

Hollywood Unscripted Ep 012 – Kara Vallow

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Scott Tallal: Welcome to Hollywood UNSCRIPTED. I'm Scott Tallal with the Malibu Film Society, and today we're actually going to be talking about television. Joining us is the multi award winning producer, Kara Vallow, who currently runs three of Fox Television's four Sunday night animation domination shows Family Guy, American Dad and The Cleveland Show. She's also the producer of the next season of Cosmos: Possible Worlds. Welcome.

Kara Vallow: Thank you for having me.

Scott Tallal: I want to start with Cosmos because this is something that you're getting ready to launch the next iteration. It's going to be called Cosmos: Possible Worlds. Talk to us about.

Kara Vallow: Well, Cosmos was originally just supposed to be a one off or supposed to be a one season special, a mini series.

Scott Tallal: Just remaking the original Carl Sagan.

Kara Vallow: Yeah a project that Seth Macfarlane really wanted to do. And he contacted Ann Druyan, who's Carl Sagan's widow, who owns the property and convinced Fox to do the series. It ended up being a lot more successful than anyone had anticipated it was going to be. So they decided they want to do a second season, which we had sort of never thought it was going to happen. And I actually finished it last year, the middle of last year, and I finally have an air date for it that I don't actually have a top my head, but sometime this spring.

Scott Tallal: I've heard its going to be March.

Kara Vallow: March. Ok, Yeah. So we're, yeah. We're excited it's finally going to be seen.

Scott Tallal: Well the title certainly suggests a lot of interesting stuff. And you get to visualize that?

Kara Vallow: Yes. Yes. I mean did you watch the first season of Cosmos? and did you watch the original Carl Sagan series?

Scott Tallal: Yes. I'm that old.

Kara Vallow: Yeah. No, I am, too. I was forced to watch that as a child with my parents. It was, you know, event television in our house. So when I was approached about contributing animation to the remake of Cosmos, I was extremely hesitant about doing it. In fact, my initial reaction was that I was very busy and I had just come off developing a show that didn't end up going. I was exhausted because before I had spoken to anyone about what they were planning on doing with it. But it held such a reverent place in my memory that I felt I couldn't do it justice. And I hadn't really spoken to anyone. I only spoken to Seth and he sort of talked about it. He's like, well, we want to you know, how they'd had in the Carl Sagan version, they had live actors portraying historical figures. And it looked a little bit wonky, you know, like current day where people are, their expectations are huge. Period. Productions like Downton Abbey and they didn't have that kind of budget. So they were gonna use animation instead. I was like, oh, I don't know. I don't know if I could do it justice. And it seemed sort of daunting to me.

Scott Tallal: Just because of the difference in animation style or.

Kara Vallow: Well, I hadn't even gotten that far in the process. It was the idea of animating Cosmos to replace a huge element of the original show. So my first reaction was, I won't do it. I can't do it. I was driving home from work and one of the producers on the show called me and said, oh, so we want you to come meet Ann and the Cosmo's people. Thanks for coming on board. And I was like, you know, I don't know. There must have been some mistake. I'm too busy and I can't. And he said, no, Seth said that you could do it and that this other project was done. And so I went and met with Ann and we talked for a couple hours. And it was one of those situations where she sort of charmed me into doing it. And I understood what she was imagining. And it wasn't just sort of replacing this live action narrative element with animation. She wanted something different. And we talked about like what Cosmos meant to us and

you know, then it was like, well, actually, animation is probably the only thing you could use to achieve what you wanted to achieve with it. So it's difficult, difficult show to work on. It was hard to just come up with an idea, a stylistic idea of some approach to it, because I wasn't really given any specific direction because it was something that was completely new and it was different then producing a property like Family Guy, you know. So they wanted something that looks sophisticated, didn't look like corny or like children's animation, but they didn't really know what that was. So there was a long period of development of trying to come up with first a way to produce it. And there wasn't a lot of money for this production and it was a huge undertaking. There were a lot of different moving parts, visual effects and live action. And then there was my part, which was somehow conveying the narrative story in each script, as well as the parts of the script that had to describe sometimes complicated scientific theories and experiments and such, but in a visual way that audience could understand them. So I felt a huge amount of responsibility, not just for it to look great and not look hokie, but to make everything understandable for viewers and to parse down sometimes very complicated, sort of convoluted ideas into little pieces that could visually explain something that people would be able to understand.

