleague Zemeckis. Together, the Oscar-winning pair had previously explored issues of the human spirit in *Forrest Gump* and *Cast Away*. Both were intrigued by the important spiritual journey taken by the nameless young hero in The Polar Express.

Beloved by children, the The Polar Express holds a special appeal for adults as well, who see themselves in the character of the young boy and remember their own childhood excitement and anticipation on that one most important night of the year. Perhaps they also remember the moment when the first shadowy doubts crept into their own young hearts and they realized that growing up might mean losing something precious and intangible forever, something they couldn't quite define but they could certainly feel.

The Polar Express is about that moment, that crucial juncture of innocence and maturity where a child can choose one path that will close his heart forever or another, where he learns that faith has no age, no rules and no limits.

“The book took me distinctly into what I call the ‘waking space,’ that state of mind between sleeping and waking where you have a touchstone in reality but are still seeing through a dreamlike filter and you’re vulnerable to a lot of emotions that wash over you,” says producer Steve Starkey, Zemeckis’ longtime producing partner and an Oscar winner for his work on *Forrest Gump*. “I said to Bob, ‘this is a place worth transporting people to.’”

Zemeckis, who wrote the screenplay with William Broyles, Jr. (*Cast Away*, *Apollo 13*) and went on to direct *The Polar Express*, acknowledges that, “It’s a story everyone can relate to. So many of us, as children or adults, have questioned our belief in something or gone through the process of having our faith tested and restored. Kids can take the story literally as a journey to find Santa Claus, while older readers understand it as a metaphor for much bigger ideas. It deals with the symbols of Christmas but at its core is a universal story about belief in things you don’t completely see or understand.

“Hopefully,” the director continues, “as you grow older you don’t become so cynical that you stop believing. The idea of Christmas is warmth and unselfishness. Santa Claus is a symbol of that but you don’t have to believe in him to have that feeling.”

Once on the train, the boy meets a number of other children, each with his or her own circumstances and lessons to learn. “Much like *The Wizard of Oz*,” notes executive producer Jack Rapke, “each child aboard this magic train is on his or her own personal journey, and each must find what they’re missing to make themselves complete. There’s a girl who has all the talent, spirit and intelligence to be a good leader but she lacks confidence, a know-it-all character who lacks humility and another boy we call Lonely Boy, who grew up in a loveless environment and needs to have faith in other people. These rich themes play out on an inner, character level while simultaneously there’s the tremendous spectacle of the outer journey as the train speeds towards the North Pole.”

Author and artist Chris Van Allsburg, one of the most respected names in children’s literature, earned a 1986 Caldecott Medal for the oil pastel drawings that illustrate *The Polar Express*. Noted for his imaginative and original tales, Van Allsburg began his publishing career with *The Garden of Abdul Gasazi* in 1979, which drew unprecedented praise and a Caldecott Honor Award, a rare achievement for a debut publication. He followed that with the fanciful *Jumanji*, in 1981 (the source for the 1995 feature film starring Robin Williams)

and The Polar Express in 1985 – both of them Caldecott Medal winners, placing Van Allsburg among a small group of authors who have earned that coveted award twice.

“Lucky are the children who know there’s a jolly fat man in a red suit who pilots a flying sleigh,” says Van Allsburg, who likewise credit grown-ups who manage to cross into adulthood without jettisoning their sense of wonder. “We should envy them. The inclination to believe in the fantastic may strike some as a failure in logic, or even gullibility, but it’s really a gift. A world that might have Bigfoot and the Loch Ness Monster is clearly superior to one that definitely does not.”

For the story’s young hero, the very fact that he climbs aboard the train when it stops for him indicates that his mind and heart are still open. As the conductor wisely advises, “It doesn’t matter where the train is going. What matters is deciding to get on.”

Creating a Visual Landscape as Magical as the Story Itself

Zemeckis was equally captivated by the book’s rich and sensitively rendered illustrations. Genuine warmth emanates from the faces of the children in the cozy Polar Express train compartment while, outside, the ever-changing landscape appears simultaneously mysterious and inviting with its deep, dark forests and snowy mountains.

“Chris’s illustrations are honest and familiar and at the same time wonderfully transcendent,” notes Zemeckis, who sought to recreate that quality on the screen, offering audiences a chance to experience what a midnight trip to The North Pole might look like through the eyes of a young boy. “It’s easy to see yourself, your children, or the kids you grew up with in the faces and personalities of these characters, and the landscape that the train passes through is like the dreams we all had about distant places where magical and exciting things could happen.”

“There’s something absolutely haunting about his artwork,” Hanks describes. “It has a tactile feeling that’s really the emotion he communicates through the artwork itself. When he’s talking about the little boy lying quietly in bed, the picture really gives you the sense of it. When the train pulls up on his front lawn you can hear the chugging and the steam.” As he recalls, he and Zemeckis agreed it would be a good idea “to recreate each painting in the book

at some point throughout the movie. We might create an elegant film that would present the Christmas spirit in a brand new way.”

Adds Zemeckis, “We wanted to offer the beauty and richness of Chris’ illustrations from the book as if it were a moving oil painting, with all the warmth, immediacy and subtleties of a human performance.”

But how?

Not only would a live action film of such far-reaching landscapes be staggeringly impractical if not impossible, it would lack the luminous texture the filmmakers were committed to recreating. Another possible option – animation – had its own limitations. “The problem with traditional animation for a project like this,” says Zemeckis, who isn’t averse to employing the technique in its rightful place, “is that it falls short in depicting authentic human characters. With exaggerated images, fantasies like *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*, or cartoons, it’s great. But I was looking for something more realistically alive.”

Zemeckis presented his unique challenge to visual effects wizard Ken Ralston, a multiple Academy Award-winner for his work and currently a senior visual effects supervisor at Sony Pictures Imageworks, an industry leader in digital production. Ralston dates his creative collaboration with Zemeckis back to the 1985 sci fi comedy adventure *Back to the Future*, a film remembered as much for its heart and deft storytelling as for its dazzling special effects.

Ralston proposed motion capture, a process by which an actor’s live performance is digitally captured by computerized cameras and becomes a human blueprint for creating virtual characters. Zemeckis was familiar with the technique but would not have expected it to serve his purposes for *The Polar Express*, based on applications he had seen. But this was no ordinary mo-cap his friend had in mind. It would have to be a giant step beyond current standards in order to achieve the depth and visual complexity Zemeckis required.

Coincidentally, Ralston and his Imageworks colleague, visual effects supervisor Jerome Chen, had been doing preliminary work on just such an advanced process, to be the next generation of mo-cap, far more sophisticated than anything ever seen before.

Beyond mere motion, this highly developed system was designed to capture every discernable movement and the subtlety of human expression from an actor’s performance, down to the slightest nuance or flutter of an eyelid. Additionally, unlike existing mo-cap

systems that are limited in range, it could simultaneously record 3-dimensional, high-fidelity facial and body movements from multiple actors, through a system of digital cameras providing a full 360 degrees of coverage.

Working together, the *Polar* and Imageworks teams ran a practical test of the process, using Tom Hanks as their first subject.

“I didn’t know anything about this,” Zemeckis says of the groundbreaking process, which they ultimately – and appropriately – christened Performance Capture. “When we did the test and the results came back, it turned out to be the perfect way to do *The Polar Express*. “In fact,” he admits, “if this hadn’t been possible, or hadn’t evolved to this degree, I likely would not have moved forward with the project.”

Here was a way – the only way – to achieve the oil painting imagery from Van Allsburg’s drawings onscreen while maintaining the immediacy of real human performances.

As Ralston describes it, “Performance Capture offers a vivid rendering of the Van Allsburg world while infusing a sense of heightened realism into the performances. It’s like putting the soul of a live person into a virtual character.”

The process not only exponentially increases the amount of live material that can be captured and interpreted digitally, it also provides unparalleled versatility in the director’s storytelling choices. While traditional film editing is dependent upon the range of coverage or angles from which scenes are photographed during production, Performance Capture technology offered full, limitless coverage that allowed Zemeckis to literally create custom shots during the editing process. He could select from a range of depths and perspectives and move characters in relationship to their cyber surroundings to emphasize nuances of expression or other details, all with natural camera movements.

The oil painting effect, so essential to Zemeckis, would be enhanced in layers during the post-performance phase, through state-of-the-art CG rendering.

The Polar Express is the first feature film to be shot entirely in Performance Capture.

Those who have seen the final footage attest that it defies easy categorization. Familiar comparisons fall short of the mark. Often it’s described in terms of what it is *not* – as in not traditional animation, not merely motion capture and not strictly live action. An art

form in its own right, Performance Capture effectively breaks new ground to offer images like nothing seen before.

Never one to introduce a new technique on screen for its own sake, Zemeckis can look back upon a filmmaking career marked by many striking innovations, secure in the knowledge that each and every time he broke creative ground it was in service to a story.

In *Forrest Gump*, for example, Tom Hanks as the fictional Gump casually and seamlessly turns up in authentic archival footage where he is seen interacting with historic figures such as President Kennedy. Recalling that startling effect, Zemeckis now says, matter-of-factly, “Well, we had a story about a guy who had met presidents. It was in the script. It was assumed that he would be on film at these meetings so we took news footage of real presidential appearances and then figured out a way, with the computer, to do it.

“It’s easy to do that kind of thing now,” he admits. “But then, it was tough.”

Prior to *Forrest Gump*, Zemeckis charmed audiences with a lively blend of live action and manic animation in the 1988 classic action comedy *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*, another fresh use of technology that the director simply acknowledges as a case of “using the modern tools we had to integrate a 2-dimensional cartoon character into a 3-dimensional world.”

“Bob will make a movie to test the art form, or to wrestle with some aspect of emotion or human nature,” says Hanks. “He doesn’t take his job lightly. He’s interested in making films that somehow break a mold or challenge not only himself as a filmmaker but the entire motion picture oeuvre in some way.”

What matters most is telling a story in the best way possible. Essentially, Zemeckis believes, either with or without cutting-edge effects, “the entire spectacle of cinema is illusion. Even the most basic techniques are illusion – a cut, a close-up, it’s all fake. It’s magic. It doesn’t exist in real life. So, if you look at it that way, all movies are illusions anyway, and some of the things I do are just extensions of that. That’s what’s so much fun about being a movie director.”

