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CINE-GT 1800 - Intro to MIAP  
Individual Project Essay  
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**“PROJECTIONISTS PLAY SANTA”  
A Revival Screening**

BROOKLYN EAGLE, WED., JAN. 26, 1955 9



**SPECIAL SHOW**—Greeted with a bag of candy for each by Irwin Breuer, owner of the Granada Theater, 2819 Church Ave., some 200 children who are unable to attend school and receive their schooling through the Board of Education's Bureau of the Physically Handicapped, enjoyed a special showing of "Snow White" yesterday afternoon as guests of Mr. Breuer and Local 366 of the Motion Picture Operators Union. Besides Mr. Breuer, the adults, left to right, are Harry Gorfman, union representative; Max Schiering, theater manager, and Hazel Kane, representing the Board of Education.

## STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Marked by frequent changes and conflicts, the workforce of the motion picture industry has seen many transitions since its birth in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Throughout these transitions, projectionists (or, motion picture operators and technicians) have been central to the cinematic experience, gaining wide recognition as conductors of the shows, for better or worse. Lately, the title “projectionist” has begun to lose its meaning, with the advent of digital projection and cinematography, and it is generally assumed that anyone could operate a new digital projector or push play on a DCP monitor. By favoring the convenience of new technology, the role of the projectionist has diminished, and with it the memory of what projectionists once were and how they contribute to the cinematic experience.

In 1893, the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, Moving Picture Technicians, Artists and Allied Crafts of the United States, Its Territories and Canada was founded in the bottom floor of an Elks Lodge in New York City. This union was created to ensure fair wages and working conditions for its members<sup>1</sup> and continues to function today. In New York City, the members of Local 306 of the IATSE have a reputation of being very active, collaborating with local film societies and maintaining their presence in the trade. Between the mid 1950’s and late 1960’s, one such ongoing collaboration was with the Movie Social Club of Kings County, which, aside from holding regular screenings for film enthusiasts in the area, had a yearly tradition of hosting Christmas parties at the St. Giles and Beth-El hospitals, in which Local 306 union representative and director of the Movie Social Club, Harry Garfman, would bring candy and toys and project films for the children at the hospitals (sometimes on the ceiling for bed-ridden patients)<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Information supplied by the IATSE Website History section.

<sup>2</sup>Information supplied by Local 306 website blog:<http://www.local306.org/2501.html>.



Holiday Time in the 1960s and the Movie Social Club's Entertainment Committee found a way to donate their projection skills, and bring Santa's cheer to youngsters in hospitals. Sadly, this is a way of life all but disappeared in the projection craft of the 21st Century.

CLIPPING PHOTO COURTESY OF BRO. MARTY ROLLER

Lately, Local 306 has fallen on rather hard times, with union membership dropping rapidly and projectionist positions becoming few and far between. However, current members still advocate joining as much as ever, representing the most skilled technicians of their profession and advocating higher standards of moving image exhibition, especially in this transitional moment of moving image history. Union members work with countless organizations (the Museum of Modern Art, Museum of the Moving Image, and Film Society of Lincoln Center, to name a few) that provide community-enriching cinema programs to New York City, maintaining a high standard of incomparable quality of presentation. However, many of these organizations charge high admission prices to maintain their facilities and costs of film programming, making attendance exclusive to a smaller audience.

In general, going to the cinema is and has been a privilege enjoyed by those who can afford the ticket and the leisure time. At the theater, a projectionist plays a neutral part in operating the machine, at the mercy of the changing equipment and content of the industry, making no decisions about who sees the films and what films are chosen. The activities and screenings held by The Movie Social Club used the technical skills of projectionists (fostered by the efforts of the union and the stage craft community) and their own personal convictions to bring the theater to the audience and bridge the gap

<sup>3</sup> Image credit: <http://www.local306.org/2501.html>

between cinema-loving classes. They also served to demystify what has become a notoriously secretive trade. The transition to digital has cast a dark cloud over the position of film projection, and the general feeling is that it's important to present moving image projection as a complex skill that is not to be undermined by the ease of every new consumer digital projector. Putting aside the internal tension of the trade, this project aims to escape socio-political conflicts and focus on more positive outlets for projection and film enthusiasm.