Scott Tallal: Well given the challenges that you had the first time around. Are you still daunted by what's coming up this time?

Kara Vallow: Yeah. I mean, going into the second season. Definitely. We had established the style, which was a huge part of launching the first season. So we had that how we created the backgrounds and how we created the animation had already been established. But unlike episodic television show like Family Guy. Each script for Cosmos involved a different time period, different characters. So it's a lot more work that goes into having to do that between like 10 minutes and 30 minutes of animation per episode. It varied with each one and we couldn't re-use any elements from the previous episode. Everything had to be drawn new. And there were a lot of things we learned from the first season that we didn't repeat in second season, which made it a lot easier. But the scripts are really brilliant and they are complicated and they were dense. A large part of it is sort of parsing through all this information and trying to make it clear storytelling and compelling and taking everything that works in the script and making it visual and making it interesting to people, but still making it really clear.

Scott Tallal: I can't imagine anything that would be so diametrically opposed to what you have historically been doing with the animation domination nights on Fox.

Kara Vallow: Yeah, it is. And I think that's why I'm really enjoying it because, you know, it's a blessing hashtag that Family Guy and American Dad have been on the air for so long. But you know, it becomes a bit of a grind. Eighteen seasons in. And what I love about animation is you can do anything with it. But the rules of like exploiting a medium are pretty narrow in network episodic show like on Family Guy. We do a lot when we can with. I don't know how familiar you are with the show, but occasionally we'll do things that sort of go outside the traditional guide of what that show is and do something with like stop motion or different elements of style. But it's basically what it is.

Scott Tallal: Or a whole musical show.

Kara Vallow: Or whole musical show. Yeah. But Cosmos is something completely different. It's a science show. And even though three quarters of what my job was is to provide the narrative storytelling part, another part of it was to animate, the sort of what we call like mini docs, these explanatory half minute vignettes of experiments and scientific things. So I worked with a small team and they had to be people that were really interested in doing a shit ton of research. And they're people that worked for animation like directors and designers, but also who were really smart and wanted to do a lot of research because that was a huge part of it, because it had to be exact. When you were animating a television episode like American Dad, we work from a script and a radio play of the voices and the artists take that and really work specifically from exactly what they're given, more or less. But with Cosmos, there was a lot more inventing and a lot more thinking had to go into it and a lot of figuring out and it's not easy. It's a difficult challenge.

Scott Tallal: It's not exactly like you're a stranger to things that are not easy. I mean, Fox came to you and Seth, and the next thing you know, you're building a brand new independent within Fox Studio with over 200 employees. I mean, that's insane.

Kara Vallow: Yeah, it was interesting how it came about. I had produced the third season of Family Guy and it was a 13 episode season and then it was canceled. And Seth and I went on to do other things. We did some things together. And during the time

of the cancellation, Fox had decided to put out the episodes on DVD. And Seth and I kind of knew just from like the zeitgeist that there were fans of the show. And when the DVDs came out, they would have these like little DVD events, at bars and stuff around colleges. And I'd go to a lot of them with Seth and there were lines around the block of these young guys wanting to just get the DVD and see Seth do voices. So it was a little odd because it had been off the air for a couple years and it sold a lot. So that was one of the reasons they investigated bringing it back. Not the only reason, but Seth was developing another show, unaware that Family Guy was ever going to return. And that was American Dad. And so I was producing a presentation for that show over at Fox to try to sell it. They had like a couple of presentations that they were going to choose from and they made the decision to renew Family Guy and then also pick up American Dad, which was a little surprising. And of course, you need to get up and running like right away. The normal order for a show is twenty two episodes. It's like a big order. They don't do those anymore. But that was the typical order for an animated show then. But they decided they wanted to do thirty five episodes for the first season. And I just thought that was fantastic. And it ended up not really being fantastic. Being sort of not a great idea in retrospect, but.

