



*The Caravel Animation*

# Quirino Cristiani

The mystery of the first animated movies



HD documentary about Quirino Cristiani, the film pioneer who directed the first ever animated feature films.

Researched by  
GIANNALBERTO BENDAZZI

Written and directed by  
GABRIELE ZUCHELLI



# OUTLINE

Who made the first animated feature film?

Today virtually forgotten, film pioneer Quirino Cristiani discovered the craft of animation on his own, far from the experimental artists of Europe or the commercial constraints and glamour of Hollywood.

'El Apóstol' opened in a cinema in Buenos Aires in 1917. Such was its success that a second feature was commissioned the following year.

In 1931, Cristiani's genius and industry resulted in another breakthrough when he produced 'Peludópolis', the first animated feature film with sound.

Tragically, both of these ground breaking films were destroyed in a series of fires.

This documentary was sparked off by the recent discovery of a never before seen interview with Cristiani, filmed in Italy when he visited the land of his birth after living in Argentina for 81 years. It is the only interview on camera ever made with him.

Following the footprints of his life, this documentary chronicles the remarkable achievement of an animation master - including 2 shorts that were rediscovered during the making of this film: a satirical sketch from 1919 and an amazing "Making-of Peludópolis" from 1931.

This is the only thoroughly researched film to chart the life and work of Cristiani.

It's overdue and restores Cristiani to his rightful place as a major innovator in the development and art of animation.





## SYNOPSIS

The film begins in Quirino Cristiani's birthplace in Italy which he revisited as an old man in 1981.

In 1900, the 4-year old Quirino and his family leave Italy for Buenos Aires in Argentina.

Not more than a teenager, he begins to work for Federico Valle, an Italian film pioneer recently arrived in Argentina.

Encouraged by the ever-inventive Valle, Quirino makes his first animations. The success of his experiments inspire Valle to produce an all animated feature film.

In 1917 "El Apóstol" premieres in a prestigious cinema in Buenos Aires. This hugely successful satirical picture on Argentinian president Yrigoyen, marks the beginning of a number of politically inspired animated movies.

To make the movie, Cristiani develops a new cinematographic technique and he patents it.

In 1918 he leaves Valle and makes another film called "Sin dejar rastro" ("Without a trace") but its controversial subject will cause the film to be confiscated by the authorities.

During the Twenties, Cristiani opens his own studio and animates several short films.

He becomes a naturist, vegetarian and founds the first nudist colony in South America.

Meanwhile Valle's studio burns down and "El Apóstol" is lost forever.

In 1928 he starts preparing his most ambitious project: an animated feature film with sound.

Premiered in 1931, Peludópolis, another satire on the president Yrigoyen, was the result of a troubled process of story changes due to the dramatic 1930 military coup by the first Argentinian dictator, general Felix Uriburu.

Cristiani won't risk another animated satire again and for the rest of his career, he will produce short films and run his studio as a film laboratory.

In 1941, he is visited by Disney who offers him a job in Hollywood. He declines and not long after, he will enter retirement.

In 1958 and again in 1961 the 'Laboratorios Cristiani' burn down to the ground. Cristiani loses virtually all his work.

He goes to live near Cordoba (Argentina), in a beautiful and remote village. The world moves on and Cristiani is slowly forgotten. Nothing seems to have remained from his passing.

Filmed in Italy, Argentina and England, this documentary features interviews with various experts; as well as family and friends of Cristiani.

Today we have uncovered one of his animations from 1919 and a Making of Peludópolis, which have both miraculously survived.

As well as these shorts we hear Cristiani's story from the only remaining interview with him.

And we'll also see him at work as an old man when in 1983 he made his last animation. Cristiani died the year after.







# MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS

**Giannalberto Bendazzi.** Film historian. Specialized in the history of animation he is regarded as one of the most important researchers on the subject in the world. Amongst his numerous publications, *"Cartoons"* has become the standard reference on animation. Quirino Cristiani's importance was re-discovered by Giannalberto Bendazzi in the late Seventies.

**César Da Col.** Children's illustrator, humorist and comic artist, he publishes for different magazines. Founder of Banda Dibujada, is also advisor to the *Museum of Caricature "Severo Vaccaro"* in Buenos Aires.

**Marcelo Niño.** Historian and creator of the *Museo Itinerante of humor and illustration*. Expert of animation and satirical humor, is also advisor to the *Museum of Caricature "Severo Vaccaro"* in Buenos Aires.

**Raúl Manrupe.** Historian and film-maker, he is also the author of *"Short History of Animation in Argentina"* (2004) and *"The Dictionary of Argentinian Films" I* (1995) and *II* (2004).

**Guillermo Fernández Jurado.** Founder of the Cinemateca Argentina, he personally met Federico Valle in 1961. In the Sixties he was the first to compile a documentary on the history of Argentinean pioneering silent movies in the Sixties which also gained a the time a lot of international attention at the time.

