

Rough transcript of Anime World Order's interview with Christine Auten at Otakon 2006

Note: since we do not know all of the names of the other people present, any questions not asked by either Daryl Surat or Gerald Rathkolb will be attributed to "Non-AWO Interviewer." Also, this transcript is not completely accurate; to hear the audio of this, please visit the AWO website.

Christine Auten: Hello! I'm Christine Auten here at Otakon 2006.

Daryl Surat: All right, we'll start with the standard, basic interview question: all right, how did you, Christine Auten, get started in the wonderful and exciting, glamorous world of anime voice acting?

Christine: Oh my goodness, well you'd think I could just copy and paste the answer and [laughs] I started back in the Dark Ages before dubbing was popular, before anyone ever really cared about dubbing back in 1998. I was an actor and I'd already done a couple of movies, commercials, theater—I had a degree in theater—done corporate voiceover for years already. I was in a theater group with some people who were doing anime. I didn't know what anime was, never heard of it. Amanda Winn and Brett Weaver—some people might know who they are—they told me about it. I sent in a voice tape, a voice demo, to ADV Films and...didn't hear anything! At all! So I sent in another one about a year later, and then eventually Matt Greenfield called me and asked me to come in and do a couple small lines. He found my demo tape at the bottom of a file cabinet actually, and he came in, asked me to come in and do a part in Compiler (White Compiler), then I auditioned for Bubblegum Crisis and got the part of Priss. And I've been doing it ever since.

Gerald Rathkolb: How was it different doing voice acting as opposed to theatrical work?

Christine Auten: It's a wonderful thing that we call in the industry ADR, which is [automatic] dialogue replacement. That's a skill that's extremely difficult to master. That's to make the flaps match the words, and that's actually very, very difficult to do. You have so many elements to keep in mind at the same time. So you've got your acting, you want to do that well. You've got sight reading, you want to do that well. You've got microphone placement, you want to be good with the mic, and there is a skill to that so that you don't pop your P's, you don't wander off mic, they're very sensitive, so you have to be good with the mic. At the same time, you've got your video, your script, your mic, you've got to be able to match them all together at once. So that was extremely challenging, and it took me all of Bubblegum Crisis to learn it. And that was like, a year. [laughs] So yeah, it's really hard, and it's extremely different and challenging from theater and just normal voice acting.

Non-AWO Interviewer: Did you find that having a background in theater helped with your voice acting?

Christine Auten: Absolutely. In fact, it wasn't until very recently, like within the last

year or two, that we had voice actors coming through that weren't previously actors. Before then, the talent was all pulled from the acting community. Professionals who did this for a living, and this is what we do, we don't just do anime, so yeah, everybody that I know doing it (pretty much everybody) came through theater, film, commercials. We all have agents that get us work, and that's pretty standard.

Non-AWO Interviewer: What do you think of the current problems with attempting to get digital rights and also reproduction rights for the various anime?

Christine Auten: Well actually there was kind of a big deal, when [the] Internet got to be such an option for advertising. The actor's union, SAG (Screen Actor's Guild) actually went on strike to protest unlimited usage of actor's voices and images on the Internet without any sort of contract or approval from us because it just got so widespread. But are you talking about fandubs, or...?

Non-AWO Interviewer: Yeah, the fandubs, the fansubs, things like that. Do you think that at all cuts into your personal work?

Christine Auten: I do, and I absolutely do not approve of distributing unlicensed material. These people worked on it, they worked very hard on it, it's their living, and they need it. I think [if] fans get to a professional point where they're wanting to sell their own work, they'll see the appreciation of people wanting to pay for it.

Daryl Surat: What do you think is the most essential element necessary for creating a good American localization of a Japanese cartoon as far as the dubbing side is concerned?

Christine Auten: Yeah, I have actually strong opinions on this one! I do believe that the Japanese cultural references can be brought into a Western viewpoint faithfully and accurately...with a bridge in between. There are certain Japanese cultural references that just aren't going to...like, there are some alliterations that they like to use, these visual allusions they like to use, that just don't translate. And I've done some writing, and you try. Man, you REALLY try, and it's very difficult to translate. And then you've got the added challenge of having to fit the flaps, which the fans REALLY want it to do now. They're not going to let slide a bad, mismatched dub. So, it's a real challenge but I think that it's worth the challenge to try to faithfully represent what's happening in the Japanese script as accurately as possible. There's also a kind of a funny thing that happens: Japanese repeat names—character names—when they talk to each other over and over and over again, and I think to a Western ear that might start to sound a little bit repetitive and redundant. So there are things that we can change to make it a little more accessible to Western ears, but at the same time I do believe that it needs to keep intact as much as possible.

Daryl Surat: That's an interesting thought you had, because one of your projects is actually rather infamous: Ghost Stories...

Christine Auten: Oh yeah!

Daryl Surat: ...which does not seem to adhere to ANY of those guidelines which you put forth. Could you tell us about that?