Scott Tallal: as in no sleep?

Kara Vallow: You know, it's not that, it was too much. And they also wanted us to do this Family Guy movie, which I had sort of forgotten about in that same time period. And it was just, I think for Seth in particular, who does the majority of the voices and at the time did the majority of work on the scripts and looked at every storyboard panel and every design. It was just that many episodes, too many. So the idea was to get these shows up and running somehow. For me, it would turn out to be really a great opportunity. I produced a lot of shows. You know, we had Fox behind us at this point. Like back before the show got canceled, they weren't really behind us so much. Trying to get anything was a bit of a struggle. But when it came back, it was a whole different sort of situation. And they allowed me to have a lot of autonomy, partially because I think the nature of a studio like that. I think if they had their druthers, they wouldn't do animation because for some reason they never really wanted to understand how or direct their minds around it. So it's something they never have a lot of control over. If you come from a background of working live action, it can become extremely frustrating to then be in charge of animated shows because it's not a situation where you can have

any control. You can read a script and give your notes, but you can't draw it. Your control is pretty marginalized and I think it's very frustrating for people.

Scott Tallal: At the studio.

Kara Vallow: Yeah, I think it's frustrating for executives anywhere with animation. But, you know, it was advantageous for someone like me because you can take advantage of those situations. And we had a lot of support from Fox, but they weren't really running the show. We had to report to people, but they put a great amount of trust in myself and Seth to just sort of do it. And for me, it was a matter of building a mechanism to produce the shows the way Seth wanted. And every model's very different. It's loosely based on The Simpsons model of how they produce their shows, but with some significant differences in that. Seth started out as an animator, so he wanted the writers and animation staff. He wanted everyone under one roof which is not done on The Simpsons, but he wanted everyone to sort of work in a communal atmosphere and staffing up shows like that. That was probably the hardest part for me is, there was a King of the Hill and The Simpsons there are certain shows like Futurama like that are based on that live action animated model. They're not like wacky cartoons. So there's certain kind of artists that sort of understood that kind of storyboarding and directing and it's very different from artists who would work on like Bugs Bunny or Powerpuff Girls or something. So there were a limited number of board artists and directors that sort of fit that mold. And so there was a lot of pillaging and I lost a lot of friends trying to staff those shows.

Scott Tallal: Those people didn't get it, didn't know. They weren't right

Kara Vallow: No, it was matter of stealing people from other shows because there were a finite number of artists who worked in that style.

Scott Tallal: Right.

Kara Vallow: And it's really important because there are wonderful artists that work on Cartoon Network or Nickelodeon, but they come in and try to draw a Family Guy storyboard and the characters are bouncing around. And if you look at a storyboard for a Family Guy or for The Simpsons, it looks very boring. The characters aren't moving all

over the place. And it's really modeled after how the actors say those lines. It's adult humor that's based on a radio play. And it's not really exploiting the medium of animation the way children's animation does.

Scott Tallal: I mean, you're serving a whole different audience.

Kara Vallow: Yeah. And it's just a different way of producing a show. And it can go horribly wrong if you don't understand that when you're setting up a system for showing that. Had I known Seth for a long time, we were very close and I knew what he wanted and it was important to not fuck that up and to build a mechanism for those shows that would give him the shows that he wanted while churning them out for a network that wanted them churned out.

Scott Tallal: He's obviously putting a lot of trust in you that has developed between the two of you since your days together I guess at Hanna-Barbera. On top of everything else, it's a male dominated industry. Talk to us about those challenges.

Kara Vallow: Yeah, well, I guess that's sort of multifaceted, that entertainment industry is male dominated and the television comedy world is male dominated again. It's a little bit better now, but they were male centric writing staffs and male executives for the most part. And I could write a book on the sort of nuanced, subtle, continuous efforts to to marginalize me and my so-called power. I was doing a job, you know,.

