



# Exploratory Practice Animation Arts

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# Statement of Intent & How has it changed

## Original Statement of Intent

Within this film I intend to explore the theme of miscommunication, specifically language barriers, based on my own personal experience growing up in this country with English as my second language. The concept consists of a newborn canary who can't sing, attempting to assimilate into an unwelcoming flock, finding herself being misunderstood by the others. One canary finds common ground with our main character and proceeds to search for her after watching her hastily flee the group. While the newborn canary hides away, the searching canary sings on her quest, influencing the newborn until she notices herself in a duet with the finally found runaway.

This 2 minute short will be created with a young audience in mind serving as a relatable film that highlights how many children may feel. The message is designed to be applicable to a broad number of issues regarding miscommunication, such as being misunderstood due to language, general personality or humour, teaching that with time one can fit in and truly belong inside their flock. The tone I aim to create is one of hope with slight humour, transforming a sad tale into a radiant one.

Throughout this character-driven 2D animation I would like to explore quite a surreal style in reference to the backgrounds especially, as well as character design, despite the concept setting being quite simple. I aspire to portray the surrealist aspect of the film within colour as well as line work style, taking inspiration from works that motivate me such as *Midnight Gospel (Netflix)* and *Smiling Friends (Adult Swim)*, that appear very experimental.

The main programs I aim to use within this project include: Photoshop, ToonBoom and Premiere Pro. As character design is one of my strengths, I aim to trial a variety of approaches within the mix of characters. In order to improve on my character expression, performance and fluidity within movement, I will focus on developing those skills and will cater the scenes I include with that goal in mind, as well as dedicating time to research exaggerated gestures and animation techniques. During the pre-production stage I also plan to take a more experimental approach regarding compositions in the scenes throughout my storyboard, as I feel that's an area I could definitely benefit with refining. This would include busy action sequences, point-of-view cutaways inspired by comic panels, in addition to simple arrangements. Further down the line during the production process I would like to collaborate with another student to create the sound. In addition to foley sound effects and slight background music that'll correspond to the mood, I'll include bird noises to act as dialogue between the characters. Finally, during the post-production stage I aim to edit and compile the film solo too.

## Changes Made

Whilst pursuing this project, I began to realise the true length of the film I wanted to create and decided to cut down the story in order for it to be just under a minute. As I didn't feel I could tell this story within this time frame effectively, I took the approach of making a trailer of this same concept.

Throughout this process I also geared the film to tell a tale in a more traditional setting, when I started researching canaries' habitat. Due to the variety of interesting trees they live in, such as 'Dragon Trees', I took inspiration from those natural structures instead of creating surrealistic new plants.



# Moodboard / Inspiration

## Existing Interpretations of Birds

Rio, 2011



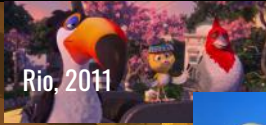
Rio, 2011



Rio, 2011



Rio, 2011



Chicken Little, 2005



The Aristocats, 1970



Looney Tunes



For the Birds, 2000



Tom and Jerry



The Ugly Duckling and Me, 2006

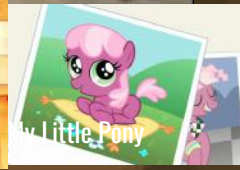


## Existing approaches to young characters geared to a young audience

Bluey



Help, I'm a fish!, 2000



In order to have a greater understanding of which direction to head in, in terms of setting and character designs I began researching the variety of ways birds have been captured on screen in regards to their looks, behaviours and movements. As the main characters within my film include a baby and a child I also thought it to be beneficial to see how children are generally interpreted too.

## Habitat References

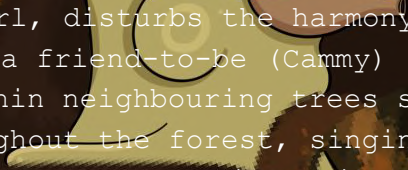


# Logline & Synopsis

## Logline

When an off-key hatchling becomes ostracized by the Bird Kingdom, a determined friend-to-be helps him learn how to fit in through the power of bird song.

