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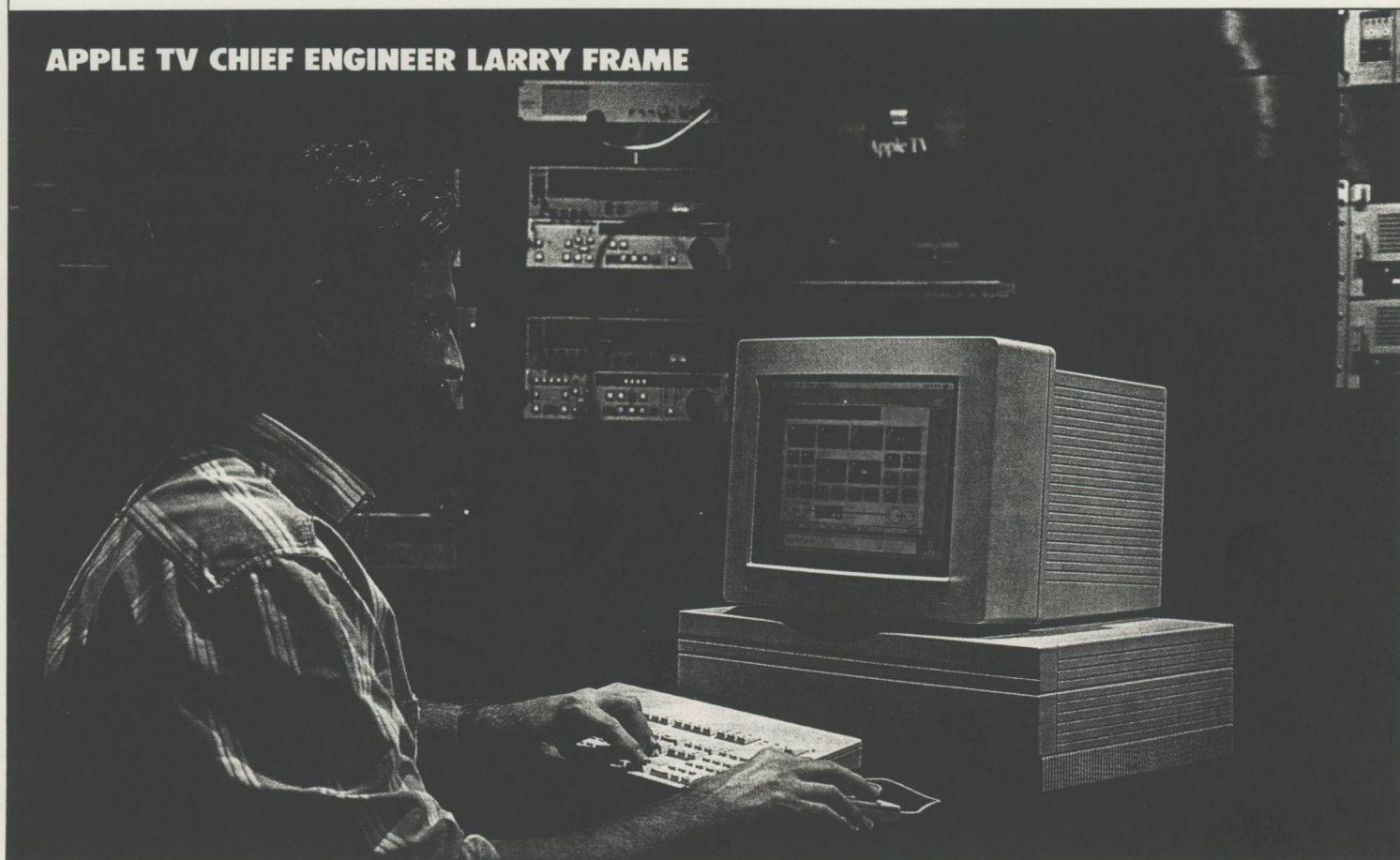
VIDEOGRAPHY

THE MAGAZINE OF PROFESSIONAL VIDEO PRODUCTION, TECHNOLOGY, AND APPLICATIONS

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TWO CHARACTERS IN SEARCH OF AN AUTHOR

Actor and actress with no current national exposure seek creative team to create a campaign around their unique characteristics. For further information call Jeff Kleiser, agent.

Has Jeff Kleiser, formerly of Digital Effects and Omnibus, forsaken computer animation to become a Hollywood talent agent? Not exactly.

Since 1987 Kleiser and his partner, sculptress/artist Diana Walczak, have been toiling away at their current company Kleiser-Walczak Construction Company, creating what they feel are the forerunners of the actors of the future, computer generated characters or "synthespians," a term they have coined to describe their product.

Digital actors can be of great value. They don't age, and they never get zits, unless you want them to. They always remember their lines, they come with their own wardrobe, and they don't get temperamental or tired. They are available to work on multiple projects at the same time, and you don't need stunt doubles or liability insurance on them. Just think of the money one can save on a shoot with no wardrobe person, no make-up person, no hair stylist, no casting, not to mention all the time and film stock saved, because digital actors get it right on the first take.

