

About the film

The Cat Piano is an 8-minute short film by The People's Republic of Animation, co-directed by Eddie White and Ari Gibson, and produced by Jessica Brentnall. The story is told in the form of a poem written by Eddie White, which is narrated by iconic Australian artist Nick Cave. The film's co-investors were the Bigpond Adelaide Film Festival and The South Australian Film Corporation.

Synopsis

In a city of singing cats, a lonely beat poet falls for a beautiful siren. When a mysterious dark figure emerges, kidnapping the town's singers for his twisted musical plans, the poet must save his muse and put an end to the nefarious tune that threatens to destroy the city.

Project History

The Cat Piano was inspired by a haunting etched image of a Katzenklavier, a 17th century German instrument (perhaps only theoretical) invented for the entertainment of a depraved German prince. The instrument was constructed from a row of caged cats whose tails were pierced with a spike when the corresponding keys were struck, resulting in a pained meowing symphony. Upon discovering the Katzenklavier, Eddie White knew this cruel, but strangely amusing musical instrument had to be brought to life as a film.

The film began as a personal project between Eddie White and Ari Gibson during their spare time in mid-2007. Producer Jessica Brentnall became involved as the film's producer and secured the iconic voice of Nick Cave to provide the narration, which was recorded in November that year while Nick Cave was on tour in Australia with his band, Grinderman.

The film received financial support from the Adelaide Film Festival Investment Fund and South Australian Film Corporation, and was completed in February 2009. The Cat Piano premiered at the 2009 Adelaide Film Festival.

Production

The filmmakers wanted the film's animation and visual style to evoke the classical style of cartoons and illustrations from the past. They wanted to avoid making it look 'shiny' or 'digital.'

The film's graphic 2D look is achieved by animating the entire film by hand in Adobe Photoshop, drawing with Wacom tablets directly into the computer. This highly versatile technique of animation has become a signature of The People's Republic of Animation.

Interview with Eddie White

Where did the idea for The Cat Piano come from?

The Cat Piano was inspired by a cruel and Byzantine musical instrument that I knew had to be the subject of my next film. The actual cat piano, or "Katzenklavier" was a 17th century German instrument invented for the entertainment of a depraved German prince. The instrument was made

up of a row of caged cats whose tails were pierced with a spike when their corresponding keys were played; resulting in a pained meowing symphony. I knew that this cruel but strangely colourful musical instrument would lend itself perfectly to an animated film.

What inspired the Poem?

I wanted the film's narration to be a poem that blends together the loose, moody and syncopated jazz like rhythms of beat poets such as Kerouac, Ginsberg and Burroughs, with the intense and haunting style of romantic poets like Edgar Allen Poe and the nonsensical rhyming verse of Lewis Carroll and Edward Gorey. It is the essences of all of these poets that provide the unique voice of the film's main character who narrates the story.

Why Nick Cave?

As the film is driven by its poetic prose, the voice of the narrator needed to be the driving force of the film's soundtrack; a haunting voice, a romantically tortured voice and a moody unforgettable voice that will heighten the dramatic nature of the story and work well against the black comedy of the visuals. A voice with a musicality and sense of timing that resonates with clarity when heard in any country of the world. With this in mind it became obvious that the voice of Nick Cave possessed all these qualities in telling the story I wanted to tell. It was also an iconic voice that could be recognized by people all over the world who would like the themes of the film.

Where did the inspiration for the visual style come from?

The film's main character and narrator is The Poet; a tortured and introverted cat who expresses himself through his dramatic poetry, and his quest to save the beautiful singer he has fallen in love with from a depraved terror that is shrouded in mystery. As the story leant itself well to Film Noir, we used many stylistic devices of the genre in colour, contrast and composition to tell the story. The film also drew inspiration from the Anime series *Cowboy Bebop*, which is a fantastic reimagination of the Film Noir genre. The character designs were also inspired by the cat designs of cartoonist and animator Hiroshi Masamura and much of the film's setting inspired by the photographs of Brassai.

What is your next project?

I am currently developing an animated feature film, *The Popovich 5*, which tells the story of 5 cosmonaut-in-training teenage siblings who escape and journey across 1980s Soviet Union to perform as a pop group in an international Pop Music competition.

I want to make a difference in the animated world. I don't want to make dazzling CG epics at this stage of my career. Nor do I want to make a completely art-house and inaccessible animated feature that the wider public won't see. While I love watching many films that fit into both of these categories, what I want to make is something different again – something that is both commercially accessible but made for the older audiences who grew up enjoying *Toy Story* and *Shrek* 10-15 years ago.