The Process

Some elements of production on *The Polar Express* resembled the traditional approach to a live-action film: Zemeckis and Broyles worked on the script, storyboards were created

and sets, props and costumes designed. Fabrics and wallpaper were selected. As Starkey explains, “even though we were breaking new ground in the way that images are captured and presented, there were still some fundamental physical details that had to be created upfront in the usual way. We still needed to see the fabric for the costumes and the hairstyles for each character.”

Production began months ahead of the first performance capture session, as the filmmakers assembled their creative team, many of them veterans of past Zemeckis projects like costume designer Joanna Johnston, who unveiled screen siren Jessica Rabbit’s trademark evening gown in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* and production designer Rick Carter, an Oscar nominee for his work on *Forrest Gump*.

The difference was that the practical elements, once digitally scanned into the computer, were retired. The filmmakers then had virtual sets, virtual costumes and an exhaustively detailed catalogue of virtual and mobile props. Everything was scrupulously recorded from every conceivable angle and depth, resulting in fully prepared, 3-dimensional stages ready for the actors’ entrance.

Other sets and locations, like the fantastic mountains and forests the Polar Express races through on its midnight journey and the bustling downtown streets of Santa’s village at the top of the globe, never existed in the real world at all. They went straight from imagination into the computer.

In creating the big-screen visuals of *The Polar Express*, the filmmakers began at the same spot Van Allsburg had begun: in the boy’s moonlit bedroom on Christmas eve, when he first hears the train pull up outside.

“But we were going deeper into the environments than the book did,” notes Starkey. “Taking a look at the book’s first image, there’s a bed, a window and part of a wall. But what does the rest of the room look like? Is there a stairwell? What does the rest of the house look like, or the neighborhood? What do things look like when the train leaves town?”

Using the book as a touchstone, the filmmakers then expanded its borders.

Production designer Rick Carter studied Van Allsburg’s illustrations before, as Zemeckis says, “going in search of Chris Van Allsburg himself.” He and production designer Doug Chiang, the conceptual designer on *Star Wars, Episode One and Two*, journeyed to the very house in which the author grew up in Grand Rapids, Michigan and used it to inspire the

design of the interior and exterior of the boy's home and the street where the train squeals to a stop. Traveling next to Zemeckis' former neighborhood in the South Side of Chicago, they tapped into similar environs and memories.

"After the train leaves the first boy's house, which is modeled after the house Chris grew up in, it stops at another house to pick up another boy," Carter explains. "It's a house that very much resembles one I found two doors down from Bob's childhood home." In a way, Carter muses, this might be "the point at which Bob gets on the train."

Chiang, who lead a team of digital matte painters and conceptual CG artists from offices in Northern California, worked in tandem with Carter to create the virtual environments. As Zemeckis explains, "Rick has never worked in this fashion before. Traditionally, he would design something, draw it on paper or make models, and then have it constructed on site. With *Polar*, we still started with the drawings and models, but then instead of physical construction we could often built it right in the computer based on those designs."

One advantage of this process over standard set design was its efficiency. "Typically, in preproduction," says Chiang, "you create flat 2-dimensional designs and then develop them in physical miniature models. But this way, at a very early stage we were able to give Bob precisely what the finished product would look like." Adjustments could be made quickly to incorporate the director's needs in an ongoing process.

Another advantage was its limitless scope, as described by Chiang, who found himself working on a computer reconstruction of the train's passage through a majestic mountain range. Quoting from Van Allsburg's text, Chiang says, "the book read 'mountains so high it seemed as if we would scrape the moon.' It's clearly a child's perspective. Visually, the whole journey could be a dream inside the boy's head. So why not design it in terms of how a child would design the world? I really enjoyed coming up with the glacial terrain on a huge scale that couldn't possibly exist in this world."

Back at Imageworks, Ralston and Chen furthered the CGI designs along the same lines. "In a film like this," says Ralston, "every frame is a painting and that's how we approached it. Jerome and I would take Doug's concepts and then move forward in the world of CG, where we built the 3-D sets." He was especially concerned with "the lighting of each

scene, creating the atmosphere, the effects work that makes sparks come off the train's wheels or the snow fall in a certain way so it's always lyrical, magical."

Adds Chen, "We gave a lot of thought to maintaining the stylization of the book. The pastel paintings are impressionistic, with contrast lighting and strong light sources and shadows. At the same time, we wanted a world you could believe in, as if down the street from the boy's house and around the corner there were more houses and a whole city."

Not only did *The Polar Express* production have to broaden locations from Van Allsburg's illustrations for the screen, but they also had to open up the children's book into a feature length story with a wider range of adventures for the young hero and accompanying stories for his fellow travelers. All of this had to be a natural progression from, and completely compatible with, the author's original vision.

"Throughout the script stage," says Hanks, referring to early discussions shared with Zemeckis and co-screenwriter Broyles about the feasibility of adapting a 29-page book into a feature film, "we kept asking each other, 'are we expanding this for the sake of air or are we adding something that is going to further develop the themes and concepts?' A key went into a lock somewhere around the moment that the three of us realized that the first line of the movie should be the first line of the book and the last line of the movie the last line of the book, and where we would extrapolate would be within those boundaries."

"The book was the inspiration for everything," Zemeckis confirms. "I used it as an outline. The intention was simply to expand it rather than try to reinvent it." For example, using Van Allsburg's illustration of the other children aboard the train, he selected three individual faces and imagined a story for each of them, thus introducing the characters known as Girl, Lonely Boy and Know-It-All-Boy. Throughout the journey, these children interact with Van Allsburg's main character, the unnamed Boy, and help define his spiritual lessons as well as experience their own.

"What's interesting about these characters," adds Hanks, "is that there is not a unified sensibility to what they are doing on the train, they're not just kids saying 'yay' at the same time. It's a journey of individuals. The only thing they mutually want at the same time is hot chocolate. If you're going to have a bunch of kids all experience Christmas the same way it's not going to be realistic."

While much of the design work was being accomplished, Zemeckis also worked with the actors on the motion-capture stage.

Measured to specific dimensions to accommodate the tight, 360-degree digital receptor coverage, the bare, minimalist sets reminded producer Starkey of Black Box Theater, a style popular in the 1960s and 70s, in which performance and story took an intimate focus over physical elements of a set, and props were either very spare or non-existent. Here on stages 2, 3 and 4 at Culver Studios, an empty picture frame might represent a window, while rudimentary blocks of unfinished wood stood in as doors or pieces of furniture. This provided basic reference points to the actors who had already seen images of the finished sets in the computer.

At this point, “liberated from the tyranny of the technical aspects of filmmaking,” says Zemeckis, he shared the traditional actor-director dynamic with his cast on each scene.

The actors donned form-fitting motion capture suits resembling divers’ wetsuits, onto which were sewn approximately 60 “jewels” or markers made of light reflective material, enabling the digital cameras to record the movement of the body as a configuration of 3-dimensional dots. This translated into fluid and natural action in the virtual world.

Since the true hallmark of Performance Capture is its ability to render genuine human emotion and natural expressions with uncompromising clarity and detail, special attention was given to the the actors’ faces. As many as 150 reflective jewels were clustered onto their faces and scalps, adhering to all lines of musculature; affixed to eyelids, brows, upper and lower lips, chin line and cheeks. The application took nearly two hours.

Once outfitted, actors delivered their performances as though on stage, without the distractions of a regular bustling movie set. In some ways, it was acting in its purest form – just the character, the space and the words.

“As actors,” says Hanks, “we were able to imprint our performances onto the story as opposed to going into the recording studio and providing voices. It was fun but it was also incredibly challenging, albeit in a good way. Because of the sensors, everything you do registers so you cannot afford to make a mistake. On the other hand, having the momentum of shooting for 10 or 15 minutes at a time and getting it all like one continuous moment, one fell swoop, is as free as I’ve felt as an actor. It was like being in theater again. If we could imagine it, we had it.”

Fully captured in three dimensions, their performances were then integrated into existing virtual sets, and from this point forward they lived in the computer. “Now you got to see the characters in motion, walking through the scene as they did on the Performance Capture set,” says Starkey.

And now, from the director’s perspective, the real fun began.

Into the computer was placed what is best described as a virtual camera – a moveable, recordable point of view that can be manipulated like an actual lens. “So,” says Zemeckis, with an ease that seems to deny the complexity of the concept, “you have this virtual set and you put the performances of your actors into it. Then you take a virtual camera and put that in as well. The camera will now record all the virtual images just like a conventional camera would record what it’s pointing at.

“Meaning,” he clarifies, “suppose I have two monitors. I can see what the virtual camera is seeing and, at the same time, I have another monitor in a sort of surveillance position on top of the set. And I can see my little virtual camera moving in amongst my actors just like you would if you were watching a regular movie set from the rafters.”

Understanding how a hands-on director like Zemeckis is accustomed to working, Ralston designed a device at this stage he called “wheels,” which simulates the feel and function of a traditional pan-and-tilt camera gearhead. Using wheels, Zemeckis and directors of photography Don Burgess and Robert Presley were able to manipulate the virtual camera with precision and familiarity, like piloting a dolly and crane rather than punching a keyboard to execute detailed commands.

Zemeckis acknowledges the unparalleled versatility and limitless options the system provides. “I can shoot a two-shot and two close-ups, or let a close-up of one actor run the entire length of the scene just like I would do in live action. Then I could do the reverse on a second actor all the way through, or another two-shot. Then I give those shots as dailies to the editor and we edit them like we would for a conventional movie.”

The essential difference is, unlike a conventional movie, where at the end of the day the director would have only what had been shot in this fashion for his dailies, with Performance Capture he is free to change his mind at any time, return to the source material and revise his point of view completely. Every possible shot, from every possible depth and angle, continues to exist on each virtual set.

Also, unlike conventional animation, Zemeckis points out, “the editing is done cinematically rather than by a layout artist.”

In this fashion he was able to fully create each and every shot for *The Polar Express*.

“You could say,” he offers, “that I directed this film in two stages: once, live, on the set, and then again, cinematically, in the computer.”

At this point, material viewed in the computer is not always fully finished. Preliminary staging is represented by images not of the actors as they will ultimately look but in a rudimentary place-holding form that the crew dubbed “Michelin men” in reference to the well-known advertising icon. Considering the manpower involved to assemble and render each finished scene, it made sense to wait until Zemeckis had selected his shots before proceeding with the final CG polish. As an adjunct to this specialized view, the director and his team could also consult a video playback of each performance.

