

Robert Abel & Associates

Co-founder of the multiple Clio-winning production firm, Robert Abel & Associates (RA&A), commercial director and producer Robert Abel (1937-2001) is noted as a central figure in the development of computer-generated visual effects. During their most prolific period, RA&A's unique design aesthetic and innovative graphics were seemingly ubiquitous across the electronic media landscape, featured in highly stylized television advertisements (7UP's "Bubbles" campaign) and the feature films and *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (1979) and *Tron* (1982).



A native of Cleveland, Ohio, Abel began his UCLA studies in 1958, obtaining dual bachelor degrees in the Department of Theater's film division and School of Design. Upon graduation, Abel worked under the tutelage of designer John Whitney, who pioneered the use of computer animation with the short film *Catalog* (1961) and the title sequence for *Vertigo* (1958) (in collaboration with Saul Bass). Abel would leave Whitney's employ in the mid-1960s to direct and produce documentary projects that included *Sophia: A Self Portrait* (1968), *Making of the President* (1969) and *Elvis on Tour* (1972).

In 1971 Abel formed a partnership with visual effects artist Con Pederson to launch the Hollywood-based production company Robert Abel & Associates, whose primary focus was the creative utilization of computer-aided photographic effects in television commercials and on-air television promotion. As the decade came to a close, RA&A would garner honors from the International Broadcasting Awards and Broadcast Promotion Association for their work with CBS ("Campaign '76"), Kawasaki ("The Ultimate Trip") and a series of iconic Levis Strauss Co. spots.

RA&A expanded operations in the early 1980s, creating imagery for The Jacksons' music video "Can You Feel It" (1980), *Tron* (1982), arcade game *Cube Quest* (1983), and the on-air interstitials for ABC's 1984 Summer Olympics coverage. Later that year, Abel and his team helmed the production of the Canned Food Information Council's "Brilliance" commercial -- also known as "the sexy robot" ad -- which aired during the 1985 Super Bowl and earned RA&A another one of their 33 Clio Awards.

Robert Abel would continue to guide his firm through a prolific period of creative output for clients including Atari, TRW and Apple. When RA&A ceased operations in 1987, Abel refocused his energies into interactive media with the formation of Synapse Technologies, producing educational programs (*Columbus: Discovery, Encounter and Beyond* and *Air Power: WWI*) and staying active in the field shortly before his death in 2001.

UCLA Film & Television Archive holds numerous examples of Abel and his firm's work (primarily advertisements and broadcast ephemera), including his animated student film *Freightyard Symphony* (1963).

For more information, or to arrange research viewing, please contact the UCLA Film & Television Archive Research and Study Center (ARSC) at 310.206.5388 by e-mail: arsc@cinema.ucla.edu or consult the Archive's online catalog for holdings: <http://cinema.library.ucla.edu>.

TELEVISION COMMERCIALS

Selected list – consult the UCLA Film & Television Archive Research and Study Center at arsc@cinema.ucla.edu for additional holdings. Please note that due to format and/or condition some holdings may take significant lead time to prepare for viewing.

7 Up. *Uncola 60* (1975)

57 of 65 commercials on 44-min. videocassette (37:21); TRT: 1 min.; ½ in.

(Inventory #: VA14035 T)

Producer, EUE/Screen Gems & Robert Abel; Agency, J. Walter Thompson, Chicago

Kawasaki Motors Corp. *The Ultimate Trip* (1977)

86 of 135 commercials on 53-min. videocassette. (18:16); TRT: 30s.; ½ in.

(Inventory #: VA14038 T)

Producer, Robert Abel Films, Los Angeles ; Agency, J. Walter Thompson, Chicago

Trans World Airlines. *Squadron* (1980)

1 DVD-R of 1; 4 ¾ in.; TRT: 30s. (Inventory #: DVD8495 T)

Producer, Robert Abel & Associates; Agency, Ogilvy & Mather, Inc., New York

Levi Strauss & Co. *Working Man* (1981)

83 of 93 commercials on 60-min. videocassette (51:09); TRT: 30s.; ½ in. (Inventory #: VA13459 T)

Producer, Robert Abel & Associates; Agency, Foote, Cone & Belding/Honig, San Francisco

Whirlpool Corporation. *Solid State Tomorrow* (1981)

48 of 62 commercials on 60-min. videocassette (37:56); TRT: 30s.; ½ in. (Inventory #: VA14643 T)