Christine Auten: Ghost Stories is a very special section of anime because the creators, the people who made Ghost Stories, told us to change it. It was their choice. They said "do whatever you want with it, just so it sells." So, that was permission given by the licensors. In fact, not just permission, it was "here this is, see what you can do with it." So, it was one of those special projects where they wanted it to sell. They wanted to do anything possible to make it sell to Western audiences, and they said "the crazier, the better." So, yes, it was actually given permission to do that so, that's a special case. Plus it was a D-title. In Japan it didn't sell at all. No one cared about it. They just wanted money, I think. They just wanted it to sell! [laughs]

Non-AWO Interviewer: Do you think that Japanese and American animation runs in sync with each other? Should the same episodes that appear in Japan also appear in America as well?

Christine Auten: You mean, simultaneously?

Non-AWO Interviewer: No, as in there should be no cut episodes. If there's a filler episode in Japan, there should be one in America as well?

Christine Auten: I think so! I mean, wouldn't that be fun? I mean, to have all of it? I think so. I think if it's part of the series it should be part...but again, that has to do with licensing and what they license. But yeah, I think if it's done in the Japanese it should be done here too. Especially if you're a fan of the show, you'd probably think so.

Non-AWO Interviewer: Have you ever had good work ruined by a bad edit or a bad editor?

Christine Auten: [laughs] You know what? In movies, in acting that I've done in movies, absolutely. But I tell you, the engineers that we work with over at AD V and Funimation are...gods. If anything, they save...everything. [laughs] There's a line that's three flaps over? Shrink it! It's because of them that dubbing has gotten so good. It's because of our engineers. They are just incredible. They are just absolutely incredible.

Daryl Surat: I just want to ask about a particular project that you worked on: Aura Battler Dunbine. The dub was handled by Carl Macek, who is infamous among anime fandom ever since Robotech and Streamline Pictures. How was Carl's approach to anime dubbing, how did that differ from say, the other ADR directors you've worked with in the past?

Christine Auten: Carl...is old-school. Very old-school. And actually, we record at ADV

a little differently than everybody else does. You've heard of the infamous beeps. What that is is they cue in exactly when the vocal's supposed to start. Then they back up a segmented time, give you three beeps. You would get beep, beep, beep, and on what would be the fourth, you start. At ADV we don't do that. We do visual. We watch it. You've been doing it as long as people like me and Monica [Rial] have, you know when it's about to start. You're not running over or behind, and it can be moved even if you are. Carl, even though he was recording at ADV, still used the beeps. But they use them at Funimation too so either way works just as well, and he just happened to use the beep way. His scripts were...in a different format. He was really into the...technical aspects of word sounds more than the acting aspects of the characters. I think I can...yeah, he was REALLY meticulous about synching and how it fit with the mouth flaps. He was very meticulous about that. That's pretty much the only difference. And we called him Uncle Carl.

Daryl Surat: We call him Uncle Carl as well.

Christine Auten: [laughs] And I worked with him for a scratch track of Lady Death. I've done a lot of stuff with Carl, so I've worked with him a lot.

Non-AWO Interviewer: One of your not exactly traditional anime roles, Barbara Fucon from The Fuccons: I was wondering how did you prepare for that particular role instead of a traditional anime like you were in Lady Death? [Daryl whispers "damn her!" under his breath which the mic picks up, probably for stealing his question but perhaps due to his objection of her classification of Lady Death and Oh! Mikey/The Fuccons as "anime"]

Christine Auten: You know, it's funny because those, like the two you mentioned, Lady Death and The Fuccon Family, are two parts that I actually HAD a chance to prepare for. Most of the time you get cast in something, unless you've given the title and the character and you can do your own research, you know nothing. You don't know anything about it. You don't see scripts, you don't see video, you don't see anything unless you can look it up yourself, and a lot of times you can't. But for Fuccon Family and for Lady Death I had well advanced notice. I'd seen most of Fuccon Family before I ever auditioned for it...and during the audition for it. The weird part was that we had a room full of Japanese men, the director and the engineer, and then the three of us actors who were doing the parents and the son, all in three different booths in the same studio. And I was the first one to record anything on Fuccon Family. We had no beeps, no soundtrack, no anything. I just had a script on a piece of paper and a video saying "okay, every time you see your mannequin, talk." [laughing] And that was pretty much it! And it goes SO fast, it was like "wha...?!" you know? So the first time through you're "wait, wait, wait, oh no there she, oh, oh gosh, oh, where is she, uh." But we did one person at a time. We were all three there and listening on our headphones in the booths, but we didn't do it interactive. We recorded all of me, and then all of Rob Mungle, and then all of Kira [Vincent-Davis], and it was really kind of weird but because there's no flaps to match you could just go crazy! And they would re-edit the video if we went a little long or something, so we didn't really even have to worry about matching that. So you could just go wild and do

anything you wanted. So yeah, that was fun. That was a lot of fun.

Daryl Surat: You mentioned you also were able to do preparation work prior to recording for Lady Death.

Christine Auten: Yeah.

Daryl Surat: Could you tell us about that?