Teams of talented computer artists would later apply texture, light and definition to backgrounds, as Zemeckis explains, “once they knew where the camera would be looking. Then they’d know which backgrounds needed to be lit and rendered. The Michelin Men footage is how we budgeted every scene.”

In addition to crafting light and shadow, computer effects animators were responsible for creating such delicate details as the look of moonlight filtered through mist or the gently curling trail of smoke rising from the train. Their artistry makes the drape of a sleeve or the movement of a child’s lock of hair look real and natural.

“But the expressions are all done by the human actors,” Zemeckis clarifies. “No one animates that. The computer does not create the performance, the actors do. The computer just takes the performance and wraps a cinematic skin around it.”

Although easily explained in a step-by-step progression, production on *The Polar Express* was not wholly linear in execution. Multiple creative processes were occurring simultaneously, and continued to run more or less throughout the duration of two and a half years of production: writing, designing, storyboarding and editing, and all the while teams of CG artists and technicians were at work scanning, recording and rendering.

“The production process was always in flux, as though pre-production continued throughout the whole thing,” recalls Ralston. “You could keep changing and manipulating

things in a way you could never do with a live-action film. It was a different way for Bob to work and he was involved every step of the way. It was an ongoing invention.”

“This is much different from a traditional film where sets are finally torn down and costumes put away,” says Hanks. “Our dreams were always at work.”

Limitless Creativity: Changing the Future of Filmmaking

Considering the creative freedom Performance Capture gave him on *The Polar Express*, Robert Zemeckis attempts to put the process into perspective. “The *good* news is that anything is possible. The *bad* news is that anything is possible,” he jokes.

But, kidding aside, the assessment does ring true.

“It raises the level of your work as a director,” Zemeckis explains, “in that it allows you to do anything. The only limit now is the filmmaker’s imagination, because you can literally create any image. I can do a spectacular shot with a little kid on top of a roaring train in the snow at night and I don’t have to worry about how I’m going to do it. I don’t have to worry about the kid falling off the train, or the camera frosting over or whether the train will hit its mark. I now have complete control over those elements. It’s the closest thing we have to typing a story into a computer and having a film come out the other side.”

With that many options, the task is in the selection, which can easily become daunting. Using *Polar* as an example, Zemeckis puts it this way: “Let’s say I have a three-minute scene. The actors have done it and it’s perfect; timing is great, the lines are down. That gets integrated into the set. Now the decision is, okay, how do I shoot this? I can shoot it in a thousand set-ups or all in one shot and nothing will change except for my cinematic interpretation of the material. You have to have a lot of discipline for that.

“More to the point,” he offers candidly, “there’s no longer an excuse for not making each shot perfect.”

From an actor’s perspective, Zemeckis believes, working with motion capture at this level of sophistication would be equally freeing, albeit with a similar caveat. “Imagine,” he says, “they can deliver a performance without having to worry, every single minute, about hitting their marks or leaning into the light or walking at a certain speed because the camera can’t keep up, or any of those horrendous mechanical things an actor has to manage. They

can focus their energy on doing a scene in continuity without breaking up the rhythm of their performance.”

The tradeoff seems minimal. “I believe the only thing Tom missed was having the physical trappings of a costume,” the director recalls. “He had to remember that the conductor wore glasses when he was the conductor and he had to remember to touch the bill of his cap or adjust his collar, which he would have done more instinctively if he had been actually wearing that wardrobe.”

From the perspective of a career spanning 30 years, Zemeckis welcomes the next wave of filmmaking, which he sees as inevitable. “I think we’re going to see a new generation of filmmakers embrace this system,” he predicts. “We can do it now without lenses, without film. There’s no need to move and bend light to create the images because it’s all done with 1’s and 0’s in the digital realm of the computer. The traditional hundred-year-old optic, chemical, mechanical way in which we record movie images is changing. When people see *The Polar Express* in a digital theater there’s no film – there was no film involved at any stage.”

“It has to change the way in which movies are imagined and made,” he concludes. “It will be a language influenced by the artistry of video games and the internet – a whole new way of how we use images to communicate.”

Cue the Actors

One vital element of moviemaking remains constant. Regardless of technical innovation, what drives everything is, of course, the actors’ performances.

For a process like Performance Capture, which relies so much on the subtlety of expression or the significance of a glance, a shrug or an upturned face to convey volumes of meaning, this requires actors of extraordinary depth and skill.

In the initial brainstorming sessions, Tom Hanks expected that he would take on one or two of the adult male roles. After the filmmakers got a better grasp of what Performance Capture could achieve, Zemeckis suggested that Hanks also consider the role of the main character, the young boy. “Since we had this fantastic tool at our fingertips, I thought why have an 8-year-old play an 8-year-old when we can have an actor of Tom’s caliber, with all

his years of experience, interpret the part?,” the director explains. “He said, ‘That sounds great. Can we *do* that?’ And of course, then we did it in the test.”

It was partly a matter of operating scale. For adults to portray children, sets and props were designed at 160% of normal size so that when the adult performances were captured and integrated into the virtual sets they were a natural fit. During the live performances, minimal props on the same oversized scale were often built as reference points for the actors.

Beyond physical dimensions that could be manipulated by props and computer calculation, it was Hanks himself who provided the credible emotional scale for the character, a nuance no CGI artist could accomplish.

Analyzing the preliminary test footage, Hanks felt that his gestures and movements weren’t as age-appropriate as they could be and needed to make essential adjustments. “He got more into it, made wider and more childlike gestures,” explains Starkey, “not exaggerated but natural, as if he were an 8-year-old. Tom’s professionalism is such that he fine-tuned his performance based on the earliest test shots. His position and timing were right on.”

Ultimately, Hanks performed five key roles in the film: the hero boy, the boy’s father, the conductor, the mysterious hobo and Santa Claus, or, as he explains, “the main adult male characters the boy interacts with. All these characters carry with them the meaningful weight of the story. They spring from the boy’s own consciousness.”

As Zemeckis earlier noted, it can be disorienting playing a scene in a mo-cap suit with no costume and without the atmosphere provided by a fully dressed set. An actor has to remember where the windows should be, if his character might be barefoot or fixing the buttons of a jacket that doesn’t physically exist at this moment – or, in the case of Hanks playing the hero boy, how tall he happens to be. Multiply that by five to approximate the amount of detail he kept catalogued in his head.

“The one thing I thought was going to drive me nuts was not having a costume every day,” the actor admits. “We had one full costume fitting for the computer scans and never wore them again. I thought that would be a problem because of the lack of actual pockets when you need to use them. But for some reason I managed to remember that the boy was wearing a bathrobe that came undone and that the conductor had pockets, a cap and glasses that he is always adjusting.

“I found that I had to change something from one character to the next, and since I couldn’t get out of my Lycra mo-cap suit the only option was my shoes. I wore running shoes when I performed as the boy and different pairs of boots when I played the conductor, the hobo and Santa. It affected my posture and my movements and, in the final result, my character.”

The effect of the suit itself, form-fitting and festooned with reflectors, had the added benefit, according to Hanks, that “self-consciousness goes right out the window, and self-consciousness is the first thing that gets in your way when you’re acting. There was an odd sense of freedom that came with seeing your colleagues on set and knowing that we all looked exactly the same in these unitards and it came down to what we played with our eyes, our voices and our whole bodies.”

When it came to representing the big man himself, Santa Claus, Hanks had a specific idea about the tone and timbre he wanted to convey, “mixing both the caricature we’ve all grown up with and some genuine mystery,” he explains. “He doesn’t ‘ho ho ho’ at the top of his lungs all the time, although he does laugh. Santa is very much aware of the power of his departing on Christmas Eve to deliver presents to the children of the world. He’s been doing this for a thousand years and even he gets involved in the drama.”

Joining Hanks on the mo-cap stage was the late Michael Jeter, who performed the dual roles of train engineer Steamer and fireman Smokey – twin brothers of widely disparate physical characteristics, one short and rotund and the other a towering beanpole. The brothers, both good-hearted, garrulous and given to breaking into song, introduce the boy to the inner workings of the train. They enlist his help in replacing a burnt out headlight, which becomes a more interesting and enlightening enterprise than he ever imagined.

Jeter read for both roles, prepared to take one or the other but, as Steve Starkey recalls, “Bob was so excited that he cast Michael for both roles on the spot.”

The acclaimed character actor, a favorite with cast and crew, passed away shortly after completing his work on the picture. “It was terribly tragic and unexpected,” says Zemeckis, who suspended production upon receiving the news on set. *The Polar Express* was Jeter’s final performance.

For the role of the girl who befriends the boy on the train, the filmmakers cast Nona Gaye, a recent Image Award nominee for her star turn in *The Matrix Reloaded* and *The*

Matrix Revolutions. As Zemeckis warmly acknowledges, “Nona was absolutely wonderful. Her ability to understand the character and present it in a way that is so charming and endearing was exactly what we needed.”

As the filmmakers imagined her, the girl is a strong and capable young person, a born leader, but unaware of her natural talents regardless of how apparent they are to those around her. In joining the boy on a perilous detour along their route to the North Pole, she finally begins to realize and tap into the potential that has long lain dormant in her.

Multiple Emmy nominee Peter Scolari took on the role of a character known as the Lonely Boy, for whom the train stops in a poor section of town. Likely the product of an unhappy home life, the Lonely Boy is wary of everything, especially the kindness and attention of others. He hesitantly boards the train as though unsure he deserves such an honor and, once aboard, remains apart from the gaiety of the other children.

“Peter took a kind of Buster Keaton approach to the role,” says Zemeckis. “He carries a deep sadness, especially poignant in the face of a child. Peter conveys the lonely soul of this boy with complete sensitivity.”

Another child on the train, known as Know-It-All-Boy, is performed by the versatile Eddie Deezen. “I wrote the Know-It-All-Character with Eddie’s voice in mind,” Zemeckis reveals, before saying of his colleague, laughingly, “he can really do that annoying arrogant thing without going too far. It’s really kind of endearing in a way. But annoying, definitely annoying.” The Know-It-All is not a bad child, just sorely in need of some humility.

“You’ve never seen four grownups having more fun,” says Hanks. “Nona, Eddie, Peter and me, when we were together playing children, we lost all the constraints of being adults. We were just four kids on a train.”