Producer, Robert Abel & Associates; Agency, D'Arcy-MacManus & Masius, Bloomfield Hills

7 Up. *Sun Beats Down* (1982)

114 of 163 commercials on one videocassette. TRT: 30s.; ½ in. (Inventory #: VA13542 T)

Producer, Robert Abel & Associates; Agency, Leo Burnett Co., Chicago

Pontiac Motor Division. *Wind Free* (1982)

115 of 163 commercials on one videocassette. TRT: 30s.; ½ in. (Inventory #: VA13542 T)

Producer, Robert Abel & Associates; Agency, D'Arcy-MacManus & Masius, Bloomfield Hills

U.S. Suzuki Motor Corp. *World of Riding* (1982)

119 of 163 commercials on one videocassette. TRT: 30s.; ½ in. (Inventory #: VA13542 T)

Producer, Robert Abel & Associates; Agency, Young & Rubicam LA/Dentsu, Los Angeles

7 Up. *Pac Man* (1982)

41 of 81 commercials on 60-minute videocassette (35:08); TRT: 1 min.; ½ in.

(Inventory #: VA14243 T)

Producer, Robert Abel & Associates

TRW. Corporate. *Exchanging Ideas* (1983)

101 of 146 commercials on one 26 min. videocassette. (25:11); TRT: 30s.; ½ in.

(Inventory #: VA3948 T)

Producer, Robert Abel & Associates; Agency, Wyse Advertising, Cleveland

TeleVideo Systems, Inc. *Skyscraper* (1983)

107 of 146 commercials on one 26 min. videocassette. TRT: 30s.; ½ in. (Inventory #: VA3948 T)

Producer, Robert Abel & Associates; Agency, Grey Advertising, San Francisco

TELEVISION COMMERCIALS (continued)

Chevrolet. Automobile. *Never Before* (1983)

111 of 146 commercials on one 26 min. videocassette. TRT: 30s.; ½ in. (Inventory #: VA3948 T)
Producer, Robert Abel & Associates; Agency, Campbell-Ewald, Warren, Michigan

Levi Strauss & Co. Apparel. *One Way* (1983)

112 of 146 commercials on one 26 min. videocassette. TRT: 30s.; ½ in. (Inventory #: VA3948 T)
Producer, Robert Abel & Associates; Agency, Foote, Cone & Belding, San Francisco

Levi Strauss & Co. *Engine* (1983)

113 of 146 commercials on one 26 min. videocassette. TRT: 30s.; ½ in. (Inventory #: VA3948 T)
Producer, Robert Abel & Associates; Agency, Foote, Cone & Belding, San Francisco

Apple Computer, Inc. *Factory* (1984)

On first of two 300 min. videocassettes with 422 other commercials (1:44:24); TRT: 30s.; ½ in.
(Inventory #: VA15806 - 15807 T)
Producer, Robert Abel & Associates; Agency, Chiat/Day Advertising, Los Angeles

Apple Computers. *Building* (1984)

On second of two 300 min. videocassettes with 422 other commercials (:30); TRT: 30s.; ½ in.
(Inventory #: VA15806 - 15807 T)
Producer, Robert Abel & Associates; Agency, Chiat/Day Advertising, Los Angeles

Benson and Hedges Cigarettes. (1) *Magic* (2) *Dreams* (3) *Power* (1985)

3 commercials on two-minute videocassette; TRT: 30 seconds each; ½ in.
(Inventory #: VA11489 T)
Producer, Robert Abel & Associates

Canned Food Information Council/NFPA. *Brilliance* (1985)

1 videoreel of 1 (Type C); TRT: 30s.; 1 in. (Inventory #: T42471)
Producer, Robert Abel & Associates; Agency, Ketchum Advertising, New York

Contel. *Country Club* (1986)

1 videoreel of 1 (Type C); TRT: 30s.; 1 in. (Inventory #: T42240)
Producer, Robert Abel & Associates

Hardee's. *Pound Puppies* (1986)

1 videoreel of 1 (Type C); TRT: 30s.; 1 in. (Inventory #: T42155)
Producer, Robert Abel & Associates

Panasonic. *Apartment* (1986)

1 videoreel of 1 (Type C); TRT: 30s.; 1 in. (Inventory #: T42242)
Producer, Robert Abel & Associates

Hawaiian Punch. *Chain Reaction* (1987)

1 videoreel of 1 (Type C); TRT: 30s.; 1 in. (Inventory #: T42148)
Producer, Robert Abel & Associates

Lemon Comet. Cleanser. *Peel and Splash* (1987)

1 videoreel of 1 (Type C); TRT: 30s.; 1 in. (Inventory #: T42162)
Producer, Robert Abel & Associates

BROADCAST EPHEMERA

(ON-AIR TELEVISION PROMOTION, LOGOS, TITLE SEQUENCES)

Selected list – consult the UCLA Film & Television Archive Research and Study Center at arsc@cinema.ucla.edu for additional holdings. Please note that due to format and/or condition some holdings may take significant lead time to prepare for viewing.