In celebration of the 100<sup>th</sup> year of Local 306, I propose to host a revival screening in honor of the Movie Social Club's charitable services, promoting appreciation of the projection of moving images and sharing this experience with those who are most in need of entertainment. A screening in partnership with Local 306 aims to showcase a tradition of outreach, drawing attention to their role and importance within New York's film history. Utilizing the New York Public Library's Reserve Film & Video Collection will reinforce a notion of "film service" represented by the mission of their collection, recognizing community resources and partnerships as valuable tools for fostering an inclusive cinema community<sup>4</sup>.

The first steps in organizing the event were to determine print availability and gain permission for screening the selected titles. Elena Rossi-Snook, head of Preservation for the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts Reserve Film and Video Collection, assisted in reserving several titles in advance. Many of the titles selected for this event are rare and required permission from the Library for outside use, and some are not listed in their catalog. Other films selected for the program will be licensed from Swank Motion Pictures. Licensing fees for these films will be covered out-of-pocket.

Equally important was to find a suitable venue that offered a comfortable and convenient space for children and parents to commune. After several considerations, Woodhull Medical Center was the only organization that responded to my proposal and also met the criteria. Within the Pediatrics unit, Woodhull has a small in-patient children's program called Child Life Care for patients ranging in age from newborns to young adults. According to hospital staff, the number of patients ranges but is

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<sup>4</sup> Rossi-Snook, Elena. Public Library 16mm Film Collections in America. 2005. The Moving Image. Volume 5. No. 1, page 16.

consistently very few (less than 15 patients), which, although keeping the event an intimate and low-attendance affair, does afford some flexibility in finding a room within the center where everyone can fit. Part of this program includes art therapy and recreation services, in which children are given time, either in their own rooms or in a recreation room, to play and be creative. A room normally used for these purposes might be sufficient to hold a small number of attendees and accommodate the power and space requirements of the event equipment. The space should not be crowded once guests and equipment are in attendance, and should also be able to accommodate any special seating or other arrangements needed by patients (wheelchairs, free space for crutches, etc.). The room must be able to hold at least 10 people while keeping a 10ft distance clear from projector to screen, which is necessary to project an approximately 4.5 ft. x 6 ft. image with a 20mm lens (however, lenses can be changed to accommodate a smaller space).

The issue of darkness in a hospital is one that complicates the event, but in anticipation of using a medium to small sized room, the close proximity from projector to screen, by using a 16mm projector with a xenon-lamp, the image will be bright enough if lights are kept at a minimum within the screening space. The availability of movable curtains at the hospital will be particularly useful in this circumstance, as they can be placed on either side of the screen to block any light interfering from directly beside the screen.

In regards to programming, the films have been chosen for their versatility and all-ages content. Several of them are not likely to be seen elsewhere during the holidays because of their lack of mainstream popularity, and two were chosen for their familiarity among younger audiences. Being a Christmas-themed screening, held on Christmas Eve, there was no attempt to cater the content to those who may not celebrate Christmas. The evening will be divided into two sets geared toward different age groups. The first portion of the program will feature the three films more suited to a younger audience, generally children up to age 8 or 9: *The Story of Christmas*, *The First Christmas Tree*, and *Christmas Cracker*. The second portion will include *Tom & Jerry* and *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, which could be more appropriate for viewers age 10 and older. Separating the films in this way will provide the audience with a short break and allow

the audience to leave early if desired, or show up later to view the slightly more mature films.

Showcasing these films on the 16mm film format, while enjoyable, is not a major component or intention of this screening, but is necessary since NYPL does not have the listed titles on DVD or digital file. Licensing from NYPL is preferable because it aligns with the community-driven aspect of this screening. Screening on 16mm is also a good opportunity to educate any children who may be unfamiliar with film and curious about the format or the projectors, turning entertainment into a learning experience.

For film projection, a projection screen, two 16mm projectors, and accompanying sound equipment will be needed. This equipment has been secured and will be provided by members of the Local 306, free of charge. For digital projection, additional equipment would include: a laptop computer with DVD drive, and large external speakers. Because this event does not attempt to highlight issues surrounding the transition from film to digital filmmaking and projection, more emphasis will be put on providing an optimal viewing experience for the audience, which I believe to be the true goal and mission of the projectionist, regardless of my personal feelings about film advocacy.