Scott Tallal: At a very high level and still are.

Kara Vallow: It's a high level, but it's still part of production. You know, these shows are productions. We're not executives. And I think there's a level of sort of misunderstanding sometimes of my role, I guess, and how it differs from other producers, client producers on shows. And I had a lot of difficulty and Seth had a lot of respect for me and I did put a lot of trust in me. And that was the only reason why they even allowed me to do what I did. And for the first couple years, maybe the first five or six seasons, and then it just stopped. I'd have to go to Fox and meet with business people and the executives, to justify my production plan for the season, which was a schedule and budget, and Seth always came with me. There was always a situation of sort of being berated by some dude about why the average job.

Scott Tallal: Who has never done your job and doesn't really understand.

Kara Vallow: Never, never done my job no. Why the episodes couldn't be delivered a year earlier, you know, just no comprehension. Simpsons had been running for like 30 years. This wasn't like new, it wasn't new science, but it was always a matter of my not being taken exactly seriously and having to defer to Seth, who would say, yes, she knows what she's talking about. This is how long it takes. Whatever. And that just continued. There was a point at which they did sort of backed off from everything and it was fine. And they didn't give us notes. And they stopped questioning the schedule, which was the same every fucking year. There wasn't gonna be a point at which it was gonna take us six fewer months to get the show on the air so. And then Seth occasionally had some great idea. Like he wanted to do this Family Guy, Star Wars crossover., So he would come to me and say, I would really like to do this. Is there a way we can do this? So I'd come up with a plan and put together a parsed down budget as much as I could because it seemed like a good idea to me and it's something he wanted to do. But then I talked to the studio about it and it would be like I was out of my fucking mind. Like, no, we're not spending another dollar to do some frivolous idea. You know, and there was that sort of lack of, well, maybe this could be commodified. So I'd come up with ideas. Well, maybe if you put it on DVD and you could get some money back for it. I ended up making them hundreds of millions of dollars and then they wanted more, you know. But it was always I was sort of constantly met with being made to feel like I was like a female child presenting some, like, ridiculous idea, not something that was like a potentially good business idea. Maybe you'll make a billion dollars on this and it'ss be something George Lucas wanted to be involved in with us. There was always just like a sort of lack of imagination when something like that. I was always asking for something and not being a partner in creating something that I wasn't making any money off of it. I was doing it because Seth wanted to do it and it wasn't like a money thing, but ended up making the studio a lot of money and I have to imagine it would have been different if I had been a dude.

Scott Tallal: Given that struggle, I mean, obviously, when you're hiring people, talent always wins out. You have to hire the people who can do the job. That said, are you involved at all in trying to create any kinds of mentorship for women who are coming up through the ranks?

Kara Vallow: Oh, of course. Yeah, yeah, totally. I mean, I don't hire the writers, but I encourage them to think outside the box of being just white men and Family Guy has been through a couple different rounds of showrunners. The current showrunners have taken up that challenge and hired some women and the showrunners at American Dad have done the same. In terms of what I have control over. Yeah, absolutely. I just sort of make it a mandate for all the other aspects of the show that I do control hiring on that in terms of talent. There's always the limitations of availability and for production and people working in those areas, I did have mandates because there's no reason to not hire people of color and women at the same rate. They'd have to figure it out. My line producers on the shows work with Women in Animation, which is a organization that promotes jobs for women in animation. It's still a bit of a struggle. Certainly my generation I was raised and my mom was a doctor. She was independent. But I was not raised to think I could be a television comedy writer or I could draw cartoons and make a living. I mean, I think maybe the millennial generation, the new generation, they may be a little more relaxed about making a living thing. But the idea that you could write jokes for a living is kind of a male like you can do anything. If you're a white male growing up, right?, you could do, that could actually be a job that was that would seem insane to me, I realized I wanted to originally be an animator, work in animation pretty young and well, going to art school. And my mother was like, well, make sure they have courses in art therapy or, you know, something that didn't involve me actually drawing. And, you know, it's a legitimate concern when you're not a dude and you have to make a living. You have to have a certain level of outside confidence to think you could be a television comedy writer and support yourself and not be concerned. But there are many more women coming up as artists now than there were of my generation,.