**Alejandra Portela.** Film historian and co-author of Di Nubila's *"Federico Valle, When the cinema was an adventure"*, she also worked on and wrote together with Raúl Manrupe *"The Dictionary of Argentinian Films"*

**Héctor Cristiani.** The dearest grandson of Quirino Cristiani, he is the custodian of his legacy. He is hoping to be able to create the *Quirino Cristiani Foundation*.

**Mario Sabato.** Renowned Argentinean film director, as a child he adopted Federico Valle as the grandfather he never had. *"India Preville"* is his latest movie.

**Andrés Insaurrealde.** Film historian, he knew Cristiani and has been a researcher for the Museum of cinema in Buenos Aires for many years.

**Marta Nora Starkman.** Historian specialized in the phenomenon of immigration to Argentina. She regularly collaborates with the Museum of Immigrants in Buenos Aires.

**Eduardo Fernández.** Director of the Association of Inventors in Buenos Aires facilitated the rediscovery of the original Cristiani's patent.

**Jorge Surraco.** Documentary film-maker, university professor and Cristiani's friend, in 1983 he recorded on video the technique with which Cristiani filmed the first animated movies.

**Felix Luna.** Arguably the most prominent Argentinean historian since the '50s when he published his first best-seller *"Yrigoyen"*. He is also the editor of the magazine *Todo es Historia*.

**Daniel Vicino.** The most knowledgeable expert on antique film equipment in Argentina, he repairs, restore and collects in his studio *La Cueva* an incredible amount of collectibles.





Frame from *Peludópolis* showing Juan Pueblo confronting members of the junta



## TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Original Title:

**Quirino Cristiani - The mystery of the first animated movies**

*English narrator with English subtitles*

Spanish Title:

**Quirino Cristiani - El misterio de los primeros largometrajes animados**

*Spanish narrator with Spanish subtitles*

Italian Title:

**Quirino Cristiani - Il mistero dei primi lungometraggi animati**

*Italian narrator with Italian subtitles.*

Running time: 90 minutes

PAL / NTSC 16:9 HD1080p / Blue Ray / Digibeta

Colour / Stereo.

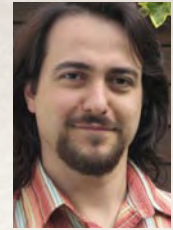
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Cristiani receiving an award in 1938 and with Walt Disney in 1941



## The DIRECTOR



**Gabriele Zucchelli** was born in 1972 in Italy.

After studying Arts he began to work as an animator in Milan.

In 1994 he moved to London where he worked as a character animator on TV specials (*The Tale of Mr. Tod*, *The Wind in the Willow*), musical featurettes with Paul Mc Cartney (*Tropic Island Hum*, *Tuesday*), movies (*The Magic Sword*, *The Tigger Movie*, *The Road to Eldorado*) and various commercials.

In 2000 he supervised the animation on two sequences of the Dreamworks feature film *Spirit, the stallion of the Cimarron* and in 2002 he completed two sequences for the animated opera *The Cunning Little Vixen* for the BBC.

After contributing to the character design for Tim Burton's *The Corpse Bride*, he worked as well as a CGI character animator and his credits so far include:

*Dinotopia*, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, *Alien vs Predator*, *Batman Returns*.

He works as a freelance animation director and he is currently the animation supervisor for the Universal's animated feature film *The Tale of Despereaux* due to be release in 2008.

In 2004 he completed his first independently produced short film *For a Tango* which has won several awards at festivals around the world.



## The CAMERAMAN and EDITOR

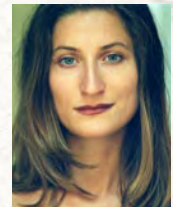
**Konrad Welz** has been in the professional video/audio business for almost 20 years.

After an engineering course at university he formed a hard-core music performance group in Apartheid South Africa, receiving official recognition in the form of police raids.

Between 1985 and 1992 he started experimenting with film and video and is recognized as a pioneer of video art in South Africa.

In 1997 he received a Masters degree in Media Art at the Royal Danish Art Academy in Copenhagen. His works have been shown at exhibitions and festivals around the world.

When not making art he works as video editor, lecturer and technical consultant.



## The ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

**Montserrat Roig de Puig** has been a professional actress since the age of 18.

Graduated from Barcelona's Institut del Teatre, she took part in several theatre plays in Spain, France and Italy.

In 1997, she moves to London to continue her studies in the Ecole Philippe Gaulier and starts acting professionally on the English stage (National Theatre Studio, The Gate, Young Vic, BAC, Hackney Empire, to mention a few).

For the past 4 years she's been working mainly for movies, TV series (*Wire in the Blood*, *Life begins*, *The Bill*, *BBC Learning Zone*), as well as radio voice overs, commercials and over 30 short films.

Amongst her film roles to date, she acted in Justin Chadwick's *The Other Boleyn Girl*.