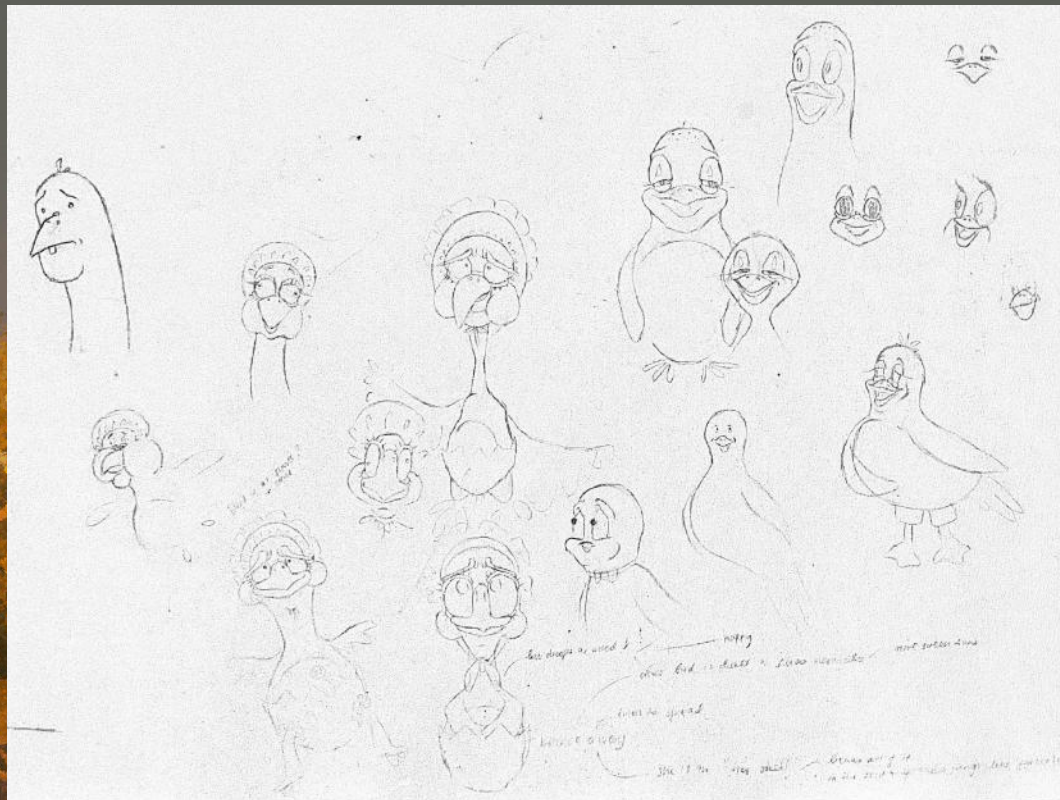
## Synopsis



Offkey disruptive newborn canary, Carl, disturbs the harmony of the Bird Kingdom choir. With no hope of fitting in, he runs away when a friend-to-be (Cammy) follows in hopes of teaching the baby to sing. Carl, embarrassed, hides within neighbouring trees so that he could be left alone, whilst Cammy flies after him searching throughout the forest, singing on her way. Through this exposure, Carl begins to recognise the bird song, gradually improving. Quickly, however, day becomes night and Cammy is left distraught as the baby is nowhere to be found, despite her endless calling for him. Giving up, Cammy sits on a branch watching the sunset when she hears a loud feathery voice and some cracks behind her, revealing Carl breaking his shell by his volume as he hits his first on-key note proudly. As he approaches her, she hands him back one of the feathers he dropped from his last performance within the choir earlier that day and they watch the sunset together in harmony.



# Character Design Progression 1/3



As I aimed to branch out of my typical style in terms of character design I decided to try designing a range of birds so that I could create a new style to work with. This page shows the various failing experimental stages within the pre-production stage.