Scott Tallal: Which is so bizarre because of your early days so many of the animators were in fact, women.

Kara Vallow: They were. Yeah,.

Scott Tallal: In the earliest days of animation,.

Kara Vallow: Animation in terms of it being sort of a viable market has ebbed and flowed a lot over the years. And during those times it was, you know, the glory days and

it was like the desert for a couple generations. And right now there's a ton of work and a lot of opportunities for anybody. But again, you have to have a sort of sense of confidence that you could possibly make a living doing that and not think, oh, I have to get a real job and have some sort of real training to do something. And, you know, that's been lacking in women for generations. And it's nice to see that the young generations have much more sense of confidence about that. But, you know, having it really integrated with non-white people, too, is a challenge, it's the same thing. You know, if you don't have like a trust fund or something you really have to be able to really think you can get a job to do something right and then to go and train to do something. To be like a cartoonist, you have to have some sort of fallback, I guess, or else it's pretty terrifying.

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Scott Tallal: We'll fire up the Wayback Machine. You went to work for Broadcast Arts. I mean, they were the ones who did Pee-Wee's Playhouse.

Kara Vallow: Yeah. I went to School of Visual Arts and studied various forms of art, including animation. And that was I wanted to work in. But, you know, I had other jobs when I got out of college for a few years. And then eventually I got my first job in animation, at Broadcast Arts. And it was the biggest commercial animation house in New York then. And it was really like the cool place to be. I did mostly commercials, but I was hired to be the assistant of one of the partners who wanted to expand and do television series. And we did a pilot for NBC called the Jackie Bison Show. You could maybe find it online because it's pretty insane. It's like a bison that's a talk show host. It didn't go. It didn't get picked up.

Scott Tallal: Almost like, you know, like BoJack Horseman or something like that.

Kara Vallow: Yeah, it doesn't seem that crazy now. I know. But that even back then, I was like, this is the stupidest thing. And I remember it was like Brandon Tartikoff. And he was there. And we were pitching this stupid idea to him in the Office of Broadcast

Arts. And I just remember thinking he was like, okay. Yeah, sounds good. So I did this pilot and it was terrible. And they did the post-production out in L.A. for some reason. So I came out here for maybe only a second time I'd been in L.A.. And then I sort of realized that I would maybe have to move there if I wanted to do anything outside of commercials and animation. So.

Scott Tallal: You made the jump.

Kara Vallow: I did. And I didn't know anybody. And it was a different time. It was cheap to live here. And I temped for a temp agency for about a year and a half before I got a job in which animation. I remember I was at a temp job at a bank and I would read the trades and Paramount was setting up an animation division. And that's when that sort of started to happen, where studios were starting to want to do animated movies. So they had a studio in Glendale called Hyperion Animation. They were just setting up. So I had had experience in animation in New York, and there were very few people who had any experience working in animation production. So my first job outside of this two years of temping was really good. It was on a movie called Bebe's Kids. It's sort of like a cult hit now at, me it seems a little offensive now, but it was, it was fun. It was kind of a flop, I guess. But I worked there for a couple of years. And then when that was done, I don't know. I worked at so many different studios as.

Scott Tallal: You did Teenage Mutant Ninja.