Robert Abel & Associates. Promotional film. (1978)

1 DVD-R of 1; 4 3/4 in. (Inventory #: DVD6510 T)

Logos: Television Francaise (TF1), ABC, Whirlpool, Kraft, Kodak, TWA, RCA, Crocker Bank, KCBS (Los Angeles), KLOS-Los Angeles, Paramount Television Service, Columbia Pictures, Gillette, Hilton, KBIG-Los Angeles

Bumper: CBS Campaign '76,

Robert Abel & Associates. Promotional video. Logo sample reel. (19--)

1 videocassette of 1; 3/4 in. (Inventory #: T40727)

Logos: Sunbeam, Arco, Freia, WIND Radio, KRON (San Francisco), Security Trust, Berger Paint

Robert Abel & Associates. Promotional film. (1980)

1 DVD-R of 1; 4 3/4 in. (Inventory #: DVD6512 T)

Logos: Opel, 7 Up, various ABC logos, WABC (New York)

Promo: ABC "Saturday Night Movie"

McDonnell Douglas. Logos in Space (1982)

1 videoreel of 1 (Type C) (30 sec.); 1 in. (Inventory #: T42451)

Promotional video. Robert Abel & Associates (1986) (Inventory #: DVD9169)

Logos: CFTO-TV Toronto, ABC "Together", KTLA (Los Angeles) "Movie Theatre", ABC News : 50 Years of Life, ESPN : "Friday and Saturday", CTV, HBO, WPIX, The Oprah Winfrey Show, KTVT (Dallas), ESPN Basketball & Football, Superstation WTBS, The Movie Channel "This Week",

Bumpers: CBS Election '84, CBS Election Night 1986, CBS Morning News, Cinemax "Video Nostalgia", Australia 9, Fox 5 (New York), CBC "Movie Presentation"

Title Sequences: *Amazing Stories* (television), *Hill Street Blues* (television), *Labyrinth* (film)

SELECTED SHORTS

Freightyard Symphony (c. 1958)

1 DVD-R of 1; 4 3/4 in.; TRT: 5:48 (Inventory #: DVD6936 M)

UCLA student film project - Motion Picture Division, Department of Theater Arts. Story and design, Robert Abel. Music, Victor Feldman.

Music videos. The Jacksons. "The Triumph" (1981)

1 DVD-R of 1; 4 3/4 in.; TRT: 10 min. (Inventory #: DVD7154 T)

Produced by Robert Abel, Michael Jackson. Directed by Michael Gibson. Written by Michael Jackson. CBS Records.

Robert Abel & Associates. Promotional video. (1985)

1 videocassette of 1; (15 min.): 1/2 in. (Inventory #: VA14083 T)

High Fidelity, 1982 short film (6:08); TRT: 1:45

COMPILED MOVING IMAGE COLLECTIONS

And Now, An Animated Word From Our Sponsor: 1948-1978 (1978)

1 videocassette of 1: ½ in. (Inventory #: VA816 T)

Produced by James Hall for the Los Angeles International Film Exposition

Collection of animated television commercials spanning thirty years of technical and aesthetic innovations. These advertisements range from traditional cel animation to prototypic computer generated imagery. Includes samples of Robert Abel & Associates television commercials and a logo montage.