Zemeckis’ longtime colleague Charles Fleischer, a 30-year veteran of both film and television who is perhaps best known as the voice of lovable toon Roger Rabbit, joined the *Polar* cast as the Elf General. He’s not only in charge of the bustling toy production at the North Pole but also tracks naughty and nice behavior for Santa via an impressive global monitoring system.

In addition to capturing the performances of the main cast, either alone, in tandem or in group scenes, Performance Capture pushed beyond the limits of standard mo-cap so far that

it enabled the *Polar* filmmakers to record an entire song-and-dance sequence with multiple dancers sharing the stage in the lively “hot chocolate scene.”

En route to the North Pole, the boy and his new friends are served steaming cups of cocoa by the train’s waiters, who explode in song and traverse the length and width of the car with their long legged leaps, dancing nimbly around the children and the seats, with serving trays hoisted high above their heads. To create the scene, a troupe of dancers were choreographed and rehearsed for a live action performance by Tony-nominated Broadway choreographer John Carrafa before being captured digitally and integrated into the virtual train car. Not a drop of cocoa was spilled.

The Polar Soundtrack and a Surprise Role for Rocker Steven Tyler

Since renowned composer Alan Silvestri provided the score for *Romancing the Stone* in 1984, he and Robert Zemeckis have shared one of the longest-running and most successful composer/director associations in the industry. Two of Silvestri’s five ASCAP honors were awarded for Zemeckis films: *What Lies Beneath* and *Cast Away*. Additionally, he earned Grammy nominations for his work on *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* and *Back to the Future*, and in 1995 his score for *Forrest Gump* brought him both Oscar and Golden Globe nominations. *The Polar Express* marks their eleventh collaboration.

At this point, Zemeckis warmly notes, they have an incomparable creative rapport. “His music is always wonderful. I count on him to add that emotional layer to the story, to play up and help define the feelings of the characters. That’s always true with scores, but with a movie like this it’s vitally important.”

On Silvestri’s recent project, *The Mummy Returns*, he teamed with veteran songwriter and producer Glen Ballard on the song “Forever May Not Be Long Enough.” He subsequently brought Ballard aboard *The Polar Express* to collaborate on several original songs for the film, including a rollicking number called “Rockin’ On Top of the World,” to which Santa’s elves cut loose after a hard year of making toys. “It’s a scene where the elves rock out,” says Zemeckis. “After Santa’s sleigh is packed and he’s on his way, they throw a party.”

The “Elfin” debut of rock legend Steven Tyler was pure casting serendipity. Ballard had invited the charismatic Aerosmith frontman to perform “Rockin’ On Top of the World.”

When Tyler arrived at the studio, his high-wattage personality and natural sense of fun immediately struck the director, who decided immediately that he would be the ideal embodiment of a partying elf. Never one to shy away from a new experience, Tyler enthusiastically signed on to don a mo-cap suit and a crop of reflective dots. As Zemeckis recalls, “It was perfect, the way it all worked out.”

The Polar Express soundtrack, a family-friendly mix of contemporary and classic songs with a holiday theme, also features the soaring ballad “Believe,” written especially for the movie by Glen Ballard and performed for the first time by multi-platinum-selling vocalist Josh Groban. Other highlights are perennial favorites from Frank Sinatra and Bing Crosby, plus two brand new songs performed in character by Tom Hanks, including the high-spirited “Hot Chocolate,” from the scene in which the children aboard the Polar Express are served cups of cocoa by a troupe of tap-dancing, singing waiters.

The Polar Express: An IMAX 3D Experience Marks Another Cinematic Innovation

Not only is *The Polar Express* the first feature film shot entirely in Performance Capture, its November 10, 2004 debut marks another cinematic milestone with its simultaneous day-and-date release in IMAX 3D®.

The Polar Express: An IMAX 3D Experience will be the world’s first feature to be presented in IMAX 3D®. Using a revolutionary new process called IMAX 3D DMR™, the footage will be converted to 3D and then digitally re-mastered into IMAX’s format through the proprietary IMAX DMR® (digital re-mastering) technology, maintaining its 3-dimensional imagery in projection and making its already extraordinarily vivid images virtually leap off the screen for a truly unique moviegoing experience.

Whether it’s the snowflakes floating around the theater or the train screeching to a halt in the laps of the audience, the IMAX 3D version of *The Polar Express* will offer the sensation of being not just inside the theater but almost inside the movie itself.

“When I saw the tests for *The Polar Express* in IMAX 3D, I was tremendously excited that audiences would be able to experience the movie this way,” says Zemeckis. “The 3D adds incredible depth and allows the viewers to experience the visual splendor and

amazing adventure of this classic story in a way that should create a really memorable experience, not only this holiday season but for years to come.”

The Polar Express: The IMAX Experience will play in IMAX, IMAX Dome and IMAX 3D Theaters worldwide beginning November 10, 2004. The fifth feature presented in IMAX theaters by Warner Bros. Pictures since 2003, it follows the successful IMAX DMR releases of the second and third installments of *The Matrix* trilogy and *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban: The IMAX Experience*, as well as its first originally produced IMAX 3D live action film, *NASCAR 3D: The IMAX Experience*.

The IMAX 3D DMR process is based upon basic principals of how the eyes and brain work together to naturally create the three dimensional world we live in. Most people see through two eyes and although both eyes automatically focus on a single center point they see it from two slightly different positions. This creates two slightly different images, which the brain fuses to give the world three-dimensional depth.

IMAX 3D takes advantage of this natural process. An IMAX 3D film actually consists of two separate strips of film projected onto the screen at the same time, one with images captured from the viewpoint of the right eye, and the other with the left eye. Special IMAX 3D glasses allow the left eye to only see the left image and the right eye to only see the right, allowing the brain to do the rest by fusing the two images and creating a three-dimensional visual that appears to come off the screen. The distance, or “separation” between left and right viewpoints determines the intensity of the 3D; too little or too much will distort.

The implementation of dual filmstrip technology is far superior to the old fashioned “red-blue” anaglyphic 3D, which combines left- and right-eye images onto a single strip of film, compromising sharpness and color. IMAX 3D technology eliminates this compromise and enhances the images by not only using the world’s largest film format (15/70mm), but also by using two separate strips of film for both image capture and projection.

Although *The Polar Express* is constructed in 3D, it is still projected in 2D when shown in conventional theaters and therefore only a single view point is projected. The original 3D modeling of the film contains the data required to create that necessary “second eye” and IMAX uses this to carefully calculate the appropriate separation from the 2D view point to create the ideal 3D viewing experience.

Both left and right eye images are then digitally re-mastered into IMAX format using IMAX DMR technology and recorded onto two separate prints of 15/70 film for projection in IMAX 3D for the world's most realistic and immersive movie experience. With crystal clear, larger than life, 3D images complemented by exhilarating state-of-the-art surround sound, audiences feel as though they are in the movie.

The IMAX 3D projector simultaneously projects two strips of 15/70 film, one for each eye, onto a special silver IMAX 3D screen. In addition to IMAX 3D glasses, which channel the right-eye image to the right eye and the left-eye image to the left eye, some IMAX theaters offer P3D glasses, polarized to separate the left- and right-eye images. Other theaters use E3D glasses, which utilize electronic liquid crystal shutter technology. The 15/70 film format used by IMAX is ten times larger than conventional 35mm film and three times larger than standard 70mm. The sheer size of a 15/70 film frame, combined with the unique IMAX projection technology, is the key to the extraordinary sharpness and clarity of films exhibited in IMAX theaters.

IMAX theaters' specialized design and unobstructed views place audiences right in the on-screen action. Gigantic IMAX 3D screens – up to eight stories high – eliminate the discomfort and decapitated edges of smaller-format 3D systems. The screen, coated with a specialty high-performance metallic paint, has a slight curvature that extends beyond the field of geometric recognition, incorporating some of the audience's peripheral vision, enhancing audience members' feelings of being in the film. The visuals are enhanced by a superb specially-designed six-channel surround system comprised of 44 custom-designed speakers that extract 14,000 watts of pure digital surround sound.

Founded in 1967, IMAX Corporation is one of the world's leading entertainment technology companies. IMAX's businesses include the creation and delivery of the world's best cinematic presentations using proprietary IMAX and IMAX 3D technology, and the development of the highest quality digital production and presentation. IMAX has developed revolutionary technology called IMAX DMR (Digital Re-mastering) that makes it possible for virtually any 35mm film to be transformed into the unparalleled image and sound quality of The IMAX Experience®. The IMAX brand is recognized throughout the world for extraordinary and immersive family entertainment experiences. As of June 30, 2004, there were 240 IMAX theaters operating in 35 countries. IMAX®, IMAX® 3D, IMAX DMR®,

IMAX MPX[®] and The IMAX Experience[®] are trademarks of IMAX Corporation. More information can be found at www.imax.com.

ABOUT THE CAST

One of the world's most admired and respected actors, **TOM HANKS (Hero Boy, Boy's Father, The Conductor, The Hobo, Santa)** also holds the distinction of being the first actor in 50 years to be awarded back-to-back Best Actor Academy Awards. In 1993, he was rewarded for his compelling performance as the AIDS-stricken lawyer in *Philadelphia*, and the following year won the Oscar for his outstanding performance in *Forrest Gump*. He also won Golden Globe Awards for both. Throughout the success of *Forrest Gump* (the fourth largest grossing movie in history), Hanks won a Golden Globe, a Peoples Choice Award, a Screen Actors Guild Award, a Chicago Film Critics Award, a National Association of Theater Owners Male Star of the Year Award, and the Hollywood Women's Press Club Award. In addition to the many honors he has received, he was named Man of the Year by Harvard's Hasty Pudding Theatricals for his performance as astronaut Jim Lovell in Ron Howard's *Apollo 13*.

In 1996, Hanks made his feature film writing and directing debut with *That Thing You Do!* that follows the meteoric rise to fame of a local rock band named The Wonders from Erie, Pennsylvania, in the summer of 1964. The film's signature song, "That Thing You Do!," not only reached the top 10 on many contemporary music charts, but was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Original Song. Hanks also appeared in the film.