Kara Vallow: I did, yeah. I went to work at a studio called Fred Wolf Films, and it was sort of the dying days of the Ninja Turtles and I produced like the last few seasons of that. And then a bunch of other shows, one called Dino Babies, which is what you think it was. And then I did a bunch of like these straight to video Bible story things. And during the first season of Cosmos, some of the producers wanted me to veer more towards like a realistic style animation. And I wanted to be way more abstract. And I couldn't find a way to describe what I was afraid of because we couldn't make it like Disney. We had a small budget and not a lot of time. So I went to stylize it to make it seem adult, not wonky. And I kept thinking back to those fucking Bible videos. And it was that the animated Jesus that looked so wonky and I said, Seth, I did these videos and it's like the animated Jesus. That's what it's going to look like if I make him look realistic and walking around like a man. It's going to look like those videos. And so he

would use that reference all the time. Whenever one of the producers, I think it should move a little more realistically and he's should look little more human and he'd be like, you know,.

Scott Tallal: Move the decimal point to the right and afford to do it.

Kara Vallow: Not even, I mean, it's hard to make anything look adult animation wise if you're gonna naturalize it. It's just fucking impossible. But that's the kind of stuff I did.

Scott Tallal: Talk about how you wound up at Hanna-Barbera and meeting Seth.

Kara Vallow: I think I had left Fred Wolf for some reason. And a friend of mine was working on Hanna-Barbera and they were looking for someone to produce the show Johnny Bravo. They're part of Cartoon Network at that point. And they were part of Turner Television and they had a program called I think it was, what, a cartoon or something like that where they were producing shorts for like anybody could submit an idea with like nobody's. It was spearheaded by a guy named Fred Seibert, who worked there at the time. And it was really brilliant. And through that program, Seth came. He was, you know, 22 or something. And he had moved to L.A. because he had a short and it launched careers like Gandhi Tarkovsky, who's like a director at Sony, and he did Dexter's Laboratory. And then there's Powerpuff Girls. And they really brought an enormous amount of talent in. But Johnny Bravo was the show that Seth was assigned to. They didn't do his short, but they put him on the show. And he was a storyboard arts and a writer. And we became really, really good friends. There was a point maybe at two years in when that show was finishing and then Warner Brothers came in and took over. Did like the big central casting corporate takeover of Hanna-Barbera and Cartoon Network, it was sort of like, you know, Hanna-Barbera is this amazing place to work, so its where television animation was born in that same location.

Scott Tallal: It goes back to, you know, The Flintstones and The Jetsons and all the stuff that people of my generation grew up.

Kara Vallow: Right and mine. Hannah and Barbara basically created the idea of TV animation and they did it there at this historic studio over on Cahuenga. And it was just really fun. And now steeling myself for the Disney takeover, I think about that. It was

one day. It was just, it was just over like Warner Brothers just come in and the good times were over. But I feel really lucky to have worked there for the last two years of that studio when we're sort of figuring out, we didn't know what was really happening. And so bunch of the artists on my show were like coming up with ideas to pitch to other studios because they didn't have jobs. So Seth was working on this short for what became Family Guy, and then all these guys were doing it in their offices at Hanna-Barbera. One of the other writers and artists on our shows, Butch Hartman, who I think developed and then pitched the Fairly Odd Parents, which became a big show over at Nickelodeon. But while we were at Hanna-Barbera, I got a job then over at Sony. And when Family Guy eventually got picked up by Fox, my boss at Sony wouldn't let me leave to go work on it. And it was one of those things where I didn't have a contract. I could have, but he just mind fucked me. He's like, this is your show. That's not yours, you know. So I stayed at Sony and I produced a show called Dilbert based on the comic strip for two seasons. And then that was canceled. That was on UPN. And then they put me on a movie that Adam Sandler was doing called Eight Crazy Nights, an animated movie with Sony. So I was producing that and it was not going well. It was nothing to do with Adam Sandler. Those guys were great. It was my producer. You know, the same person who wouldn't let me leave to go to Family Guy we were head butting heads. And Seth called and said, can you come over and like he knew I didn't have a contract on this movie. And so I decided to leave. And it was this, that was a big fuck fest of people like freaking out at Sony. And it was awful time. You know, and I kept questioning myself. Imagine if I'd stayed on that movie, not gone to Family Guy. So I left. And we did one season and then it was canceled. But it was still, it was a wonderful experience. And then it ended up coming back a couple of years later. So

Scott Tallal: And not only came back, but again,.