Filmmakers:

Eddie White – Writer-Director

Edward Alexander White was born in Adelaide, Australia 9 October 1981. Eddie graduated from Flinders University with a Bachelor of Arts, majoring in Drama Performance.

With a strong interest in drawing and animation from an early age, Eddie co-founded The People's Republic of Animation in 2003 with his brother, Sam and childhood friends. As PRA's Creative Director, Eddie devotes most of his time to writing and directing the studio's films as well as providing creative input into their other projects.

Eddie co-directed *Fritz Gets Rich* (2005) and *Carnivore Reflux* (2006) with fellow PRA founder, James Calvert. *Carnivore Reflux* was awarded the best animation award at Australia's people's choice of film 'The IF Awards' in 2006.

In 2007, Eddie wrote and directed the short film *Sweet & Sour* a short-film co-production with The Shanghai Animation Film Studio. Eddie also wrote and co-directed the animated TV series pilot; *I was a Teenage Butterfly* (2007), for Nickelodeon Australia.

His latest film, *The Cat Piano*, has won the Best Animation award at the Australian Film Institute Awards, the Sydney Film Festival, Melbourne International Film Festival and the Inside Film Magazine Awards, as well as selection at the prestigious Annecy International Animation Festival.

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Ari Gibson - Director

Ari Gibson was born in Adelaide, Australia on 14 May 1983. He graduated from the University of South Australia with a Bachelor of Visual Arts, majoring in New Media Art. Ari has collaborated with The People's Republic of Animation since 2005.

With Eddie White, Ari co-directed *The Cat Piano* short film and *I Was a Teenage Butterfly* pilot. He also served as Art director on Eddie's short film, *Sweet & Sour*, bringing to it lavish visuals that combined traditional drawn animation with 3D graphics.

Nick Cave – Narrator

(From www.nick-cave.com)

Nicholas Edward Cave was born in Warracknabeal, Australia on 22/09/1957. He attended Caulfield Grammar School in Melbourne, where he met Mick Harvey, with whom he founded a high-school band that would become "The Birthday Party".

The band moved from Australia to London, where their incendiary live shows and a string of albums and EPs of swaggering, raw-boned blues had a huge impact on the British rock scene of that time. The band moved to West-Berlin and fell apart in 1983 after releasing 3 studio albums and 2 EP's.

Part of the Birthday Party members would form Nick Cave's eponymous band, The Bad Seeds, recording the first Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds album in 1984, *From Her To Eternity*. The band would go on to record over ten studio albums over the next 15 years.

As a film composer, Nick Cave has scored several features including *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* (2007), and *The Road* (2009). As a screenwriter, he has written the screenplays for *Ghosts... of the Civil Dead* (1988) and *The Proposition* (2005)

Most Recently, Cave's published *The Death of Bunny Munro*, a novel which deals with a middle aged lothario whose constant womanising and alcohol abuse comes to a head after the suicide of his wife.

Jessica Brentnall – Producer

Jessica Brentnall began her career in the fashion industry at Vogue Australia. Following Vogue, Jessica worked in Public Relations for Louis Vuitton.

Jessica made the transition to film in 2000 working on the Australian drama, *Rabbit-Proof Fence*. In 2001 Jessica produced the feature length documentary, *The Walk*, and 2002 created the special film project *POV* (Point of View), which was presented by her production company, Magic Films, in association with Working Title Australia, the Australian arm of Working Title Films (*Bridget Jones Diary*).

During the two years that *POV* ran in Australia, Jessica commissioned and executive produced 14 short dramas and theatrically released (in Australia) both *POV 2002* and *POV 2003* as anthology feature films. Directors of *POV* films included Clayton Jacobson (*Kenny*), Nash Edgerton (*The Square*), Elissa Down (*The Black Balloon*), Andrew Lancaster (*Accidents Happen*), Anthony Hayes (*Ten Empty*) and Garth Davis (*Love My Way*). Individual *POV* films went on to screen at festivals around the world, including Sundance.

In 2007 Jessica initiated PULSE, an Australian Directors' Showcase that screened at Paramount Studios, Los Angeles in January 2008 as part of Australia Week (G'DAY USA). Magic Films presented PULSE with Australia's screen agency, the Film Finance Corporation, and United Talent Agency (USA).

In 2009 Jessica produced the short film *The Cat Piano* with Eddie White and Ari Gibson of The People's Republic of Animation, which was narrated by iconic musician, Nick Cave. The film won Best Short Animation at the Sydney Film Festival and the Melbourne International Film Festival and was selected for Official Competition at Annecy International Animation Film Festival.

