



Ascendent Animation: Giving Voice to Talent and Anime that 'Don't Fit the Mold'

The Black-owned and LGBTQ+-operated studio launched in 2020 to embrace the need for more diversity and inclusivity – and mature, representative storytelling - in the anime dubbing industry.

By [Victoria Davis](#) | Tuesday, January 11, 2022 at 4:26pm

In [2D](#), [Anime](#), [CG](#), [Digital Media](#), [Diversity and Inclusion](#), [Films](#), [People](#), [Television](#), [Voice Acting](#) | [ANIMATIONWorld](#) | Geographic Region: [All](#)



'Fire in His Fingertips.'

In 2020, setting up shop alongside Funimation, Sentai Filmworks, and other anime adaptation titans, a new dubbing studio "ascended." Black-owned and LGBTQ+-operated, **Ascendent Animation** launched out of a need for more diversity and inclusivity in the anime dubbing industry, both regarding the talent and production staff hired onto projects as well as the projects themselves.

"For me, it came from the pain of rejection," says Steve Warky Nunez, Ascendent's sound engineer known for his voice acting work on video games like *Camp Buddy* and *The Fifth Expedition*, as well as animations like *Spacy* and *Ultra Nova*. Nunez was the one who raised the call for Ascendent to assemble after live-action TV series producer K. Cornell Kellum, now Ascendent's owner, licensed the anime *Ishida and Asakura*.

"I had tried to be a part of anime for decades," continues Nunez. "The responses I received while trying to work in the industry were: 'You don't live in Texas. You don't live in California. You don't live near us.' I was also rejected for many arbitrary reasons, such as my orientation. I worry that in this industry, we stop looking for what is new and become complacent with the familiar."



Get AWN delivered to your inbox! Never miss an important article again!

Latest AWN Must Reads

- » 'Riverdance: The Animated Adventure' Reimagines an Iconic Musical
- » Mamoru Hosoda's 'Belle': Learning to Become Your Truest Self

Ascendent's website administrator Sean Tay adds, "We look for projects that cover all walks of life. We reach out to cast from around the globe. We try not to restrict ourselves so that we can include a wide range of stories and talent."

From the get-go, New York City-based Ascendent chose to tackle anime projects that were anything but familiar to U.S. audiences, from the TV-14, over-the-top, high school comedy *Ishida and Asakura* to their second dub, *The Titan's Bride*, a TV-MA yaoi love story about a boy summoned to a world of giant titans, allegedly destined to marry its prince. And the studio was adamant about using remote recordings, which meant ongoing access to a global dub voiceover talent pool that has proven so important... and meaningful.

"When we were growing up, dubbing or voiceover is what brought animation to life," says Tay. "And with such a global market for talent, as well as modern technology, it really didn't make sense to limit a talent pool to a small geographic location. The global lockdown really provided an opportunity to give the idea of a global dubbing attempt a test flight."



'Everything for Demon King Evelogia.'

The studio's most recent project, *Everything for Demon King Evelogia* - featuring a gamer who reincarnates into his favorite game and becomes obsessed with the demon king antagonist - highlights this guiding principle, with most of the main dub cast located outside the United States.

"Which is unheard of for an English dub of an anime," notes Tay. "We wanted to highlight accents and made deliberate efforts to reach out to talent with native accents for casting auditions."

Of its five licensed projects so far, Ascendent has cast talent - some completely new to the industry - from England to Australia. But between initial translation to casting, recording, and mixing, Tay also says that one of the most important roles Ascendent plays in a project is maintaining a relationship of trust with the companies whose work they are handling, going so far as to include the original story author, whenever possible, in casting decisions for character voices they created.

"What we are trying to convey is our dedication to the projects we handle," says Tay.



Office manager Katrina Caffeine adds, "As a diverse corporation, we really do want to see people from all different sorts of backgrounds. We want to find the perfect fit for every character. We don't want to put a name behind the voice, we want to have the best voice

behind the character. We're looking to flesh out a story that will resonate with all who hear and see it."

On top of isolating choices for talent, many anime dub studios shy away from highly mature comedies and LGBTQ love stories, considering them to be "undesirable" and "unprofitable," as noted by Ascendent's production assistant Paul Davey. This also isolates certain fanbases.

