

# Frozen Producer Wins an Oscar

Peter Del Vecho (CFA'80) gets Best Animated Film nod

ONE REASON *Frozen* is different from Disney films of yore is that the storied princess doesn't need to be rescued by a handsome prince. For that you can thank the film's producer, Peter Del Vecho (CFA'80), who guided *Frozen*'s transformation from a traditional princess tale to a quirky, touching story about the relationship between two sisters.

The film, released in November 2013, has grossed more than \$1 billion at the box office worldwide—surpassing the studio's blockbuster *The Lion King* in ticket sales—and it won this year's Oscars for Best Animated Film and for Best Original Song. It earned Del Vecho, who has been a producer and animator for 30 years, the Outstanding Producer of Animated Theatrical Motion Pictures honor at the Producers' Guild Awards ceremony in January. There are even plans to turn the movie into a Broadway musical, à la *The Lion King*.

"The response to this film is overwhelming and quite humbling to us," says Del Vecho.

A Quincy, Mass., native, Del Vecho studied theater production at BU and went on to work in theater for 15 years,

most of them at Minneapolis' famed Guthrie Theater. It was there, he says, that he learned the importance of story development and visual storytelling. Both of those skills made him attractive to Disney Animation, which at the time was turning out hits such as *The Lion King* and *Beauty and the Beast*. The studio approached him in 1995 with a job offer Del Vecho couldn't refuse.

"I think it was because they found great success in the past with directors and producers who had come from a theater background," Del Vecho says. "At the time, the studio was being run by two theater veterans—Thomas Schumacher and Peter Schneider—and so they valued that sort of work."

He began in production management, developing films that include 2002's *Treasure Planet* and 2005's *Chicken Little*, and later, as a producer for the studio, he worked on 2009's *The Princess and the Frog* and 2011's *Winnie the Pooh*.

Del Vecho says his job is to understand the film the director is trying to make, and then help get that film made. He is involved from the beginning, hiring writers and artists, overseeing scripts and storyboards, and dealing with schedules and budgets. The goal, he says, is to "protect the creative from the business side of what we're doing, so they can do what they do best and get their artistic vision up on the screen."

The idea for turning Hans Christian Andersen's story *The Snow Queen* into an animated film had been kicking around the studio for decades. The project was attempted several times, but difficulty with the wicked

Snow Queen character was a stumbling block.

It wasn't until the success of another animated film about an atypical princess, 2010's *Tangled*, that the studio decided to again try developing *The Snow Queen*, opting this time for a 3-D treatment.

"Originally we portrayed Elsa, the Snow Queen, as a true villain," Del Vecho says. "But that evolved over time, because we weren't connecting with her in a way that we could understand what she was doing. We found making her a sister and making her driven through fear made her relatable. So the theme of our movie is 'love versus fear.'"

The film has Anna (Kristen Bell) embarking on an epic quest to save her estranged sister, Elsa (Idina Menzel), whose icy powers have trapped their kingdom in eternal winter. Anna is aided in her efforts by a thrill-seeking mountain man (Jonathan Groff), his reindeer, and a bucktoothed snowman (Josh Gad).

"From the very beginning, the director had the bold idea to tell the story about a different kind of love, not necessarily romantic love," Del Vecho says. "Was there a way to tell a classic story in a new, fresh way? It was something that resonated with us as filmmakers, and we hoped it would resonate with audiences as well."

Amy Laskowski



COURTESY OF PETER DEL VECHO



Del Vecho believes *Frozen* tells a classic story in a new and fresh way.

COURTESY OF DISNEY



Peter Del Vecho worked in theater for 15 years before joining Disney Animation.