Robert Abel & Associates: Television Commercial Compilation (198-)

1 DVD-R of 1; 4 ¾ in. (Inventory #: DVD9424 T)

Reel 1: Benson & Hedges. Gold. Power (Malaysia) -- AT&T Telephone -- Panasonic Quasar -- TRW. Amplifier -- TRW. Geothermal -- Magnavox. Odyssey. Videogame -- American Airlines -- Chevrolet. Never before -- K-BIG. Radio station. Nice & easy -- Zenith. TV. Breakthrough -- TransAmerica. Corporate. King Kong -- TransAmerica. 112 year old man -- Chrysler. Asked his engineer -- TRW. Changing pictures -- Kelloggs. Cereal. Apple Jacks -- Bendix. Corporate. People with Cliff Robertson -- Western Airlines -- Western Airlines -- 7Up. Pac Man -- Activision. Videogame -- Prudential-Bache. Financial. New York -- Pontiac. Wind free -- Pepsi. Vanishing bottle -- Southern Bell. You -- Southern Bell. Expanding -- ITT. Imagine cities -- Levis. Devil engine -- Ameritech. Communications. Regional Bells -- Airborne. Express delivery. Mountain -- Alaska tourism -- Hilton. Hotel. City lights -- Wang. Computer -- TRW. Corporate. Line -- 7-Up. Sun beats down -- Phillips. Car stereo (in French)

Reel 2: TRW. Corporate. Exchanging ideas -- Bayer. Meet your max -- Ameritech. Communications. Name introduction -- TRW. Corporate. Ripple -- RCA. Home entertainment. Lightning -- Bayer. Rotating box -- Levis. Calf roper -- Levis. Drive in 3 -- Hoover. Vacuum -- Activision. Video game. Dreamgame -- Herman Miller. Ergon chair. Extended promo ca. 10 min. -- Benson & Hedges. Gold. Carousel (Malaysia) -- Victoria Bank. Narrated by Burgess Meredith (ca. 10 min.) -- Alaska tourism. Jerry Cable Travel -- The black hole--trailer -- Advanced Energy Technology. Anti-friction drive (ca. 5 min.) -- Pan Am. Moon over Miami -- Collins & Aikman. Textiles -- Whirlpool. Appliances -- Universal Studios Tour. Special effects stage.

Robert Abel & Associates: Sizzle Reel (1984) - Inventory #: VA23398

"Digital productions, consisting of commercials and other materials."

Open-Live Aid/Mick Jagger Combo -- Entrepreneur--Rockwell -- Manage--Rockwell -- Balance--Rockwell -- Chevy Van in glass head -- DP/Album -- Coke cans--texture mapping -- WTBS -- Grand Canyon test (fractals) -- Bird in flight--style test -- Sony Walkman -- Cable Music Channel -- ABC/Australia -- Rockwell -- CBS peel -- Northwestern Bell -- Hunt test--Rockwell, Jupiter -- STP -- Chevy Astro -- Rockwell -- STP -- Vivitar -- Skull metamorphosis -- Chevrolet Astro -- Inverted plate test -- Rockwell--Black Fiero -- Two balls -Jupiter -- Glass ball--metamorphosis -- Hitachi--Jelly fish -- Hitachi--environment -- Mick Jagger video--Hard woman.

COMPILED MOVING IMAGE COLLECTIONS (continued)

Visual Pathfinders: Robert Abel's World (1985)

1 videodisc of 1 (laser optical CAV); Laserdisc. (Inventory #: VD2018 M)

"Sample videodisc of computer-animated commercials, commercial logos, and motion picture excerpts from Robert Abel & Associates, circa 1970s-1985."

SIDE ONE:

- | | | |
|----------------------------------|---|--|
| 1. Robert Abel introduction | 14. Kraft/Kodak/TWA/RCA/TF1 "Days of the Week" logo montage | 24. Whirlpool "Tomorrow" |
| 2. Whirlpool logo | 15. Hilton/Columbia Pictures logo montage | 25. TRW "Laser" |
| 3. 7 Up "Bubbles" | 16. <i>The Black Hole</i> (Disney) opening title | 26. Disney Epcot Center videodisc sequence |
| 4. Kawasaki "Ultimate Trip" | 17. Braun Micron II | 27. Atari "The Fly" |
| 5. 7 Up "McBubbles" | 18. AT&T "Green Giant" | 28. Skidmore, Owings & Merrill "Chicago" |
| 6. Berger Paint "Vinyl Silk" | 19. Braun 2000 | 29. Maxfli DDH "Energy" |
| 7. 7 Up "Uncola" | 20. AT&T "Energy Building" | 30. <i>Tron</i> (Disney) Flynn's ride sequence |
| 8. Renown Clothing | 21. Braun "Little Tiny Hair" | 31. SOM "Dade County Stadium" |
| 9. Chevy V-6 "Malibu" | 22. AT&T "Access" | 32. Panasonic "Glider" |
| 10. Zenith Systems III | 23. Philips "Car Radio" | |
| 11. Jovan "Man and Woman" | | |
| 12. Levi's "Brand Name" | | |
| 13. ABC Logo Series/KLOS 95.5 FM | | |