If this sounds bizarre or like the plot of a science fiction movie (Michael Creighton's *Looker*, circa 1978) it's not, it's exactly what Jeff Kleiser and Diana Walczak have in mind.

Their first synthespian, Nestor Sextone, was unveiled at SIGGRAPH in 1988. Nestor was running for the presidency of the Synthetic Actors Guild on a platform that protested a synthetic role (Max Headroom), being portrayed by a live actor. If elected, Nestor claimed, he would make sure synthetic roles would go to synthetic actors. Their newest creation, Dozo, the world's first computer-generated pop star (though probably not the first synthetic one) made her debut at SIGGRAPH 1989 in *Don't Touch Me*,

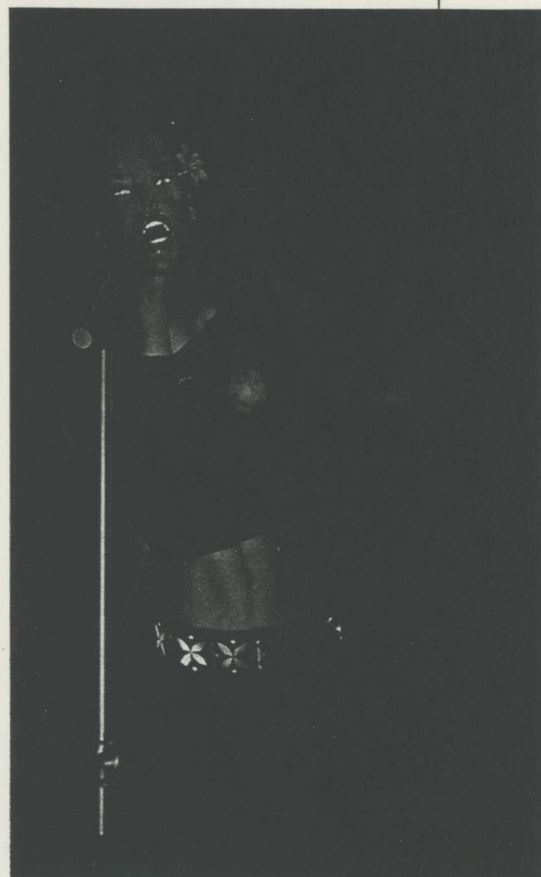
her first music video. Dozo goes far beyond Sextone in her virtuosity as a performer and definitely in the looks area as well.

All kidding aside, Kleiser and Walczak do not intend for computer-generated characters to be used as a cost effective alternative to live actors. According to Kleiser, photorealistic actors are at least ten years away, and will be very expensive to produce. Even though synthespians walk and talk like human actors, they currently are most definitely not human, not Claymation and not cel animation either. The uniqueness of synthespians gives them a high retention effectiveness, which is the element that advertisers seek, to cut through the clutter.

Dozo, who is the state of Kleiser-Walczak's art, is very flexible. Her legs bend at the ankles and knees, she can move her neck and bend at her stomach, and has elbows and wrists which bend and turn. Her shoulders move, but are presently being perfected. Dozo's face is made up of 3,600 polygons, by comparison, Nestor had only 1,800. She has 45 facial expressions that through skillful mixing will cover a whole range of emotions and lip syncs.

The library of Dozo's facial expressions and phonemes was first sculpted in clay by Diana Walczak and then digitized to create key frames for Dozo's facial expressions. Interpolation between those frames was achieved using custom software written by Larry Weinberg. Dozo's body was also sculpted in clay and encoded into a database. Using body moving and flexing software by Frank Vitz, motion analysis data acquired from a dance performed by Perla Batalla, was also applied to the database.

The three minute *Don't Touch Me* was directed by Kleiser, and the song was created and performed by Perla Batalla. Lyrics were written by Kleiser and Walczak and the music was by Frank Serafine. Hewlett Packard and Wavefront Technologies provided hardware and production software. The film was



A crooning "synthespian" steals the show in *Don't Touch Me*.

recorded using the Gemini Process, a co-venture of the Post Group and Pacific Title & Art. According to Walczak, all parties involved donated their time or technologies to the project. The project took seven months to produce and would have cost approximately \$300,000 in real-world dollars.

The unique qualities of computer generated characters in themselves, is what Kleiser/Walczak is promoting. This new technology is waiting to be used creatively, they do not see this as a cheaper way to make a commercial (a good CGI spot costs about as much as the average live-action spot), or a way to dredge up personalities from the past, instead they await a creative concept that will use the opportunity afforded to make a strong impression.

Future characters are already on the drawing boards, and Kleiser-Walczak is also presently negotiating feature film and television contracts which could introduce synthespians to a wide-viewing audience.

—ALFIE SCHLOSS