A printed program will be provided, with descriptions for each film and show times listed. The content of the program is as follows:

#### PROGRAM DESCRIPTION:

An early evening program of holiday films and cartoons for children and parents, to be screened at Woodhull Medical Center on Christmas Eve<sup>5</sup>.

*Total run time: 123 min. with a 10 min. intermission.*

Program 1:

**Max's Christmas (1988, 16mm, 5 min., NYPL ):** Directed by Michael Sporn. Voices by Jenny Agutter and Rex Robbins. Based on the book by Rosemary wells, Ruby Rabbit tries to convince Max Rabbit to go to bed, but he sneaks out to meet Santa Claus on Christmas Eve.

**Christmas Cracker (1964, 9min, National Film Board of Canada NYPL):**

Directed by Norman McLaren. In a combination of stop-motion and cartoon animation by legendary animator Norman McLaren, three Christmas stories are introduced by a elf-like jester character: a story about jingle bells in which boy and girl paper cut-outs move to music; a story about in which tin toys perform a ballet; and a story in which a

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<sup>5</sup> Descriptions and film info supplied by NYPL Catalog and Swank Motion Pictures.

Christmas tree trimmer builds a space vehicle in order to pluck a star from the sky for the top of his tree (Synopsis from NYPL).

**Mole & the Christmas Tree (1994, 24 min, 16mm., NYPL):** A Christmas adventure with Mole and Rat; part of the popular “Mole” T.V. series.

**Mickey's Christmas Carol (1983, 26min., 16mm, NYPL):**

An adaptation of Charles Dickens' classic Christmas story, featuring a cast of Disney characters. Mickey Mouses play Bob Cratchit, the overworked, underpaid employee of Ebenezer Scrooge played by Scrooge McDuck. Also stars Goofy, Jiminy Cricket, Willie the Giant, Donald and Daisy Duck, Minnie Mouse, Mr. Toad, Chip & Dale, Ratty and Moley, The Bad Wolf and the Three Little Pigs.

*(10 min. Intermission)*

Program 2:

**Tom & Jerry: Night Before Christmas (1941, video, 9min., US, Swank):**

The usual antics of Tom cat and Jerry mouse culminate in a heart-warming Christmas cheer ending.

**A Cricket in Times Square (24 min. NYPL):** Directed by Chuck Jones. Although not a Christmas story, a charming film taking place in winter in New York City about a cricket who warms the hearts of New Yorkers with his musical wings.

**Dr. Seuss' How the Grinch Stole Christmas (1966, video, 26min., US, Swank):**

Directed by Chuck Jones. Narrated by Boris Karloff. Dr. Seuss' classic story of how The Grinch tries to take Christmas away from Whoville.

#### LOGISTICS:

In planning this screening, I was confronted with several complications and considerations regarding logistics and technical needs. Most issues have to do with coordinating with Woodhull Medical Center. Arranging a meeting the Director of Public Affairs at Woodhull Medical Center required much persistence although they were exceedingly helpful and enthusiastic about the project. Being a hospital, it is understandable that the administration is considerably busy, which has hindered by ability to visit the site and perform a projection test.

Additionally, the projection and sound equipment must be transported to the venue, which is preferably done by car rather than public transportation. I have agreed to pay for the transportation of equipment and accompanying projectionists to and from the venue, and members of the AMIA Film Advocacy Task Force has volunteered to help. Setting up the equipment must be done prior to show time, which will require the designated room to be unoccupied for at least one hour prior to the show.

The two films not supplied by NYPL must be rented or bought, in addition to the licensing fee, or Swank can provide a copies for a \$21.00 shipping fee. Below is an estimate of total costs for the entire event:

COSTS

Licensing & Shipping fees: <i>Tom &amp; Jerry: Night Before Christmas</i> <i>How the Grinch Stole Christmas</i>	(still awaiting quotes) 75.00 + 15.00 (DVD) 75.00 + 14.00 (DVD)
Equipment Transportation to and from venue	~ 60.00 (or volunteer transportation)
Chairs	0.00 (provided)
Venue rental fee	0.00
Equipment	0.00 (donated)
Staff	0.00 (volunteer)
Total	~ 239.00



## RESOURCES

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<http://www.nyc.gov/html/hhc/woodhull/html/services/pediatrics.shtml>

## EVENT CONTACTS:

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Local 306.	212.956.1306