

Preservation History
Rain Dance by Helen Hill

In January of 2007 – under the tutelage of filmmaker and preservationist Bill Brand (BB Optics) – the second year students in Moving Image Archiving and Preservation at NYU undertook a class project to restore and preserve *Rain Dance*, a color 16mm sound animated film by Helen Hill. The project was supported through funding from the MIAP program.

Helen Hill (1970-2007) was an independent filmmaker and animator working in New Orleans, Louisiana. She had previously been involved in filmmaking communities in Halifax, Nova Scotia. She grew up in South Carolina. She received a BA from Harvard University and attended graduate school for animation at California Institute for the Arts.

Rain Dance is a four-minute animation produced by Hill while an undergraduate student at Harvard University from 1988-1992; the exact date of the production is currently unidentified. Although little known, the film is representative of both Hill's do-it-yourself approach – employing character cutouts, strong, yet playful colors, and a narrative and technical simplicity rich with charm – and her jovial demeanor and inquisitive approach to life. The film is dedicated to Elijah Aron, Hill's boyfriend throughout college. Aron remained close friends with Helen and her husband Paul Gailiunas, and was the godfather of their son Francis.

At the start, the only existing element for the film was an a-wind silent 16mm color workprint assembled with tape splices. The film was in relatively good condition, with little shrinkage, and only minor sprocket damage and emulsion wear – primarily nicks that appear as white specks in the preserved film. The workprint did not display any notable chemical or biological deterioration. We were aware of the existence of a VHS copy of the film with a soundtrack, which were unable to see. However, this video was reported to be of such poor quality that it the film was thought to be b/w instead of color. It is unclear whether Hill ever conformed the negative original to the work print, and completed the film with an answer print. Neither the negative original nor a positive answer print has been found. The class was unable to see the VHS and determine whether it was copied directly from the work print, or if in fact, another element may have existed. However, due to the extenuating circumstances of Helen's recent passing, we felt it best to proceed with the elements given.

During the initial interview, Gailiunas informed Bill Brand that the film needed a new sound track, as it was never properly completed. The original track was written and performed by Gailiunas with accordion by Matthew Butterick but neither he nor Helen was satisfied with the recording. For this restoration project Gailiunas recorded the guitar and voice anew in Vancouver and sent the track to Matthew Butterick in Massachusetts, who recorded accordion and glockenspiel and returned the track to Gailiunas who then mixed the tracks with Jon Wyna in Vancouver. After mixing, the track was sent to us in New York as an MP3 file.

For this restoration, the MIAP class replaced the tape splices with cement splices causing the loss of one frame at each splice. However, since the film is an animation shot on “2’s” and “3’s” and this provides identical adjacent frames, replacing the splices caused no loss of image flow. From this original workprint we created a 16mm polyester 3272 preservation internegative on an optical printer, skipping splices, and replacing lost frames with identical adjacent frames where appropriate. We created a 16mm sound answer print and 16mm release prints from the preservation internegative and optical negative track. We also produced a film-to-tape telecine transfer to Digital Betacam and a DVD for access copies. Colorlab Corp., in Rockville, MD produced the internegative and the positive prints, the telecine transfer and the DVD master. With Trackwise at Full House Productions, in New York, NY, we “stretched” and synchronized the soundtrack to fit the picture element. Trackwise produced the optical negative track and a 16mm magnetic safety track.

A preservation credit was added to the end of the film that reads:

This film was restored in 2007 by Bill Brand and graduate students in the Film Preservation class of New York University’s Moving Image Archiving and Preservation Program (MIAP), part of the Cinema Studies Department of the Tisch School of the Arts.

The soundtrack was restored with a new recording by Paul Gailiunas and Matthew Butterick

audio mix Jon Wyma

students Joshua Ranger
 Sarah Resnick
 Loni Shibuyama
 Lauren Sorensen

laboratory BB Optics
 Colorlab
 Trackwise at Fullhouse Productions

thanks Laura Kissel, University of South Carolina
 Dan Streible, Orphan Film Symposium

The original 16mm workprint, preservation internegative, optical sound track, 16mm magnetic safety track, answer print, Digital Betacam video master and DVD master were delivered to Colorlab Corp. with the understanding that they would all be forwarded to Harvard Film Archive along with the other preserved Helen Hill titles undertaken by Colorlab. One 16mm release print and DVD was delivered to Helen’s mother Becky Lewis and another release print and DVD to Paul Gailiunas. A third 16mm print and DVD was delivered to the New York University Film Study Center.

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