Kara Vallow: It's still going.

Scott Tallal: Thirty five show order on top of everything else.

Kara Vallow: Yeah. It was super exciting at that point. It was really exciting because these fans that no one really know existed kind of came out of the woodwork. Leading up to when we were going to re-premiere, they do these live events where the actors would do like a live table read. They were like the Beatles. It was insane. People were

so crazy about the idea that Family Guy coming back. It was really fun. And then then we just got beaten down by all the episodes and all the things they made us do.

Scott Tallal: Why did you want to become an animator and what made you think that you could really do it?

Kara Vallow: My grandfather was from Germany and he was sort of obsessed with animation and he was an engineer and he had like eight millimeter reels of Walt Disney films and he was sort of obsessed with it. And at some point, I just remember, I was maybe 8 or 9 and having a conversation with him about it. And he was like, oh, you're gonna be an artist. I was like, but I want to like the idea of, I tried to explain to him the idea of conceiving of something, anything and not being able to see it, was very frustrating for me. I don't really know why. It was frustrating to me. But so the idea of being able to conceive of something like, you know, a dog and a cat in a banana field, whatever. And to be able to draw it and actually put it in motion and be able to see it, it was very compelling for me. And then I became just obsessed with that idea of figuring out how to do it. My grandfather and I made like a flipbook or something. And I was obsessed with watching cartoons, too. I went to very small schools. I grew up in Philadelphia and I went to a small, private high school where I was considered like, I got the art award and thought I was like, great. And then I went to art school and I very quickly figured out, like there were people that do painting like Rembrandt. It was a rude awakening. Like I sucked compared to most of the people at school. And I did my classes and I learned a lot. I was very competitive growing up. I did a lot of things well, and then I got to New York and I was a little bit younger than my classmates. And I was like, fuck, there are people like painting. So I kind of quickly decided that it might be easier for me to sort of facilitate projects rather than to actually do that. I could draw and I can animate, but I would not have been successful had I gone that route. I really did not have a lot of talents.

Scott Tallal: But you have talents as a producer?

Kara Vallow: Yeah, I do. And it is a kind of talent.

Scott Tallal: Kind of.

Kara Vallow: Well, you'd be surprised what people don't.

Scott Tallal: Hopefully, most of our listeners know.

Kara Vallow: I hope so.

Scott Tallal: Just how hard producing is. It's pulling together a whole project. It's making it happen, in television in particular. I mean, people talk about film being a director's medium. But television is definitely the producer's medium.

Kara Vallow: Yeah. And I think that the shows I produce are on an arcane model. The streaming model, they don't do like twenty two episodes of television, but we still do that. The Simpsons still does that. That's really a metric ton of work and animation takes a really long time. I mean, it's like a year and a half. Yeah, it's it's an exhaustive amount of work. Everything's hand drawn. It's not computer spitting anything out.

Scott Tallal: Now, the big question, growing up as a kid. Disney or Warner Brothers?

Kara Vallow: I'm gonna say Hanna-Barbera. They were my favorite shows, but those were really my Saturday mornings. I loved the Disney movies. You know, those are sort of special events. But Hanna-Barbera was really like those series that they would churn out, all of them. The Flintstones was far away. My favorite show ever. I think it still is.

Scott Tallal: So growing up, you were talking about how Cosmos was an event in your household. Just how mind-blowing is it now to actually be producing Cosmos?

Kara Vallow: Yeah, it is. I mean, I still will hold the Carl Sagan in so much reverence. And I feel like it's something so different. It's not that show. It's sort of a whole new creation. And after we've produced the first season and it became so popular. People loved it so much. It was amazing because everything is so difficult and the amount of work you put into animation is, it takes so long and it's such hard work. And to see that kind of reaction was really wonderful and to see like Neil DeGrasse Tyson basically became like a superstar because of that show. And it was amazing to see people actually wanted to see a science show, millions and millions of people. They broadcast it simultaneously all over the world. And they were desperate for a science show. I

guess. And if Ann and Seth hadn't sort of pushed it and said, we just want to do this, just let us do it. Because I mean, Family Guy. So let me do this. You know, no one would have thought of doing something like that, like putting a science show on Fox on Sunday night.