Born and raised in Oakland, CA, Hanks first became interested in acting during high school. While attending California State University in Sacramento, he appeared in *The Cherry Orchard* and met director Vincent Dowling, the resident director of the Great Lakes Shakespeare Festival in Cleveland. Dowling invited Hanks to intern with the company, where he made his professional debut portraying Grumio in *The Taming of the Shrew*. Hanks appeared in other Great Lakes productions, including *Two Gentleman of Verona*, for which he received the Cleveland Critics Award for Best Actor. From Cleveland, Hanks went on to

New York, where he appeared in his first feature film, *He Knows You're Alone*, and onstage in *The Taming of the Shrew*.

After moving to Los Angeles where he performed in a production of *The Dollmaker*, Hanks got his big break when cast as the lead in the ABC comedy series *Bosom Buddies*. This led to starring roles in *Bachelor Party*, followed by Ron Howard's *Splash* -- a box office hit that started him on his path to becoming one of Hollywood's busiest and most sought-after actors. Hanks' many film credits include *Volunteers*, *Nothing in Common* and *A League of Their Own*. In 1988, with his box office success established, Hanks found himself a critical success with highly acclaimed work in *Punchline*, and *Big*, for which he earned his first Academy Award nomination and Golden Globe Award. The same year, the L.A. Film Critics recognized the two performances by bestowing on him their coveted Best Actor Award. In 1993, he received a Golden Globe nomination for his work in *Sleepless in Seattle*.

Constantly challenging himself, Hanks served as Executive Producer for HBO's *From the Earth to the Moon* -- an ambitious 12-hour dramatic film anthology that explored America's Apollo space program. Not only did he personally help make this show a reality, he directed the first episode and wrote and appeared in the final episode.

Hanks starred in Steven Spielberg's 1998 feature *Saving Private Ryan*, in which he played a soldier who went deep behind enemy lines to save a trapped private during the Allied invasion, and for which he received an Oscar nomination. He also starred in 1999's *The Green Mile*, written and directed by Frank Darabont and based on the Stephen King novel.

In 2000, Hanks starred in Robert Zemeckis' *Cast Away*, earning another Oscar nomination for his role as sole survivor of a plane crash on a deserted island. Also in 2000, he served as executive producer (as well as directing one of the episodes), for the epic HBO miniseries *Band of Brothers*, based on the Stephen Ambrose book that chronicles a group of paratroopers from their training in Georgia through their subsequent battles on D-day, the Battle of the Bulge, and their eventual capture of Hitler's Eagle's Nest. It aired in Spring 2001 to wide-scale critical acclaim, leading to a Golden Globe win for the miniseries in 2002.

In 2002 Hanks starred in the Sam Mendes' gritty depression-era drama *The Road to Perdition*, opposite Paul Newman and Jude Law. He followed with the stylish caper *Catch Me If You Can*, opposite Leonardo DeCaprio, based on the true exploits of international con

man Frank Abagnale Jr. Hanks portrayed FBI agent Carl Hanratty who ultimately caught Abagnale, a counterfeiter who cashed \$2.5 million worth of bad checks between 1964-1970.

Hanks recently starred in the Coen brothers' dark comedy *The Ladykillers*, as an eccentric southern professor who assembles a band of incompetent thieves to rob a Mississippi riverboat, and Steven Spielberg's *The Terminal*, with Catherine Zeta-Jones, about an Eastern European immigrant stranded indefinitely at JFK Airport when his passport is invalidated by a political upheaval in his home country.

Hanks lives in Los Angeles with his wife, actress Rita Wilson, and their family.

MICHAEL JETER (Smokey and Steamer) most recently starred in Kevin Costner's Western drama *Open Range*. Prior to that, he starred in the 2003 ensemble comedy caper *Welcome To Collinwood*, and with William H. Macy and Sam Neill in *Jurassic Park 3*. He also had a starring role in *Taken*, a ten part miniseries produced by Steven Spielberg for the Sci Fi Channel.

Among his numerous feature film credits are Sam Raimi's *The Gift*, opposite Keanu Reeves and Cate Blanchett; the Oscar-nominated *The Green Mile*, with Tom Hanks; Dwight Yoakam's *South of Heaven, West of Hell*; and *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. Jeter has also appeared in *Patch Adams, Jakob the Liar, True Crime, The Fisher King, Air Bud, Mouse Hunt, Waterworld, Drop Zone, Zack & Reba, Sister Act 2, Tango & Cash, Dead Bang, Woody Allen's Zelig* and Milos Forman's *Hair*, which marked his acting debut.

Jeter gained critical attention for his role opposite Burt Reynolds on the TV series *Evening Shade*. He won an Emmy in 1992 and was nominated two more times for his portrayal of coach Herman Stiles. Guest roles on *Picket Fences* and *Chicago Hope* earned two additional Emmy nominations. Jeter's wide-ranging television work includes appearances on *Suddenly Susan, Chicago Hope, Veronica's Closet, Murphy Brown, Crime Story, Designing Women, Lou Grant* and in the TV movies *The Ransom of Red Chief, Love Kills, From Here to Eternity, Sentimental Journey* and *The Boys Next Door*. His series regular role as the lovable Mr. Noodle on the ever-popular *Sesame Street* brought him recognition from children everywhere he went.

On Broadway, Jeter starred in *Grand Hotel*, for which he won a Tony Award, *Once in a Lifetime* and *G.R. Point*, for which he won a Theater World Award. His notable Off-

Broadway credits include *Cloud 9*, *Greater Tuna*, *The Boys Next Door*, *Alice*, *Only Kidding* and *The Master and The Margarita*.

Jeter passed away March 30, 2003, after completing work on *The Polar Express*.

PETER SCOLARI (Lonely Boy) is a founding member of the Colonnades Theater Lab (N.Y.C. 1974-1979). He appeared in 13 productions during this time including *Moliere in Spite of Himself*, *Reflections* and *A Flea in Her Ear*. His previous Broadway and Regional credits include *Grease*, *Out of This World*, *Ziegfeld's Follies of 1937* (City Center's *Encores* series), and most recently the title role in Larry Shue's *The Foreigner* at Berkshires Theater Festival, directed by Scott Schwartz, for which he was awarded the BTF's Best Actor Award.

In his long television career he will admit to co-starring roles in *Bosom Buddies* and in *Newhart*, for which he received 4 Emmy nominations and a Viewers For Quality Television Emmy Award. It is possible he starred in Disney's *Honey I Shrunk The Kids*, though it might be urban legend. Among his numerous feature film, movies-of-the-week, mini-series and episodic credits Scolari can only remember A&E's *Stop The World...*, *The Ryan White Story*, *Perfect Harmony*, *Missing Children*, *Twilight Zone*, *Family Ties*, *E.R.*, *The West Wing*, HBO's *From The Earth to the Moon*, and *That Thing You Do*, unless he is properly medicated.

Scolari recently ended his run in Larry Gelbart's *Sly Fox* on Broadway at The Barrymore Theater and is thrilled to be returning to the cast of *Hairspray*. He is in love with actress Cathy Trien and their two children, Keaton and Cali Elizabeth.

A native of Washington D.C., **NONA GAYE (Hero Girl)** is best known for her acclaimed performance opposite Will Smith as Belinda, Muhammad Ali's second wife in Michael Mann's *Ali*.

She appeared on stage for the first time when she was three weeks old with her father, soul legend Marvin Gaye. At six years old her father announced on *Soul Train* that "She sings quite well." She was 14 when she cut her first demo and was signed to Atlantic Records at 16. In 1992 she released her first album, *Love for the Future*, which received high praise from the music industry. She recently dueted with her father on his rendition of "The Star Spangled Banner" for the NBA All-Star Weekend.

Adding modeling to her career, Gaye shot a campaign for Armani and walked the runway for Gianni Versace. In 2001 she returned to the recording studio, collaborating with Bono & Artists Against AIDS Worldwide re-recording “What's Going On” as a call to stop the spread of AIDS in Africa.

After taking time to raise her son, Nolan, Nona began to pursue her dream of becoming an actress. Her first audition was for *Ali*, resulting in her feature film debut, rave reviews and a call from USA Today for a supporting actress Oscar nomination.

Gaye recently co-starred opposite Keanu Reeves, Laurence Fishburne and Carrie Anne-Moss as Zee in the second and third installments of *The Matrix* trilogy, *The Matrix: Reloaded*, released in May 2003 and *The Matrix: Revolutions*, released at the end of the year.

Crash, directed by Paul Haggis and set for 2005 release, has Gaye working with an all-star ensemble cast led by Sandra Bullock, Don Cheadle, Brendan Fraser and Ludacris.

She began filming *XXX2: State of the Union*, opposite Ice Cube, in late July.

EDDIE DEEZEN (Know-It-All Boy) has run two Hollywood careers concurrently, as both an actor and a voice actor, for more than 20 years.

Debuting in the 1978 sci fi feature *Laserblast*, he went on to featured roles in such films as *Grease*, *I Wanna Hold Your Hand*, *Desperate Moves*, *Zapped*, *War Games*, *Critters 2: The Main Course*, *Assault of the Killer Bimbos* and more recently, *Spy Hard*, as well as the television movies *The Computer Wore Tennis Shoes*, *Mob Boss*, and *Champions: A Love Story*.

Deezen has also applied his versatile vocal talent to voicing characters on television productions of *Mother Goose & Grimm*, *Scooby-Doo in Arabian Nights*, *Dexter's Laboratory* and *The Weird Al Show*, as well as the series *Pigs Next Door*, *Lloyd in Space* and *Kim Possible*.

CHARLES FLEISCHER (Elf General) began his career in the Goodman Theater in Chicago. His unique vocal abilities and comedic talent in the role of Roger Rabbit in Robert Zemeckis' 1988 film *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* brought him national awareness and led to an hilarious pairing with Robin Williams at the 1989 Academy Awards Show.

Fleisher's debut starring engagement in Las Vegas and his one-man show for HBO's "One Night Stand" have been critically acclaimed. His non-stop concert dates at major comedy venues across the nation attest to his emergence as a superstar on the American comedy scene. His wild flights of improvisational invention have kept audiences coming back for more, as no two performances are ever the same.

His recent television appearances include episodes of *Drew Carrey* and *For the People*. Among his film credits are *Permanent Midnight*, with Ben Stiller, *Back to the Future*, *Nightshift*, *The Hand*, *Nightmare on Elm Street*, Warren Beatty's *Dick Tracy* and *Straight Talk* with Dolly Parton.