# Character Design Progression 2/3 - Final Turnarounds and Lineup

After experimenting with a range of styles, some too basic and some too unique, I started from scratch thinking about how I could create a character that related to myself as the film is based on my own experiences as a child with Russian having been my first language in England. As I wanted the main character to appear very restricted throughout the beginning of its journey finding it's voice, I decided to keep him within a shell, resembling a Matroska (a Russian Doll) while wearing a bonnet also resembling a Russian Headdress. Even though the root of these elements on the character aren't obvious to the viewer, I liked the idea of creating a character that had some culture within.

Even though I wanted my characters to feel unique and personal in some ways, I also aimed for them to have a modern contemporary feel, by studying similarities within young characters on television today, such as large and wondrous eyes.

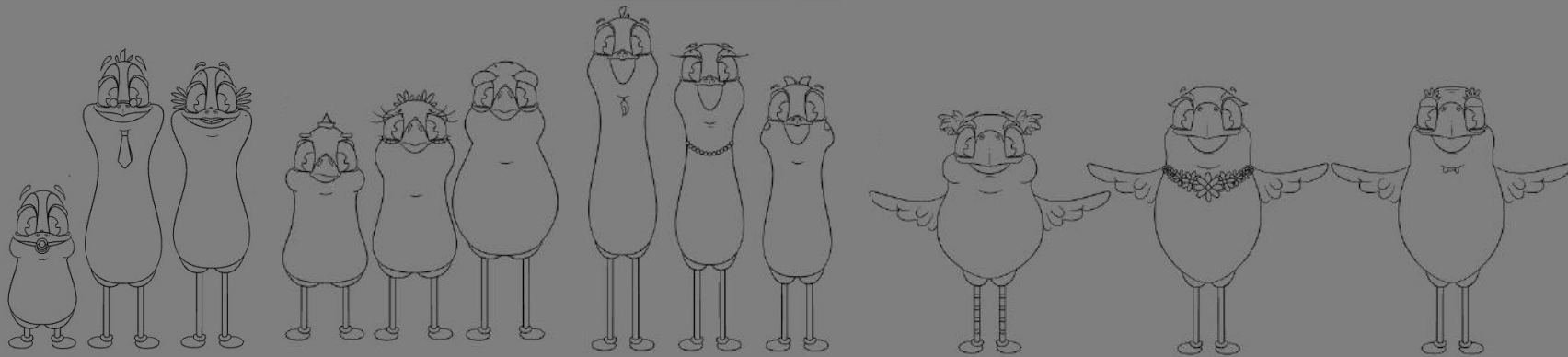


## Carl & Gammy





# Character Design Progression 3/3 - Background Character Lineups



Family 1

Family 2

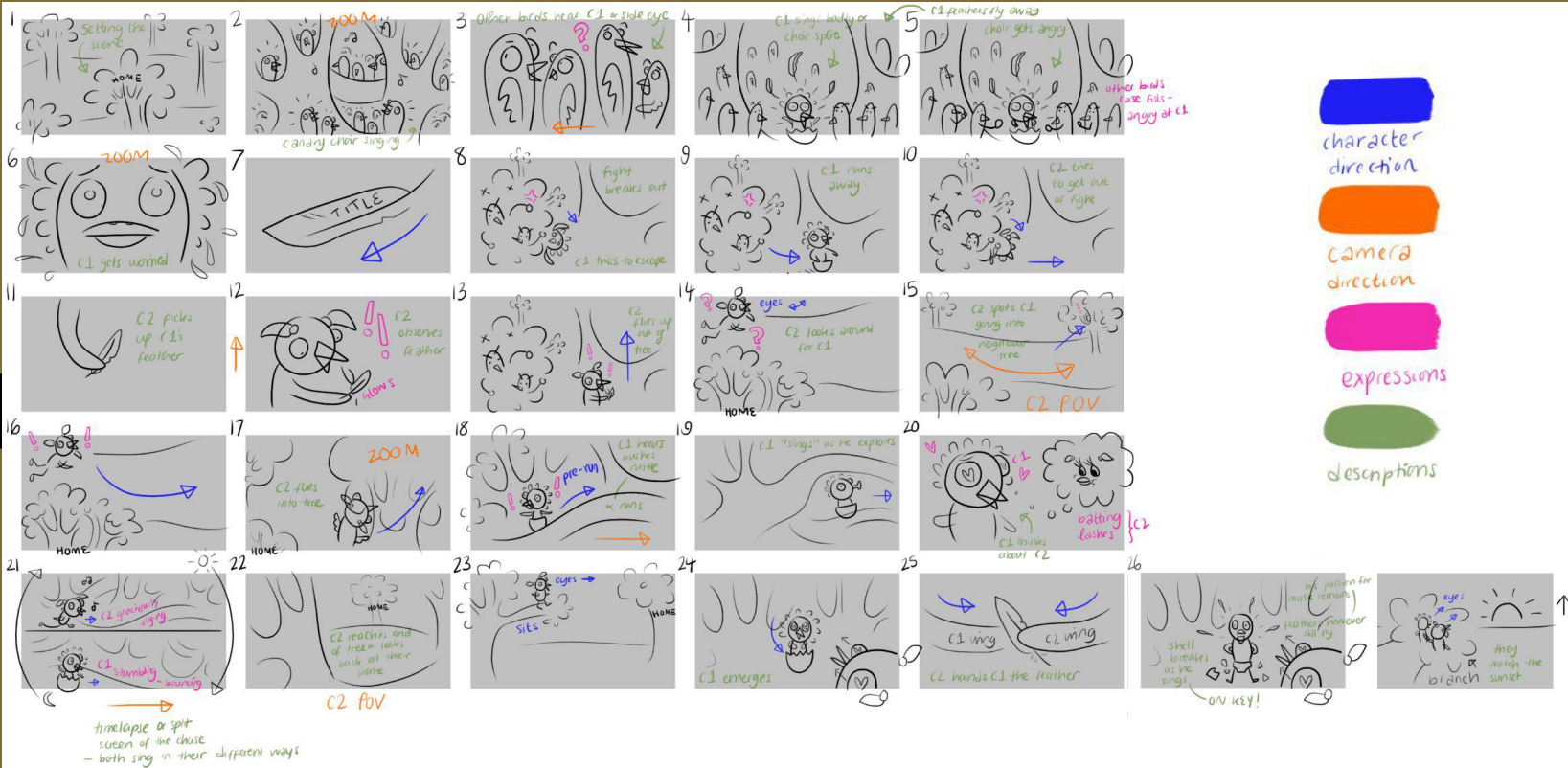
Family 3

Family of Character 2

As within my statement of intent I aimed to develop my character design skills, I decided to make unique familial characters within the choir that had different facial and body structures that could still feel similar enough to be natural on screen together. During this process I would at times wander too far into a different style that didn't work in harmony with the others as seen on the right.