Christine Auten: Actually, about a year before it was ever recorded, we did a scratch track, which is...they just had about four actors sit around in a circle with microphones—more Japanese-style I guess—and record. I did all the female parts and a couple men split up all the male parts, and what we did is just read through the entire script, acted it out, having never seen it before by the way or anything. We got some character pictures and some sketches to see what our characters looked like. We recorded the entire script, and then they took that script and that's what they animated to. They took that recording and animated to that recording. Then, about a year later, they had auditions again to actually do the real voices for it. And I guess about 40 or 50 people auditioned for Lady Death, and Andy, who was directing the project, he said he'd just gotten so used to hearing my voice for the scratch track that when I auditioned he just couldn't hear anyone else doing it, so whether my audition was good or not, I don't know. But they'd just gotten so used to hearing me. But when I got up in the audition it was like "I already know all these lines. I've already seen it! I've already done it!" So, it was...I had already knew everything there was to know about it, so I had a big advantage over everyone else already auditioning for it.

Non-AWO Interviewer: With the exception of Bubblegum Crisis, which was your first, what would you say was your most difficult job that you've had to do?

Christine Auten: Bubblegum! Because it was the first! And the learning curve was like, Mount Everest! And it was so hard, and there was the singing; the songs weren't translated in any sing-able form so me and the engineer had to rewrite them to actually fit because the translations for some reason were just massively long. And nothing fit into the music at all so we had to rewrite everything. Yeah, it was hard. That was, to date, the hardest I think I've ever had to do. Now, I'd love to go back and redo it because I'm so much better at it now than...eh, whatever. [laughs]

Gerald Rathkolb: Saint Seiya was kind of an unusual project in America in that it was actually dubbed once by one company for television and then it was dubbed again by you guys. I was wondering if you ever actually got to see that television dub, or...

Christine Auten: I did not, and I'm so infrequently in the one that we did that I don't even have all the volumes of it, so I kind of come in and come in, but toward the end I'm in it a little bit more. But no, I never saw the TV dub at all. But I do like the one that we did. I like it quite a bit.

Non-AWO Interviewer: Anime fans are pretty known for having a certain amount of...call it zeal.

Christine Auten: Yeah.

Non-AWO Interviewer: Where's your line? "All right, now back off, that's enough now"?

Christine Auten: I was joking with Monica, I don't have that kind of draw. No, I really don't. She does, of course. So nobody's ever come close to crossing the line. [laughs] I did have, I do have a lot of weird emails where people are wanting to...send me things that I don't think are necessarily appropriate. "Send them to ADV, and see what they do with them!" [laughs] But yeah, that's it. I mean, I'm a real kind of private person, but I'll answer any question if it's not too weird. The only question I wouldn't answer on an email was my political affiliation, because I don't think that's important.

Daryl Surat: If it's any consolation, when I mentioned I was going to be interviewing you just prior to this, someone said "ask her if she'll marry me."

Christine Auten: [laughs]

Daryl Surat: "Even though she's kind of scary."

Christine Auten: "Kind of scary." Well, I've been married for ten years. I have a husband, and I don't think he wants me marrying anybody else. He thinks I'm scary? He must have seen [Oh! Super] Milk-chan. [laughs]

Daryl Surat: Tell us about Milk-chan!

Gerald Rathkolb: Please, tell us. You were working with Steven Foster.

Christine Auten: Yeah, I love Steven. Steven is just a doll, and we had a lot of fun doing Milk-chan. Milk-chan was another one of those where you get to do...the disc has three different versions: it has a subtitled version, it has a dubbed version that is very faithful to the Japanese, and then it has a...slightly different one that's a little more fun. But, I don't know if any of you have ever seen Milk-chan, it has these really bizarre video inserts that, oh my gosh, they're the strangest things I've ever seen. For the straight translation dub, we redubbed the video inserts too, and I got to do a couple of those as well. But for the strictly Westernized version, we did a "Curb Your Enthusiasm"-style behind-the-scenes video storyline that goes through all four volumes that takes us from recording to A-Kon, and we did it, the last volume we're on a bus going to A-Kon. It was just so much fun. It was so much fun, and Steven needed somebody to be the director because he just wouldn't be on camera, and [laughs] so I was like "oh, I'll do it! I'll do it!" I mean, he's got Luci [Christian] as the production manager, so a few of us played parts, and the rest of everybody else played themselves, but I'm not really that mean. [laughs] I'm not.

Non-AWO Interviewer: Just a final question, if I may: is there any particular character or project that you really want to be a part of?

Christine Auten: Yeah, you know, I'm kind of with the other guys. I don't watch that. I don't, because you don't want to get attached to something and not get it. At the same time, if you don't get it, you don't want it to be ruined for yourself. You still want to be able to enjoy it, so I just don't even look at it until it comes up.

Daryl Surat: I guess if you have any final closing comments, let's hear them.

Christine Auten: I just have so many favorite anime that I'd like to talk about, like Azumanga Daioh...I like RahXephon, I like Orphen, and I just have so much fun at Otakon talking with people about these anime I did five or six years ago that I'd completely forgotten about and didn't know anybody else watched! And that's kind of the neat thing about this, it's like "oh you watched Orphen too? You liked that? Great!" Just finding people who, it's just such an amazing thing, that if you like something, there were other people who like it too, and you can find SOMEWHERE somebody who likes that stuff.