Fleischer is also the author of The Moleeds, a book of his own mathematical theories which has received resounding praise from academicians. The complex theories are hilariously woven into many of his comedy performances. His love for and desire to teach science to children has brought him much recognition, in particular for an educational CD-ROM for 7th Grade called "Virgil Reality," and as a host for *The Fleischer Files* on Discovery's Next Step. Fleischer blends his love of technology and comedy in his popular website, monkeydog.com, where users can view art, read about the Moleeds and use the insult engine to send personalized insults anonymously to anyone on the internet.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

ROBERT ZEMECKIS (Director/Writer/Producer) won an Academy Award, a Golden Globe and a Director's Guild of America Award for Best Director for the hugely successful *Forrest Gump*. The film's numerous honors also included Oscars for Best Actor (Tom Hanks) and Best Picture. Zemeckis since re-teamed with Hanks on the contemporary drama *Cast Away*, the filming of which was split into two sections, book-ending production on *What Lies Beneath*. Zemeckis and Hanks served as producers on *Cast Away*, along with Steve Starkey and Jack Rapke.

Earlier in his career, Zemeckis co-wrote (with Bob Gale) and directed *Back to the Future*, which was the top-grossing release of 1985, and for which Zemeckis shared Oscar and Golden Globe nominations for Best Original Screenplay. He went on to helm *Back to the Future, Part II* and *Part III*, completing one of the most successful film franchises ever.

In addition, he directed and produced *Contact*, starring Jodie Foster, based on the best-selling novel by Carl Sagan; and the macabre comedy hit *Death Becomes Her*, starring Meryl Streep, Goldie Hawn and Bruce Willis. He also wrote and directed the box office smash *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*, cleverly blending live action and animation; directed the romantic adventure hit *Romancing the Stone*, pairing Michael Douglas and Kathleen Turner; and co-wrote (with Bob Gale) and directed the comedies *Used Cars* and *I Wanna Hold Your Hand*.

Zemeckis also produced *House on Haunted Hill*, and executive produced such films as *The Frighteners*, *The Public Eye*, and *Trespass*, which he also co-wrote with Bob Gale. He and Gale previously wrote *1941*, which began Zemeckis' association with Steven Spielberg.

For the small screen, Zemeckis has directed several projects, including the Showtime feature-length documentary *The Pursuit of Happiness*, which explored the effect of drugs and alcohol on 20th century society. His additional television credits include episodes of Spielberg's *Amazing Stories* and HBO's *Tales From the Crypt*.

In 1998, Zemeckis, Steve Starkey and Jack Rapke partnered to form the film and television production company ImageMovers. *What Lies Beneath* was the first film to be released under the ImageMovers banner, followed by *Cast Away*, which opened to critical and audience acclaim in the Fall of 2000, and *Matchstick Men*.

In March 2001, the USC School of Cinema-Television celebrated the opening of the Robert Zemeckis Center for Digital Arts. This state-of-the-art center is the country's first and only fully digital training center and houses the latest in non-linear production and post-production equipment as well as stages, a 50-seat screening room and USC student-run television station, Trojan Vision.

STEVE STARKEY (Producer) earned an Academy Award as one of the producers of Best Picture-winner *Forrest Gump*. The film, directed by Robert Zemeckis and starring Tom Hanks, became one of the highest grossing movies of all time and collected six Oscars, including Best Director and Best Actor, as well as a Golden Globe Award, the National Board of Review's highest honor in 1994, two People's Choice Awards, the Producers Guild Golden Laurel Award and a BAFTA nomination for Best Picture.

In 1998 Starkey, along with Zemeckis and Jack Rapke, formed ImageMovers, a company primarily focused on motion picture production. He then re-teamed with Zemeckis

and Tom Hanks on the epic drama *Cast Away*, and produced the psychological thriller *What Lies Beneath*, starring Harrison Ford and Michelle Pfeiffer, also directed by Zemeckis.

Starkey's professional association with Zemeckis began in 1986 when he was associate producer on the innovative feature *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* and went on to serve as associate producer on the second and third installments of the *Back to the Future* trilogy. Their collaboration continued as Starkey and Zemeckis produced the black comedy *Death Becomes Her*, starring Goldie Hawn, Meryl Streep and Bruce Willis, followed by *Forrest Gump* and *Contact*, starring Jodie Foster and based on the best-selling novel by Carl Sagan.

Starkey also co-produced the feature comedy farce *Noises Off*, and produced the Showtime feature-length documentary *The Pursuit of Happiness*, exploring drug and alcohol addiction, which was directed and executive produced by Robert Zemeckis.

He is currently developing several projects for ImageMovers.

Early in his career, Starkey worked with George Lucas at Lucasfilm, Ltd., where he became an assistant film editor on *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi*. He later edited documentary films for Steven Spielberg's Amblin Entertainment, was associate producer of Spielberg's *Amazing Stories* television anthology series and was executive producer on the 1993 CBS series *Johnny Bago*.

GARY GOETZMAN'S (Producer) producing credits include *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, *Beloved*, *That Thing You Do!*, *The Silence of the Lambs*, *Philadelphia*, *Devil In a Blue Dress*, *Miami Blues*, *Modern Girls*, *Amos and Andrew*, *Storefront Hitchcock*, and the 2001 Emmy and Golden Globe winner for Best Mini-Series, HBO's *Band of Brothers*.

At 21, Goetzman was production manager for Jonathan Demme's directorial debut, *Caged Heat*. He also produced the Talking Heads' concert film *Stop Making Sense*, Neil Young's long-form video *The Complex Sessions* and music videos for Bruce Springsteen, Suzanne Vega, David Byrne and Jane Child's number one music video, *Don't Wanna Fall in Love*, which he also directed.

In 1998 Goetzman teamed with Tom Hanks to form PLAYTONE, a film, television and record company.

Producer WILLIAM TEITLER's upcoming projects include two films set for release in 2005: *Empire Falls*, starring Paul Newman, Joanne Woodward, Ed Harris, Helen Hunt, Philip Seymour Hoffman and Robin Wright Penn, directed by Fred Schepisi and based on the Pulitzer Prize winning book by Richard Russo; and *Zathura*, starring Tim Robbins and directed by Jon Favreau, based on the book by Chris Van Allsburg.

Among his producing credits are *How To Deal*, starring Mandy Moore, Alison Janney, Peter Gallagher and Trent Ford, directed by Clare Kilner, based on the book by Sarah Dessen; *Tuck Everlasting*, starring Ben Kingsley, Sissy Spacek, William Hurt, and Alexis Bledel, directed by Jay Russell, based on the award-winning book by Natalie Babbitt; *The Hurricane*, starring Denzel Washington, directed by Norman Jewison, based on the life of Rubin 'Hurricane' Carter, which garnered a Golden Globe and an Academy Award nomination for Washington; *Jumanji*, starring Robin Williams and Bonnie Hunt, directed by Joe Johnston, based on the book by Chris Van Allsburg; *Looking for Richard*, starring Al Pacino, Alec Baldwin, Winona Ryder and Kevin Spacey, directed by Al Pacino, which received the DGA Award for Best Documentary Feature; *Mr. Holland's Opus*, starring Richard Dreyfuss (Oscar nomination) and Glenn Headley, directed by Steven Herek; *Picture Perfect*, starring Jennifer Aniston, Kevin Bacon, Olympia Dukakis and Jay Mohr, directed by Glenn Gordon Caron; and *Unforgettable*, starring Ray Liotta and Linda Fiorentino, directed by John Dahl.

Teitler's television credits include HBO's CableAce Award-winning series *Tales From the Crypt* and Fox's *Two-Fisted Tales*, as well as *Tales from the Darkside* and *Moment of Fear* for Laurel/LBS.

Teitler and author Chris Van Allsburg are producing partners in Golden Mean Productions, where they are currently developing a diverse slate of projects including adaptations of Van Allsburg's classic books *The Widow's Broom* for Paramount/Nickelodeon Films and *The Sweetest Fig* for Columbia. Other projects include *What Maisie Knew*, a contemporary adaptation of the Henry James novel, by Nancy Doyne and Carroll Cartwright, and *My Year of Meats*, based on the novel by Ruth Ozeki.

Teitler graduated from Williams College. He lives in New York City with his wife and two daughters.

A graduate of NYU film school, **JACK RAPKE (Executive Producer)** moved to Los Angeles in 1975 and started in the mail room of the William Morris Agency. Four years later, he joined Creative Artists Agency (CAA) and began his 17-year association with the company. In addition to representing director/writer/producer Robert Zemeckis, Rapke's CAA clients included Jerry Bruckheimer, Ridley Scott, Imagine Entertainment partners Ron Howard and Brian Grazer, Michael Mann, Harold Ramis, Michael Bay, Terry Gilliam, Bob Gale, Bo Goldman, Steve Kloves, Howard Franklin, Scott Frank, Robert Kamen, John Hughes, Joel Schumacher, Marty Brest, Chris Columbus and Ezra Sacks.

Rapke departed from CAA as one of Hollywood's most accomplished and admired agents. He had overseen the company's motion picture department as co-chairman for seven years and was instrumental in building production companies around his high-profile client list.

Rapke left the agency business to go into business with Robert Zemeckis and producer Steve Starkey. In 1998 they formed ImageMovers, whose primary focus is the production of theatrical motion pictures. The company's first feature was *Cast Away*, directed by Zemeckis and starring Tom Hanks. ImageMovers went on to produce the Zemeckis-helmed *What Lies Beneath*, starring Harrison Ford and Michelle Pfeiffer, and *Matchstick Men*, directed by Ridley Scott and starring Nicolas Cage. Upcoming producing projects for the company include *Monster House*; *The Prize Winner of Defiance, Ohio*, starring Julianne Moore and Woody Harrelson, directed by Jane Anderson; and *Last Holiday* starring Queen Latifah, to be directed by Wayne Wang.

CHRIS VAN ALLSBURG (Author, Executive Producer) was raised in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He attended the University of Michigan with the vague idea of studying law, but the art courses he took as a lark proved more interesting than anything else. In 1972 he graduated with a degree in sculpture and moved to Providence, Rhode Island, where he continued his study of sculpture at the Rhode Island School of Design. Shortly after receiving his graduate degree, Van Allsburg began to show his sculpture in New York City galleries, where their surreal imagery quickly won him a reputation as an artist to watch. He didn't begin drawing until 1979, when his teaching commitments at RISD and a cold studio too far across town kept him from his sculpture.