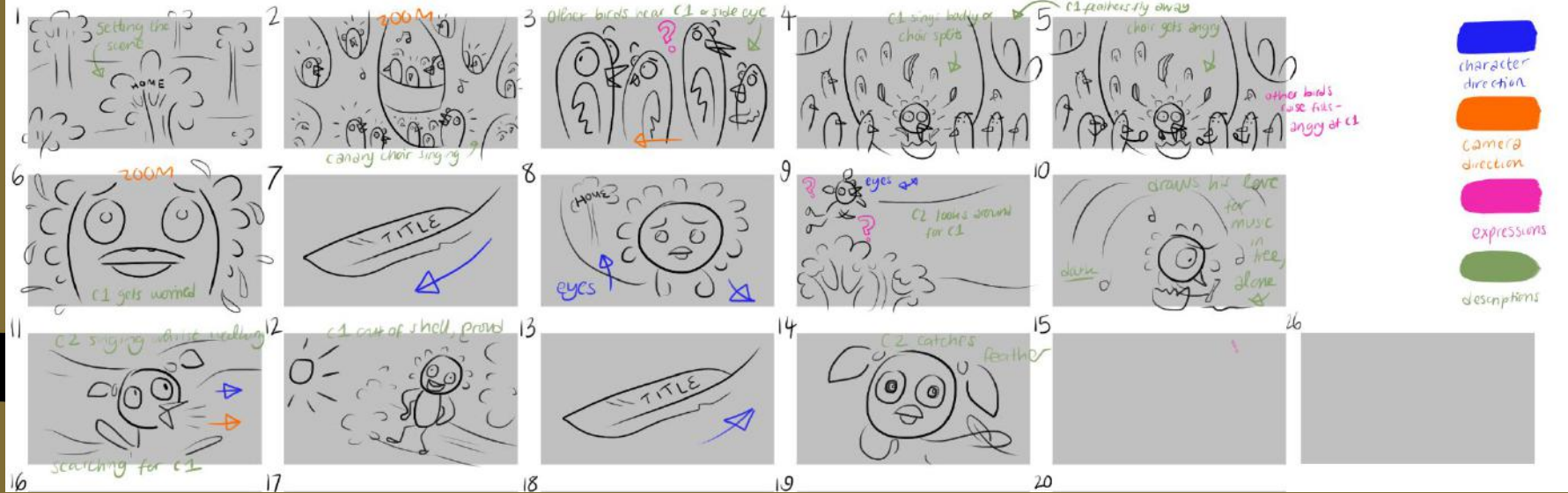


# Storyboard Progression 1/2



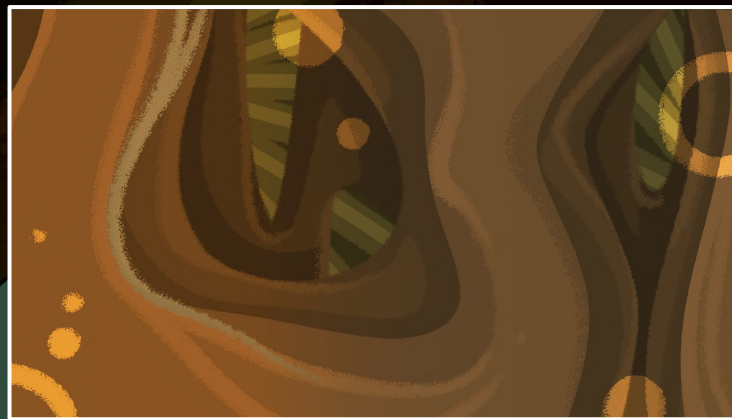
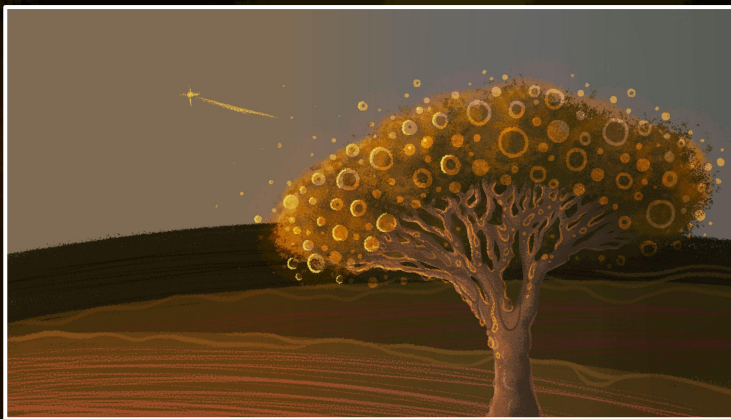


# Storyboard Progression 2/2



As during this project I slightly changed my idea for the final outcome to be a trailer instead of a full film, as I had previously been too ambitious, when storyboarding again I tried to pick shots I felt represented the different stages of the full plot well, that still felt somewhat ambiguous. This includes scenes such as when the main character, Carl the Canary, is sat alone carving into wood, showing his loneliness or him looking away from his home-tree and him standing without his shell, leaving a cliffhanger whilst implying to the viewer there's an adventure ahead.