»» 'Puppy Dog Pals' Returns with Cute New Pets and Silly, Fun Adventures

»» Ascendent Animation: Giving Voice to Talent and Anime that 'Don't Fit the Mold'

»» The Absurd, Surreal, Metaphysical Creation of a No-Budget Animated Feature

»» 'Hilda and the Mountain King': Why We Love Our Trolls

»» MPC Film Creates S'More Great VFX for 'Ghostbusters: Afterlife'

»» 'Smiling Friends' Provides Big Laughs in a Small, Suspicious-Looking Package

[See More »](#)

Top Headline News

»» HBO Sets Storm Reid to Star as Riley Abel in 'The Last of Us' Series Adaptation

»» Watch the Clip: 'Big Nate' Now Streaming on Paramount+

»» Sphere Media Acquires Montreal Animation Studio Sardine Productions

»» Territory Studio Names Colleen Butler Executive Producer

»» 'Eternals: The 500 Year War' Now Available on Marvel Unlimited

»» Watch Video of How ILM Brought Alligator Loki and Alioth to Life

»» 'South Park Rings in 25th Anniversary, Sets New Season and Premiere Date

»» All 4 'Adventure Time: Distant Lands' Specials Coming to Blu-Ray and DVD

[See More »](#)

Career Connections

»» 3D Character Animator
[Elliott Animation](#)

»» Multimedia Specialist
[Corning Optical Communications](#)

»» Visualization Artist
[Payette](#)

»» Senior Web/Digital Graphic Designer
[ICF](#)

»» Associate Video Producer
[William Blair](#)

»» Multimedia Producer
[Virginia Tech](#)

»» Junior Editor/Motion Graphics Designer (Full Time)
[MVAR Media](#)

"At Ascendent, we are trying to change the stigmas that shows with an LGBTQ+ slant have," explains Davey. "We want to prove that there is a market for these animes, and they will assuredly contribute to the successful growth of a company."

Technical supervisor Danny Miller adds, "There was an untapped market for not only the genres that we have been producing, but fanbases that felt unheard. In the American market, it's incredibly homogeneous, both in terms of the content being offered and the folks getting cast."

The team certainly doesn't blame other studios for the hesitation to license titles such as the pectoral-centric romance *Fire in His Fingertips* - another of Ascendent's upcoming dub projects - as well as other anime containing more explicit facets of romance and intimacy that some actors may not be as understanding toward or as comfortable acting out. But it's a corner of the anime industry Ascendent is passionate about spotlighting, despite any supposed risk.



'Ishida and Asakura.'

"For LGBTQ+ and minorities, we are a market of people who want to see representation, not only in movies, but in TV and animation as well," says Nunez. "Ascendent knows that there's an audience for it, and Ascendent is willing to 'take the risk' on talent and anime that don't fit the 'mold' because we know how important it is. If other companies see us having success, then I know it will become more mainstream, and I think that would be a wonderful thing."

And so far, the audience response has been favorable. "The feedback has been really positive," says Davey. "We are so thankful to all of those who have liked and supported what we've done. I, like many others, am excited to see what we'll do next and how we will grow; not only as a company, but as a community."

Tay adds, "The most rewarding part of the journey is being able to break into new, uncharted territory. We share laughs, burdens, and success together as we blaze our own trail. It's a very liberating feeling. As far as goals go, we still have a wish list of projects we'd love to work on, so stay tuned for more updates down the road."

The projected release date for *Fire in His Fingertips* (1&2) and *Everything for Demon King Evelogia* is Summer 2022. Fans can stream, watch, and buy (digitally) the released dubs of Ascendent's titles on Amazon Prime Video.



Victoria Davis is a full-time, freelance journalist and part-time Otaku with an affinity for all things anime. She's reported on numerous stories from activist news to entertainment. Find more about her work at victoriadavisdepiction.com.

Tags [Taking on More Risky Anime](#) [Ascendent Animation](#) [Anime](#) [Voice Acting](#) [voiceover](#) [voice dubbing](#) [Dubbing](#) [voice talent](#) [FUNimation](#) [Sentai Filmworks](#) [LGBTQ+](#) [inclusivity](#) [gender diversity](#) [Black-owned businesses](#) [Steve Warky Nunez](#) [K. Cornell Kellum](#) [Sean Tay](#) [The Titan's Bride](#) [Katrina Caffeine](#) [Paul Davey](#) [Danny Miller](#) [Ishida and Asakura](#) [Fire in His Fingertips](#) [Everything for Demon King Evelogia](#) [TV Animation](#) [Animated TV Series](#)

» Lead Producer
[Deck Nine Games](#)

[See More »](#)

Recent Comments



do you know how a non-eurocentric environment can impact eurocentric people??

[Cartoon Network and 'Steven Universe' Fight Racism in 'See Color' PSA](#)



Actually, the syndication package of 1980s "Inspector Gadget" aired in Canada through 2015.