The black-and-white artwork he created in carbon pencil and charcoal was appealing to his wife, Lisa, who used picture books in her elementary school art classes. She felt her husband's pictures had the quality of illustration and, with the encouragement of a friend, illustrator David Macaulay, she showed the work to children's book editors.

Walter Lorraine at Houghton Mifflin, Macaulay's editor, looked at a drawing of a lump in a carpet and a man raising a chair to hit it (an image much like the one printed in Van Allsburg's The Mysteries of Harris Burdick) and said, "If he can get this much storytelling content into one piece of art, I know he can create a children's book." Lisa Van Allsburg walked out with the promise of a contract and the rest, as they say, is history. Houghton Mifflin has published 15 of Van Allsburg's books, from his Caldecott Honor Award-winning first book, The Garden of Abdul Gasazi, to his most recent space adventure, Zathura.

The success of Van Allsburg's Jumanji and The Polar Express is no less than phenomenal: both received Caldecott Medals, Jumanji was made into a movie in 1995, and The Polar Express has become a classic with millions of copies sold. The Widow's Broom, The Sweetest Fig and Zathura are also in various stages of development for the movies.

Van Allsburg lives in Providence, Rhode Island, with his wife Lisa and their two daughters, Sophie and Anna.

WILLIAM BROYLES, JR. (Screenplay) grew up in Baytown, Texas, and attended Rice University where he was president of the student body and won the Hugh Scott Cameron Award for service to the University. He then went to Oxford University as a Marshall Scholar, worked in the civil rights movement, and finished out the Sixties as a Marine infantry lieutenant in Vietnam. Broyles was the founding editor of *Texas Monthly*, which won three National Magazine Awards during his tenure. He was the editor of *California Magazine*, and subsequently editor-in-chief of *Newsweek*, after which he vowed never to hold a job again. Since 1984 he considers himself an unemployed and occasionally homeless Vietnam veteran.

Broyles has lectured and taught at UCLA, USC, Rice, NYU, Columbia University, the U.S. Naval Academy, the Smithsonian, and the University of Texas at Austin. He has written for many newspapers and magazines, wrote the book *Brothers in Arms*, and was the co-creator of the television series *China Beach*, which won four Emmys.

Broyles teamed with one of his pals from early *Texas Monthly* days, Al Reinert, to write the film *Apollo 13*, for which he was nominated for an Academy Award and a Writer's Guild Award, and was awarded the PEN Center Literary Award for best screenplay. He was also the co-writer on 1999's *Entrapment* and wrote the original screenplay for *Cast Away*, which was released in 2000. He has since co-authored three more films, *Planet of the Apes* in 2001, *Unfaithful* in 2002 and *The Polar Express*.

Broyles is working on more books and screenplays. He serves on the advisory board for PEN Center USA and was named a distinguished alumnus of Rice University, and was inducted in 2002 into the Texas Film Hall of Fame. He's married to Andrea and has five great kids.

DON BURGESS, A.S.C. (Director of Photography) is an Academy Award-nominated cinematographer for his work on the acclaimed hit *Forrest Gump*, for which he also received an Outstanding Achievement nomination from the American Society of Cinematographers and a BAFTA nomination. He also received a CableACE Award for Best Cinematography on the Robert Zemeckis-directed television movie *Tales from the Crypt*, "Yellow."

Feature film credits for Burgess include the blockbuster hits *Spider-man* and *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines*; *Radio*; Robert Zemeckis's *Cast Away*; the thriller *What Lies Beneath*; *Contact*, starring Jodie Foster and Matthew McConaughey; *The Evening Star*; the Billy Crystal comedy *Forget Paris*; *Richie Rich*; *Josh and Sam*; *Mo' Money*; *Blind Fury*; and *Death Before Dishonor*.

His television work includes TNT's *The Courtmartial of Jackie Robinson*, which earned him another ASC nomination and *Breaking Point*, for which he won another CableACE Award for Best Cinematography.

Burgess most recently completed the romantic comedy *13 Going on 30* and the upcoming Joe Roth feature *Christmas with the Kranks*.

ROBERT PRESLEY (Director of Photography) previously collaborated with Robert Zemeckis as a camera operator on the 2000 releases *What Lies Beneath* and *Cast Away*.

His film career includes work on many acclaimed and high-profile films of the past decade, including *Die Hard: With a Vengeance* and *The 13th Warrior* for director John McTiernan; Joel Schumacher's *A Time to Kill*; *Breakdown*; *Hard Rain*; *EdTV*, for director Ron Howard; *The General's Daughter*; Disney's *The Kid*; the epic *Pearl Harbor*, for director Michael Bay; and *The Rookie*. Television credits include the hit CBS series *The Agency* and *L.A. Doctors*.

Prior to *The Polar Express*, Presley completed work on *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines* and *Radio*.

RICK CARTER (Production Designer) has been designing sets for the worlds of film and television for over 25 years. Among his recent credits are Steven Spielberg's *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence*, for which Carter was nominated for both the AFI Production Designer of the Year and the Art Directors Guild Award; and the acclaimed Robert Zemeckis film *Cast Away*, starring Tom Hanks.

Carter previously teamed with Zemeckis on *What Lies Beneath*, *Death Becomes Her*, *Back to the Future Part II* and *Part III*, and *Forrest Gump*, for which he earned an Academy Award nomination. His additional production design credits include *Jurassic Park* and *The Lost World: Jurassic Park*, *Amistad* (which earned another Art Directors Guild Award nomination) and *Three Fugitives* as well as the Spielberg-produced series *Amazing Stories*.

Carter is currently in pre-production on *The War of the Worlds*, with Steven Spielberg set to direct.

DOUG CHIANG (Production Designer) studied film at UCLA, and industrial design at the Center of Creative Studies, College of Art and Design. He got his start as a Stop Motion animator on the *Pee Wee's Playhouse* television series and soon rose to become a Clio Award winning commercial director and designer for Rhythm and Hues, Digital Productions, and Robert Abel and Associates.

In 1989, Chiang joined Industrial Light and Magic and became Creative Director in 1993. During this time, he worked as Visual Effects Art Director for films including *Ghost*, *Back to the Future II*, *The Doors*, *Terminator 2*, *Death Becomes Her*, *Forrest Gump*, *Jumanji*,

and *The Mask*. He earned both an Academy Award and a British Academy Award for *Death Becomes Her* and another British Academy Award for *Forrest Gump*.

In 1995 Chiang left ILM to head up the Art Department as Design Director for *Star Wars: Episode I, The Phantom Menace* and *Episode II, Attack of the Clones*.

He has just published his first book, *Robota*.

As an independent filmmaker, Chiang has received numerous awards, including a First Place FOCUS Award for his film, *Mental Block*. His short teaser film for *Robota*, the book and forthcoming video game, was awarded both the Prix Du Rendu award at Imagina 2003 Film Festival and Best Advertising/Promotional Film in the 2003 Annecy Animation Festival.

Chiang's paintings have appeared nationwide in various publications as well as limited edition prints and posters and have been featured in major national and worldwide exhibitions including the Brooklyn Museum, the Houston Museum of Fine Art, the San Diego Museum of Fine Art, the Fields Museum in Chicago, and the Kyoto and Tokyo National Museums, among others.

In 2003, he received an Honorary Doctorate from the prestigious Academy of Art College in San Francisco. Chiang lives in Northern California with his wife and two children.

JEREMIAH O'DRISCOLL (Editor) previously collaborated with Robert Zemeckis as an assistant to Arthur Schmidt on five of the director's feature films, starting with *Death Becomes Her* and followed by *Forrest Gump*, *Contact*, *What Lies Beneath* and *Cast Away*.

Among his additional feature credits as an assistant editor are *Driving Miss Daisy*, *The Last of the Mohicans*, *Addams Family Values*, *The Birdcage* and *Primary Colors*.

The Polar Express is O'Driscoll's first feature credit as Film Editor.

A Puyallup and Blackfeet Indian, **R. ORLANDO DUENAS (Editor)** grew up on the Puyallup Indian Reservation in Tacoma, Washington. Working in Seattle's film and video market until the mid nineties, Duenas moved to Los Angeles to concentrate on feature film editorial. He first worked with director Robert Zemeckis on *Contact*, and later edited his documentary, *The 20th Century: The Pursuit of Happiness*.

Duenas' additional editing credits include *Like Mike*, *The Scorpion King*, *Big Fat Liar*, *Cast Away*, *What Lies Beneath* and *Tommy Boy*.

KEN RALSTON's (Senior Visual Effects Supervisor) insight into dramatic development, along with his mastery of visual effects technology have earned him five Academy Awards as Special Effects Supervisor (*Forrest Gump*, *Death Becomes Her*, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*, *Cocoon*, *Star Wars: Episode VI – The Return of the Jedi*) and an equal number of British Academy Awards for many of the same films.

Since his arrival at Sony Pictures Imageworks, Ralston has served as special visual effects supervisor on *Phenomenon*, senior visual effects supervisor on *Michael* and *Contact*, visual effects guru on *Patch Adams* and senior visual effects supervisor on *Men in Black II*, *Cast Away* and *America's Sweethearts*.

While still an elementary school student in Los Angeles, he began “messing around” with film. Devising makeshift stop motion techniques and building models and miniatures, he shot an 8mm adventure about being shipwrecked on an island. The work of legendary filmmaker Ray Harryhausen inspired him to explore larger-than-life effects. In search of solutions, he wrote to Forest Ackerman, editor of “Famous Monsters of Film Land” magazine, who surprised Ralston with an invitation to his home. There, he met Jon Berg, who worked at one of the earliest visual effects commercial houses, Hollywood-based Cascade Pictures.

Ralston spent much of his high school years—and allowance—filming *The Bounds of Imagination*, a day in the life of a young boy that was, in his words, “just an excuse to play with as many effects as I could create.” Upon graduation in 1971, with the 45-minute film and his friendship with Berg as his calling card, Ralston landed a job at Cascade, where he worked in almost every capacity on the prototypical visual effects advertising campaigns of the early ‘70s. He built sets, sculpted models, animated puppets, created optical effects, performed stop motion animation and more on close to 200 spots for such clients as Volkswagen, Green Giant and Pillsbury (where, in many commercials, it was Ralston’s hand pressing the Doughboy’s stomach).