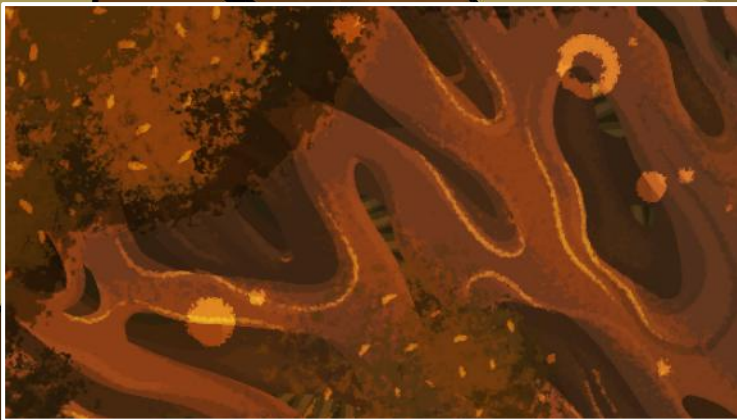
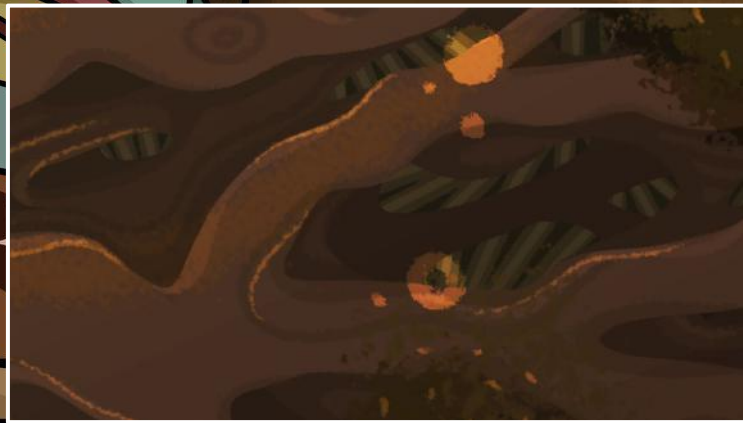
# Backgrounds



# Backgrounds



As originally I wanted to create a surreal world but then changed the setting to be more traditional and realistic, I still aimed to include a sense of fantasy and magic within this world through adding golden lights and golden carvings within the canaries' home-tree. I also felt that it could make the background feel more dynamic as I'd be able to experiment with the lighting aspect of these background designs within certain scenes such as where Carl sings and the lights flicker from the volume.