Scott Tallal: Speaking of superstars, Seth, I mean, this is a guy who, aside from starting off in animation and now running these shows for Fox, this guy who sings at Carnegie Hall and the Royal Albert hall and has released five albums and has hosted the Academy Awards and is putting The Orville and other great television on the air. And he's picked you.

Kara Vallow: Well, let's just say he picked me long before any of that happened.

Scott Tallal: But he was still the guy.

Kara Vallow: To me he was, you know, maybe a couple weeks after knowing him, when I realized that he was different, I thought he was special. And he's someone that like, you know, Family Guy's has never won an Emmy, and it never will. And I think there was a great amount of resentment because he was touted as like the youngest show-runner ever of the million dollars deals, whatever. I mean, maybe people realize this now, but he's one of those few people that deserves it. He's, he's so fucking talented. I've never seen that in anybody else. I mean, I watched him, like, teach himself how to play the piano. He's never afraid to make a fool of himself which I think is a huge asset because I'm always afraid of making a fool of myself. But he's never had like that one toe in the water thing. We did a fundraising event. Well, I produced and like, I think I'm gonna tap dance. I'm like what?. So he took tap dancing. Like, who would do that? Like, that takes balls as a grown man to get up there. He's the most talented voiceover actor I've ever seen in my life. It's just unbelievable what he can do. You know, I think it's been sort of double edged sword in terms of the shows aren't winning awards. Done 18 seasons and every other fucking animated show has won an Emmy.

Scott Tallal: Is it because he and you are so dedicated to pushing the envelope in terms of what you can get away with?

Kara Vallow: He's the one pushing the envelope in terms of what he can get away with. I think where I push the envelope is in quality. I'm absolutely unrelenting. I will never go into anything if I'm not sure I can be hundred percent successful, which is one of the reasons why I originally said no to working on Cosmos. I didn't really get it and understand it but if I do it, it's going to be the best it can be. Fortunately, Seth and I were on the same page and didn't have to work in any confines. I was building something from scratch and you know, I've worked in a lot of animation studios and you have to work within their own systems of how they think things should be done. To me, it's never right unless it's how I want to do it. So I'd have a really hard time ever going to work within someone else's system again.

Scott Tallal: So when you think back to why you wanted to do this as a kid and where you are now, how's that turned out? I mean, are you happy?

Kara Vallow: Yeah. I can't complain. It's really, it's worked out well. Yes. And for all my griping and complaining about some of the systems of oppression that will always be there. I was given an amazing opportunity to do exactly what I wanted, which was to create a system, exactly how I wanted it to be or how I felt it needed to be and to be able to hire everybody. It just, you don't have to ever work with an asshole, like you don't ever have to hire someone. Everyone is great at the studio. Otherwise, they don't work there. And it's a wonderful place to be. And I work with amazing people and I didn't get into animation as like just a way to get into entertainment, I don't ever want to work at any other. I don't want to work in live action television. I'm not interested in any of that. It's just this medium that I love and I love working with artists and seeing the results of all that hard work on the process.

Scott Tallal: Thank you for taking us inside all of that.

Kara Vallow: Thank you.

Scott Tallal: Our guest today, Kara Vallow, executive producer of Family Guy. And so many other great shows.

Kara Vallow: Thank you.

Announcer: Hollywood UNSCRIPTED is created by Curtco Media and presented in cooperation with the Malibu Film Society. This episode was hosted by Scott Tallal with guest Kara Vallo produced and edited by Jenny Curtis. Sound Engineering by Michael Kennedy, the executive producer of Hollywood UNSCRIPTED is Stuart Halperin, the Hollywood UNSCRIPTED Theme Songs by Celeste and Erik Dick. Please rate review and subscribe to this podcast for more conversations with top industry professionals discussing entertainment you love.

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