When George Lucas began *Star Wars* in 1976, Ralston was brought aboard as a camera assistant under the leadership of Special Effects Supervisor Dennis Muren. The film’s

success opened a door to a new realm of visual experimentation and Ralston's relationship with Industrial Light & Magic flourished. Next came the role of Special Effects Camera Operator on *Star Wars: Episode V – The Empire Strikes Back* (1980). *Dragonslayer* followed in 1981 with Ralston designing one of the key dragon characters and working as Special Effects Cameraman. With *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* (1982), he earned his first shared credit as Special Effects Supervisor. *Star Wars: Episode VI – The Return of the Jedi* was produced the following year (he co-supervised the effects on the multi-award winning film) and *Cocoon* (his first solo credit) in 1984.

For close to two decades, Ralston was a Visual Effects Supervisor at ILM, placing his aesthetic and technical stamp on many of the company's landmark innovations. Constantly pushing the technological envelope, he worked with directors and production designers to hone and realize their ideas on screen. He designed and executed visual effects on such top-grossing films as *Contact*, *Phenomenon*, *Out of Africa*, *Back to the Future I, II, and III*, *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home*, *Sabrina*, *Forrest Gump* and *Jumanji*, as well as the Academy Award winners noted above.

JEROME CHEN (Senior Visual Effects Supervisor) joined Sony Pictures Imageworks shortly after its inception in 1992 and worked his way up through the production ranks as a digital artist, senior animator, computer graphics supervisor and digital effects supervisor before becoming visual effects supervisor. He is an acknowledged expert in the technique of integrating digital imagery with live action, especially in the area of photorealistic effects. Chen's film credits include *Stuart Little* and *Stuart Little 2*, *Godzilla*, *Contact*, *James and the Giant Peach*, *The Ghost and the Darkness* and *In the Line of Fire*.

With *Stuart Little*, Chen earned his first Academy Award nomination for groundbreaking visual effects in the creation of the title character, Stuart the mouse. He was instrumental in the development and advancement of digital imagery techniques including innovations in lighting, compositing, fur and cloth – accomplishments subsequently surpassed by achievements in feather systems and photorealism in *Stuart Little 2*.

Chen's peers have repeatedly recognized his contributions to visual effects. He is a two-time Monitor Award winner for Best Electronic Effects in a Theatrical Release for *Stuart Little* and *Contact*, and also earned Monitor nominations for *Godzilla* and *James and the*

Giant Peach. Additionally, he was honored with a 1998 ANNIE Award nomination for Best Special Effects Animation in a Feature Film for his work on *Godzilla*. He has spoken internationally on the subject of digital character creation and imagery techniques.

Chen was visual effects supervisor on *Stuart Little 2*, “a great opportunity for new innovations in the area of digital characters in a live action environment,” he says. The introduction of two birds to Stuart’s world required Chen and his team to tackle the challenges of believable integration and performance of feathered creatures. The film won the VES Award (Visual Effects Society) for Best Character Animation in an Animated Film, as well as the Prix du long Metrage (Best Feature Film) at the Imagina Awards.

STEVEN BOYD (Co-producer) continues his long-standing relationship with director Robert Zemeckis with *The Polar Express*. Among his additional producing credits are *Cast Away*, *What Lies Beneath*, *The 20th Century: The Pursuit of Happiness* and *Contact*.

Oscar-nominated and Grammy-winning composer **ALAN SILVESTRI (Music Score, Original Songs)** has written the music for an extraordinary number of hugely successful films, including the *Back to the Future* trilogy, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*, *Father of the Bride*, *The Bodyguard*, *Predator* and perhaps his most familiar score, the Best Picture Oscar-winning *Forrest Gump*.

Within the last few years, Silvestri has added several more mega-hits to his resume: the Tom Hanks drama *Cast Away*; *What Women Want*, with Mel Gibson; the summer blockbuster *The Mummy Returns*; and *Something’s Gotta Give*, with Diane Keaton and Jack Nicholson. These, plus the John Cusack thriller *Identity*, the action-adventure *Van Helsing*, Jennifer Lopez’s comedy *Maid in Manhattan*, Disney’s animated *Lilo and Stitch*, and *Stuart Little 2* comprise some of the latest of his more than 70 scores.

Born in Manhattan, Silvestri was raised in Teaneck, N.J., and attended Boston’s prestigious Berklee College of Music before joining a Las Vegas band as a guitarist. His performing and arranging skills earned him work in Los Angeles, including an accidental gig scoring a film. Later, he wrote the music for more than 100 episodes of *CHiPs*, which led to the composer’s first major film, 1984’s *Romancing the Stone*, directed by Robert Zemeckis.

Zemeckis and Silvestri have made ten more films since then, including the time-travel trilogy *Back to the Future*, the live-action/animation riot *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*, the black comedy *Death Becomes Her*, the Oscar-winning *Forrest Gump*, the science-fiction epic *Contact*, the Hitchcockian thriller *What Lies Beneath* and the Tom Hanks tour-de-force *Cast Away*. Their collaboration spans 20 years and, next to that of Steven Spielberg and John Williams, is Hollywood's longest-running, most successful director-composer relationship.

For other filmmakers, Silvestri has written equally diverse, powerful and touching music, including a dark and suspenseful score for John McTiernan's *Predator*; one embodying the wonder of *The Abyss* for James Cameron; soaring, celebratory music for Charles Shyer's *Father of the Bride*; a memorably melancholy theme for Whitney Houston in Mick Jackson's *The Bodyguard*; a delightful cat-and-mouse score for Rob Minkoff's *Stuart Little*; and faux spaghetti-western music for Gore Verbinski's *The Mexican*.

A resident of Carmel for the past 13 years, Silvestri is an instrument-rated pilot and has recently begun a second career as a vintner. Within the next three years, he expects to be in full wine production on his 300-acre vineyard in Carmel Valley. Active in the fight against Juvenile Diabetes – a disease that afflicts one of his three children – he has testified before a Congressional committee on the issue and has written a song, “Promise to Remember Me,” which became a rallying song for the Juvenile Diabetes Foundation.

With five Grammy Awards, sales of nearly 150 million records and #1 hits across the Pop, Modern Rock, Jazz, Adult Contemporary, Country and R&B charts, **GLEN BALLARD (Original Songs)** ranks as one of the most acclaimed and successful songwriter-producers today. In recent years, he has produced and co-written songs for Christina Aguilera, Dave Matthews, Aerosmith, No Doubt, Anastacia, Shakira and Van Halen, among others.

Although Ballard had a long track record of hits written for Michael Jackson, Wilson Philips and George Strait, it was his 1995 collaboration with then-unknown Alanis Morissette on *Jagged Little Pill* that officially catapulted him to international prominence. The chart-topper was certified 16 times platinum with worldwide sales over 30 million copies and remains the #3 best-selling album in history as well as the best-selling solo and best-selling debut album of all time, earning Ballard four Grammys and a nomination for Producer Of The Year. He subsequently co-wrote and produced Morissette's *Supposed Former*

Infatuation Junkie and the Dave Matthews Band's *Everyday*, both triple platinum; produced tracks on No Doubt's platinum *Return Of Saturn* and *Best Of Van Halen, Vol. 1*; and wrote and produced for Shelby Lynne's lauded *Love, Shelby*.

Born in Mississippi in 1953, Ballard started playing piano as a child, wrote his first song before his 10th birthday and was a familiar face in local rock bands by the fifth grade. Upon graduation from the University of Mississippi, Ballard turned down fellowships to graduate and law schools and moved to the West Coast. By sheer luck, he joined Elton John's company in L.A., starting as an assistant and playing piano for Kiki Dee. His first chart single was Dee's recording of "One Step" in 1978, which secured a songwriting position with MCA Music Publishing, beginning a relationship that continues to this day.

Through the early '80s, Ballard composed songs for artists including George Benson, French superstar Johnny Hallyday and The Pointer Sisters. Quincy Jones took note of the young composer and under his aegis Ballard wrote "Try Your Love Again" for James Ingram and went on to write and produce for R&B singer Patti Austin. Soon he was writing and producing full-time for Qwest Records. Spurred by his success, he went independent, writing George Strait's 1986 Country Song Of The Year, "You Look So Good In Love," Michael Jackson's "Man In The Mirror" and arranging "Keep The Faith" for Jackson's *Dangerous*.

In 1990, he received his first Grammy for arranging "The Places You Find Love," for Chaka Khan and Siedah Garrett, and three nominations for his work on Wilson Phillips' eponymous album. In 1991 he wrote and produced Wilson Phillips' platinum follow-up, *Shadows And Light*. Others who have recorded his songs include Celine Dion, Al Jarreau, Earth, Wind & Fire, Sheena Easton, The Corrs, Lisa Loeb, Amy Grant, Philip Bailey and K.T. Oslin.

Ballard wrote and produced end title song "Adrenaline," with Gavin Rossdale for the 2002 blockbuster *XXX*, and collaborated with Alan Silvestri on "Forever May Not be Long Enough" for *The Mummy Returns*.

In 1997, he was named Songwriter of the Year by both ASCAP and the National Academy Of Songwriters, and received the prestigious Governor's Award from NARAS. In 2001, Ballard was honored by Billboard Magazine with a tribute issue marking his extraordinary achievement of penning and/or producing records selling over 150,000,000 copies worldwide

The Polar Express marks **JOANNA JOHNSTON's (Costume Designer)** eighth creative collaboration with Robert Zemeckis, beginning with the 1988 classic *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*, for which she created Jessica Rabbit's trademark form-fitting evening gown.

She re-teamed with Zemeckis on *Back to the Future Part II* and *Part III*, *Death Becomes Her*, *Forrest Gump*, *Contact* and *Cast Away*.

Johnston's feature film credits as a costume designer began with the 1987 horror fantasy *Hellraiser* and includes Steven Spielberg's *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* and *Saving Private Ryan*; Ron Howard's romantic epic *Far and Away*; Lawrence Kasdan's *French Kiss*; M. Night Shyamalan's *The Sixth Sense* and *Unbreakable*; *About a Boy*; and most recently, the romantic comedy *Love Actually*. She earned a Costume Designers Guild Award nomination for her work on *About a Boy*. Earlier in her career, she worked on a number of high-profile films including *The Color Purple*, *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, *The Pirates of Penzance*, *Tess* and *Death on the Nile*.

Johnston is currently in pre-production on Steven Spielberg's next film, based on H.G. Wells' *War of the Worlds*.