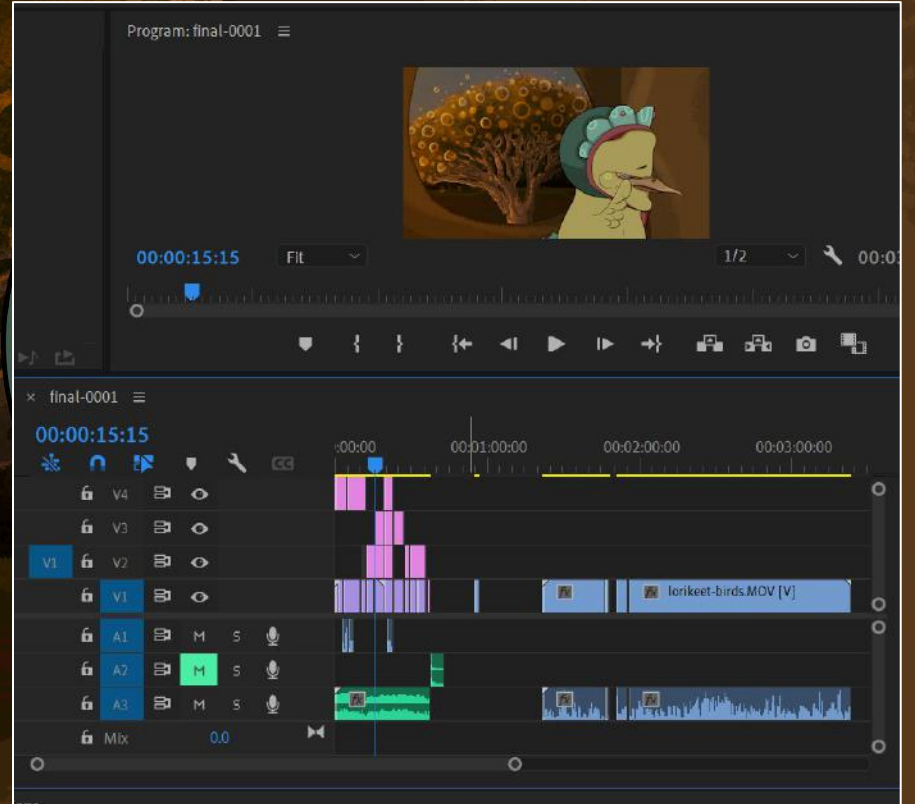




# Collaborated Sound

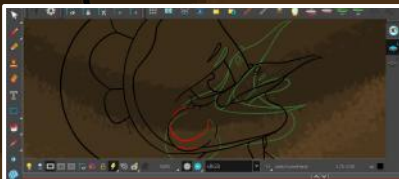


For this film, I collaborated with Omar in order to create the sound for the film, him working on the music and me on the sound effects. As Omar was in charge of the serene harmonious sound of the bird choir, in order to achieve the squawking noises Carl made I recorded birds I have at home in the above pictures.



# Reflective Progress Screenshots

## Animation Stage: Motion Paths / Parent Pegs VS Frame by Frame



Within the animation stage as I planned on the main character to spew feathers when singing initially to add a little chaos to the scene, I applied Parent Pegs, which I hadn't used before within ToonBoom, in order to create a seamless motion path that could easily follow arcs I had marked.

## Editing Stage: Titles & Extra Effects



For the introductory title to maintain within the light-hearted childlike spirit of the film, I created liquified bubbles containing the title.



In order to add extra depth and interest to scenes, within Premiere Pro I developed the colours further as well as adding extra detailed effects such as flashing lights



# Animatic & Animated Product

Animatic Link

<https://youtu.be/Byrrf2zWAlk>

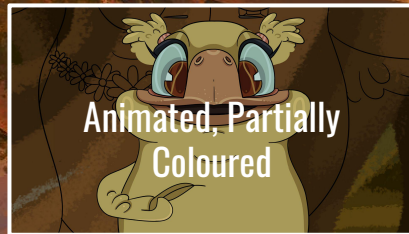
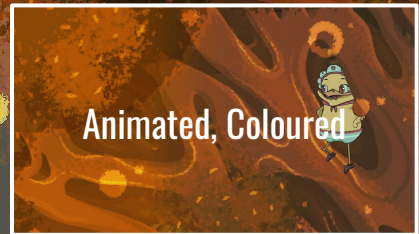
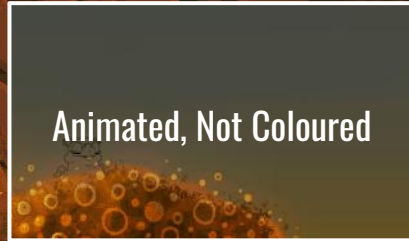
Animation Link - Work in Progress



[https://youtu.be/XbID\\_IVBook](https://youtu.be/XbID_IVBook)



# Continuation



Continuing on, I aim to finish the scenes which contain the background choir characters as those aren't fully coloured.