Jessica is presently in pre-production on her first feature film as producer, *Sleeping Beauty*, which stars Emily Browning (*Sucker Punch*) in the lead role.

Through Magic Films, Jessica is developing a number of new film and television projects, including Eddie White's debut feature film, *The Popovich 5*.

The People's Republic of Animation – Production Company

The PRA is a multi award-winning animation studio based in Adelaide, Australia creating world-class animation for film, advertising and video games.

Their latest short, *The Cat Piano* (2009) won 'Best Short Animation' awards at the 2009 AFI Awards, Inside Film Awards, Flickerfest, DENDY Awards, Melbourne Film Festival and the Bigpond Adelaide Film Festival. Their previous films including *Sweet & Sour* (2007) and *Carnivore Reflux* (2006) have also won numerous awards locally and internationally with *Carnivore Reflux* also a 2006 Tropfest Finalist.

In advertising, PRA has also lent its style to brands such as Converse, Smirnoff, Bridgestone and Mitsubishi. PRA has also branched into interactive media, working with several major video games developers in Australia to produce animated cinematics for XBox 360, Playstation 3 and Nintendo Wii games titles.

PRA is currently producing a series of animated interstitials titled *Itty Bitty Ditties* for new kids channel, ABC 3. They are also developing feature film projects written by Creative Director Eddie White.

Bigpond Adelaide Film Festival - Investor

Established in June 2002 by the Premier of South Australia the Hon Mike Rann, the biennial Adelaide Film Festival is an eleven day celebration of the moving image in all its manifestations - from cinema to galleries, from mobile phones to on line. The boutique AFF explores contemporary screen culture through its innovative program and partnerships.

Established in 2003, the ground breaking AFF Investment Fund has supported and then world premiered an internationally acclaimed slate of films which have gone on to garner awards from all over the world including the Cannes and Toronto Film Festivals and dominated the 2005, 2006 and 2007 AFI awards.

From a total of 32 Adelaide Film Festival Investment Fund supported projects since the fund's establishment in 2002, there have been 60 AFI and 39 IF nominations and 28 AFIs and 18 IF Awards. This is in addition to Bigpond Adelaide Film Festival winning the 2007 IF Award for Best Film Festival and being listed in Variety Magazine's Top 50 Unmissable Film Festivals around the world.

The 2011 BigPond Adelaide Film Festival will take place from 24 February to 6 March 2011.

SA Film Corporation - Investor

The South Australian Film Corporation (SAFC) is a film support body and lead agency in South Australia for the promotion, stimulation and development of the film industry. It is a statutory body established under the 1972 South Australian Film Corporation Act and has a Board of Directors, which is appointed by the State government and reports to the Minister for the Arts.

Since its inception in 1972, the SAFC has formed a vital part of South Australia's cultural and economic life. The core functions of the SAFC are to foster the creation and delivery of critically acclaimed and commercially successful ideas, moving images and sound for any viewing medium; to support the SA screen industry in a dynamic and responsive manner and to optimise opportunities for production & post-production in this state.

The vision of the SAFC is to create a sophisticated, dynamic film and television industry and community that prospers in a rapidly changing world and which makes a significant contribution to South Australia's cultural and economic well being.

Credits

Directed by	Eddie White & Ari Gibson
Narrated by	Nick Cave
Poem Written by	Eddie White
Produced by	Jessica Brentnall
Art Director	Jason Pamment
Animators	Ari Gibson, Makoto Koji, Alex Grigg, Benjamin Drake, Brodie McCrossin
Executive Producers	Nick Cave, Sam White, Hugh Nguyen
Production Manager	Renée Boucher
Character Design	Ari Gibson, Eddie White, Makoto Koji, Alex Grigg
Editor	Jeremy Hill-Brooks
Music	Benjamin Speed
Supervising Sound Designer	Robert Mackenzie
Sound Designer	Tom Huezenroeder
Re Recording Mixer	Pete Smith
Voice Recorded at	Soundfirm Melbourne
Mixed in	Boom Sound at Best FX
Music Mixer	Geir Brilliant Gunnarsson
Compositing & VFX	Ben Steele, Raynor Pettge, Leath Mattner
Assistant Editor	James Calvert
3D Visualisation	Simon Westlake, Ben Steele, Brodie McCrossin
Colouring & Shadows	Luke Marsden, Heath Pagram, Leath Mattner, Jonah Booth-Remmers
Special Thanks to	Katrina Sedgwick, Rachel Willis, Richard Harris, Sandy Cameron, Defrim Isai, Sarah El-Atm, Rushali Keskar, Simon Herden, Greg Holfeld, Felix Riebl, Limi Seo, Anthony Cheung, Mahalia Tanner, David Ngo, Karen Yang, Becky Zhang, Martyn Zub, Stefany Frigo, Tim Lucas, Nicola Tate, Adrian Tisato, Dario Russo, Barry Plews, Hu He, Ryan Kirby, Julia Rébutin, Alex Vickery-Howe, Robi Watt, Amy Gebhardt, Joe Millward, Finnegan Kruckemeyer, Jennifer Vigaud, Aimee Horne, Aaron Mellor, Sonya Mellor, Matt Bate, Bettina Hamilton.
Developed and Produced in association with	Magic Films
Principal Investor	Adelaide Film Festival
Financed with the assistance of	The South Australian Film Corporation
Post Production	Merging Media
Supported by	WACOM
Mastering Facilities	The Cutting Room
Music Mixing Facilities	AFTRS
A Film by	The People's Republic of Animation