## F.A.Q.

**Question: How did you discover Quirino Cristiani:**

**Gabriele Zucchelli:** In 2004, I completed a short film set in Argentina at the turn of the century which allowed me to travel to several festivals around the world. When I met Giannalberto Bendazzi at the Zagreb Animation Festival, I asked him about the earliest animated features and he talked to me about the research he had done on Quirino Cristiani some 25 years earlier. I read his book *Due volte l'Oceano* and nothing could stop me since...

**Q: Why have you made this documentary?**

**GZ:** There are a number of personal reasons why I find the subject very dear to me but more than anything else, it was the opportunity to jump into an adventure of discovery. And luckily we were able to fish out materials that were going to be lost or forgotten forever. I believe this film can be valuable to future generations as well.

**Q: Why do you think nobody made a documentary on this subject before?**

**GZ:** I really don't know... Despite having met lots of enthusiasts on this bit of history, Argentina had forgotten about Cristiani. The incredible cartoons and graphic legacy that the city of Buenos Aires should be proud of, is valued and protected only in one museum, which is one of the most inspiring I have ever seen, the "Severo Vaccaro".

**Q: Was it difficult to prepare the film from across the ocean?**

**GZ:** It took one year just to prepare the film. Most of this time was spent collecting images of the time from the General Archive in Buenos Aires, studying the history of the political events surrounding these obscure presidents and trying to contact as many people as possible who could, in one way or another, contribute to the understanding of Cristiani's story.

**Q: How long did it take to shoot the film?**

**GZ:** After my research I flew to Buenos Aires in June 2006. 3 weeks were spent planning the shoot, then Konrad Welz (camera-man) and Montserrat Roig de Puig (assistant director) came to start with me the filming of all the interviews and some locations.

After 3 weeks, we left Buenos Aires with 70 hours of footage. The editing took about one year.

**Q: How did you find the precious footage you have included in the documentary?**

**GZ:** The interview to Cristiani was organized by Giannalberto Bendazzi and the RTSI back in 1981.

The other shorts surfaced with the help of Marcelo Niño who knows virtually all the film and cartoon collectors in Buenos Aires. An old friend of Cristiani, Andre Bouchard, had kept these two films that Cristiani had donated him many years ago.

**Q: Were you hoping to rediscover his feature films?**

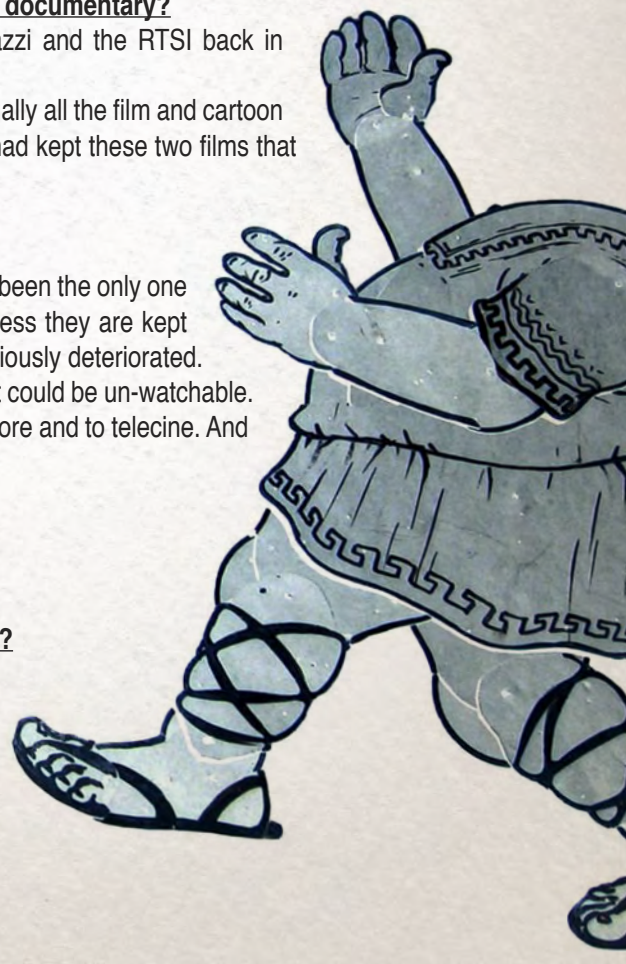
**GZ:** I tried all I could. Especially for *"Without a Trace"* which could have been the only one escaping the fires. Unfortunately nitrate films are very delicate and unless they are kept in perfect humidity and temperature conditions, they are sure to get seriously deteriorated. Even if one day somebody would dig out a mysterious reel of his films, it could be un-watchable. The 1919 short *"La Liga"* that we re-discovered was a nightmare to restore and to telecine. And it was a later copy on acetate, probably from the '30s or '40s.

**Q: How did you organize the production?**

**GZ:** With a lot of passion and very little money!

**Q: What impressed you the most of Quirino Cristiani's life and craft?**

**GZ:** The will to experiment. I'm still pondering of the nudist idea....







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