SIDE TWO:

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| 1. Levi's "Working Man" | 19. Global-TV | 35. CBS Election '80 |
| 2. Pepsi "Vanishing Bottle" | 20. Feather | 36. NBC Movie opening |
| 3. Pepsi "A Wedding" | 21. AT&T | 37. CBS Election '84 |
| 4. Mazda "Laser Battle" | 22. TRW | 38. ABC Olympic logo |
| 5. 7 Up "Pac Man" | 23. RCA | 39. Herman Miller "Equa: A Chair for People Who Can't Sit Still" |
| 6. Transamerica "King Kong" | 24. The Jacksons "Peacock" | 40. TRW "Changing Pictures" |
| 7. Panasonic "Hi-fi Sounds" | 25. Levi's "Hurdler" | 41. Wang "Puzzle" |
| 8. 7 Up "Sun Beats Down" | 26. Levi's "Engine" | 42. TRW "Exchanging Ideas" |
| 9. Jantzen Jeans; | 27. Levi's "Mirage - Pool" | 43. General Electric "Build a Phone" |
| 10. Sprint "High Tech" | 28. Levi's "One Way" | 44. TRW "Line" |
| 11. ITT "Growing Cities" | 29. Levi's Cords "Be There Pig" | 45. Hoover "Dimension" |
| 12. Chrysler "Laser" | 30. Levi's Hurdler Olympic logo | 46. TRW "Ripple" |
| 13. Pontiac "Wind Free" | 31. Levi's Hockey Olympic logo | 47. Canned Food Information Council "Brilliance" |
| 14. Corvette "Never Before" | 32. Levi's Gymnast Olympic logo | 48. RA&A photo gallery |
| 15. Global-TV | 33. CBS Election '76 | |
| 16. Yellow Pages | 34. HBO Movie opening | |
| 17. Amtrak | | |
| 18. Citicorp | | |

"The Making of Brilliance" (1985)

1 videocassette of 1 (6 min.); 3/4 in. (Inventory #: T42382)

Produced by Robert Abel & Associates and Ketchum Advertising

A behind-the-scenes look at the production of the *Brilliance* (aka Sexy Robot) Super Bowl commercial, sponsored by the Canned Food Information Council. This computer-animated spot was designed and produced by Robert Abel & Associates in conjunction with Ketchum Advertising.

"The Making of the Benson & Hedges Gold Spots" (1986)

1 videoreel of 1 (Type C) (ca. 10 min.); 1 in. (Inventory #: T42157)

Details the making of the Malaysian *Gold* advertisements, which were the first to utilize computer generated 3-D modeling.

SELECTED EXTERNAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

-for more information on these publications consult the Worldcat catalog at <http://www.worldcat.org> or UCLA Libraries-

- Ellen Wolff. "Remembering Robert Abel." *Millimeter* 10 Oct. 2001: 10. Print.
- Halas, John. *Graphics in Motion: From the Special Effects Film to Holographics*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1981.
- . *Masters of Animation*. Topsfield: Salem House, 1987.
- Hall, Jim. *Mighty Minutes - An Illustrated History of Television's Best Commercials*. New York: Harmony Books, 1984.
- Herdeg, Walter. *Film & Television Graphics 2*. Zürich: The Graphis Press, 1976.
- Jankel, Annabel and Rocky Morton. *Creative Computer Graphics*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984.
- Krasner, Jon. *Motion Graphic Design: Applied History and Aesthetics*. Amsterdam. Boston: Focal Press, 2008.
- Laughton, Roy. *TV Graphics*. London: Studio Vista, 1966.
- Lisberger, Steven, dir. *Tron: 20th Anniversary Collector's Edition*. United States: Walt Disney Video: Buena Vista Distribution, 2002.
- Mirman, Kenny. "Saying Goodbye to Robert Abel." *Animation World Network*. AWN.com, 31 Jan. 2002. Web. 2 Dec. 2009.
- Rickitt, Richard. *Special Effects: The History and Technique*. New York: Billboard Books, 2007.

For more information, or to arrange research viewing, please contact the Archive Research and Study Center (ARSC) at 310.206.5388 or by e-mail: arsc@cinema.ucla.edu.

Collection Profile researched and compiled by Tony Best as a graduate student project in UCLA's Moving Image Archive Studies (MIAS) program.