Awards & Screenings

Awards

- **AFI (Australian Film Institute) Awards** – *Winner: Best Short Animation.*
- **Annecy International Animation Festival (FRANCE)** – *Official Selection: International Short Film Competition.*
- **IF (Inside Film Magazine) Awards (AUSTRALIA)** – *Winner: Best Animation*
- **Sydney Film Festival (AUSTRALIA)** – *Winner: Yoram Gross Dendy Award for Best Short Animation*
- **Melbourne International Film Festival (AUSTRALIA)** – *Winner: Best Animation Short*
- **Flickerfest Film Festival (AUSTRALIA)** – *Winner: Yoram Gross Award for Best Short Animation Film*
- **Adelaide Film Festival (AUSTRALIA)** – *Winner: Audience Choice Award for Best Short Film.*
- **15 Short Film Festival (USA)** – *Winner: Jury Prize for Best Animation & Audience Award for Best Short Film*
- **2009 Shorts Film Festival (AUS)** – *Winner: Bronze Shorts Award*

Festivals & Screenings

- **Anima Mundi International Animation Festival of Brazil (BRAZIL)** – *Official Selection: Short Film Competition*
- **LA Shortsfest (USA)** – *Official Selection*
- **Raindance Film Festival (UK)** – *Official Selection*
- **Bradford Animation Festival (UK)** – *Official Selection*
- **Animatu International Festival of digital animation (PORTUGAL)** – *Official Competition*
- **Klik! Amsterdam Animation Festival (NETHERLANDS)** – *Official Competition*
- **Foyle Film Festival (IRELAND)** – *Official Selection*
- **Leeds International Film Festival (UK)** – *Official Selection*
- **China International Cartoon & Digital Animation Festival – CICDAF (CHINA)** – *Official Competition*
- **New Orleans Film Festival (USA)** – *Official Competition*
- **Brisbane International Film Festival (AUSTRALIA)** – *Official Selection*
- **Revolve Film + Music Festival (USA)**
- **Small World International Animation Festival (UK)**
- **Tindirindis Animation Festival (LITHUANIA)** – *Official Selection*
- **Animation Volda (NORWAY)** – *Official Selection*
- **Fredrikstad Animation Festival (NORWAY)** - *Screening*
- **Future Film Festival (ITALY)** – *Official Selection*
- **Cinequest Film Festival (USA)** – *Official Selection*
- **Chicago International Movies & Music Festival (USA)** – *Official Selection*
- **Ashland Independent Film Festival (USA)** – *Screening*
- **Spokane International Film Festival (USA)** – *Official Selection*
- **ATOM (Australian Teachers Of Media) Awards** – *Finalist: Best Short Animation*
- **Bondi Film Festival (AUSTRALIA)** – *Official Competition*
- **SITGES Festival Internacional de Cinema Fantastic de Catalunya (SPAIN)** – *Official Selection*
- **CineCity – The Brighton Film Festival (UK)** – *Official selection*
- **Lucerne Film Festival - Animation Night (SWITZERLAND)** - *Screening*
- **ICON SF Festival – Israeli Annual Science Fiction & Fantasy Festival (ISRAEL)** – *Official Selection*

- **Sydney International Animation Festival (AUSTRALIA) – Official Screening**
- **Ottawa International Animation Festival (CANADA) – International Showcase**
- **Animex International Festival of Animation & Computer Games (UK) - Screening**
- **The Revenge of The Freakishly Short Animation Festival (USA) – Official Selection**
- **Redhot Shorts (AUSTRALIA) – Screening**
- **Victoria Film Festival (CANADA) – Screening**