[Cinedigm to Release 'Inspector Gadget' Titles](#)



Jojo Get info, cant wait!
[20th Century Studios Drops 'The Bob's Burgers Movie' Trailer and Images](#)



the point isn't to just not be racist, it's to properly equip people with the ability to *be* anti racist, and you can't understand what racism is and how it impacts specific communities if you...

[Cartoon Network and 'Steven Universe' Fight Racism in 'See Color' PSA](#)



The Bob's Burgers Movie Is Real
[20th Century Studios Drops 'The Bob's Burgers Movie' Trailer and Images](#)



Joshua Your audience says "fire Bob cheapskate"
[Disney Sets Three "Strategic Pillars" for Success in 2022](#)

Most Popular

[20th Century Studios Drops 'The Bob's Burgers Movie' Trailer and Images](#)
2 comments · 21 hours ago

[Disney Sets Three "Strategic Pillars" for Success in 2022](#)
2 comments · 2 days ago

[Why Producers of 'The Joan of Arc Case' are Betting Big on Animated Docudrama](#)
1 comment · 3 days ago

[A 'Scott Pilgrim' Anime is in the Works - Here's Everything We Know So Far](#)
1 comment · 3 days ago

[Mamoru Hosoda's 'Belle' Hits Theaters January 14](#)
1 comment · 6 days ago

[COVID-19 Sends Pixar's 'Turning Red' to Disney+](#)
1 comment · 1 week ago

More From ANIMATIONWorld:

Next Post	Previous Post
← 'Puppy Dog Pals' Returns with Cute New Pets and Silly, Fun Adventures	The Absurd, Surreal, Metaphysical Creation of a No-Budget Animated Feature →

Related Content

[Paramount+ Announces 'Big Nate' Voice Cast](#)

[Maluma Joins Disney's 'Encanto' Voice Cast](#)

[Cartoonito's 'Naked Mole Rat Gets Dressed: The Underground Rock Experience' Voice Cast Revealed](#)

[DC's 'Catwoman: Hunted' Anime Feature Snags Badass Female Voice Cast](#)

[Idris Elba to Voice Knuckles the Echidna in 'Sonic the Hedgehog 2'](#)

[Critical Role Drops 'The Legend of Vox Machina' Voice Cast Featurette](#)



ALSO ON ANIMATION WORLD NETWORK



20th Century Studios Drops 'The Bob's ...

6 days ago · 2 comments

Bob, Linda, Tina, Gene, and Louise expand their comedic horizons - and ...



Mamoru Hosada's 'Belle' Coming to

3 months ago · 1 comment

GKIDS will release the highly acclaimed Studio Chizu animated feature ...



Unity to Acquire Weta Digital's Tools and ...

2 months ago · 1 comment

Deal calls for purchase of leading VFX studio's proprietary software ...

0 Comments

Animation World Network

Disqus' Privacy Policy

Login

Favorite

Tweet

Share

Sort by Best



Start the discussion...

LOG IN WITH



OR SIGN UP WITH DISQUS



Name

Email

Password

- I agree to Disqus' [Terms of Service](#)
- I agree to Disqus' processing of email and IP address, and the use of cookies, to facilitate my authentication and posting of comments, explained further in the [Privacy Policy](#)
- I agree to additional processing of my information, including first and third party cookies, for personalized content and advertising as outlined in our [Data Sharing Policy](#)
- I'd rather post as a guest



Be the first to comment.

Subscribe

Add Disqus to your site

Do Not Sell My Data

DISQUS

Elsewhere on AWN



'Sing 2': Getting Ready for the Big Time



Jonas Poher Rasmussen Talks 'Flee'



'Dragons: The Nine Realms': A Modern-Day Twist on the Boy-Meets-Dragon Tale



Practical and Digital Effects Expertly Join Forces on 'Dune'



It's No Day at the Beach for Weta Digital on 'Eternals'



'Encanto' Pushes Animation Boundaries While Celebrating the Fundamentals of Family

Animation World Network

[Contact Us](#) | [About Us](#) | [Terms Of Service](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Media Kit](#)

More Animation World Network Sites

[AWNtv.com: AWN Television](#) | [Videos](#) | [Channels](#) | [Categories](#) | [Playlists](#) | [Submit Your Films](#)

[AIDB.com: Animation Industry Database](#) | [Production Companies](#) | [VFX Houses](#) | [Schools](#)

© 2017 AWN, Inc. AWN.com - Part of the Animation World Network - 13300 Victory Blvd, Suite 365 Van Nuys, CA 91401