# Critical Appraisal

Initially, when given this brief of making a personal film, I began thinking of certain issues that related to myself that I'd be able to visualise in a light-hearted format. As a child, I struggled to communicate with other children as my first language was Russian, causing me to isolate myself at that young age until I picked up English. This thought caused me to delve into a process of creating characters that perhaps may have isolated themselves for certain reasons. As canaries are known for singing I started wondering how a canary may feel not being able to sing themselves. Through this, the storyline became a tale describing an off-key disruptive canary's journey of learning birdsong, through running away from his choir in the trees from embarrassment, when a friend-to-be follows, sure she can teach him birdsong.

Once the storyline was created I began studying how babies and birds have been portrayed in children's entertainment, seeing what stylistic patterns there are, experimenting with a variety of character designs. As I aimed to explore the characters' design in depth I tried many different styles that I hadn't tried before to see what worked, finally narrowing in on a more charming and feminine style. In order to bring in my Russian heritage subtly into the design I made the main character, Carl, shaped like a Russian Doll wearing a Russian Headdress, as he is a hatchling stuck in his shell, metaphorically and physically. As I used a relatively feminine style for these characters I tried not to make the friend-to-be character, Cammy, overly feminine as she is a child canary but also to avoid having too stereotypical of a design.

After finishing visualising the main characters, I storyboarded the extensive idea I had for this film which upon reflection was a bit too ambitious. After receiving feedback I realised how long this film would realistically be in order to not make it too rushed and began narrowing down the storyboard to include key shots. I was cautious about this because I have a tendency at times to underestimate how long shots can take to settle in for the viewer, causing some past works to be too rushed. This gave me the idea to make a trailer as this meant I could include key out-of-context moments that get the viewer questioning. Within this storyboarding stage, I tried to use some different compositions I hadn't used before in order to be a little more experimental.

As timing was something I've struggled with, during the animatic stage I became more attentive to how long certain things may need to be on screen. Even though I'd say I've improved in that aspect, by including less shots but making them last longer, I do feel some scenes upon reflection come in and out of frame too fast. Within this stage, I also had to design unique yet blendable background characters which I had never done before. Through practicing staying within a chosen style that's unnatural to myself in this way, I think I may have improved within designing characters. Even though I think these characters were more dynamic and expressive than my usual characters, which is an improvement, I plan on creating characters with greater fluidity and even more exaggerated expressions as that's something I tried to focus on within this brief.

In addition to creating greater expressions within my characters, in my statement of intent I aimed to put more time into developing stronger backgrounds. This is an objective I set myself which I think I have improved on, however I think I could have experimented even more with composition using these backgrounds.

As sound was an important aspect of my film due to the plot, I worked with Omar to express my creative vision as sound isn't generally my strongsuit. However, for the scenes of Carl singing I used my own recordings of my birds from home and embedded them when needed. Through collaborating with Omar it helped me gain a greater understanding how the film looks from face value which caused me to realise it was a little confusing due to the scenes in my film not being in a linear sequence. This caused me to try to develop my visual language more and manage what I had with editing to make this film trailer easier to understand and digest.

Once I reached the inbetweening stage I started changing the timing of the shots again due some feedback I'd received. During this stage I experimented with using Parent Pegs and motion paths in order to get a smoother effect when the feathers would fall off Carl.

In the beginning I found this tool quite difficult to use but with time I started to understand it more. Looking back at the film now, I think some scenes would've benefitted with a greater number of feathers falling off in order to add a greater sense of chaos and confusion as intended. In addition to this, I wish I had added some of the details from the character designs, such as the flushed cheeks, into the final animation as I think that would've added more feeling to the characters.

In conclusion, through working through this brief and listening to feedback I think I've learned more about character design, background design and animating in general, improving. However, I do think some of my shots weren't as experimental as I would've liked so on the next project I plan to prioritise visual interest in composition.