>> From WXXI News, it's 1370 Connection. [Background music] I'm Bob Smith, I'm with Caroline Werner Gannett Visionaries in Motion Series of lectures and presentations continues at RIT's Webb Auditorium this evening at eight. You're going to meet the man--you're about to meet right now, here in 1370 Connection. My guest of this hour is cartoonist, illustrator Charles Burns. He may be best known for his contributions to the RAW Comics magazine and two of his books, "Big Baby" and "Hard-Boiled Detective," published by RAW books, and his graphic novel "Black Hole." Black--he's actually known for a lot more whether you know it's his work or not. You're going to find out as he joins me right now. Great to have you with us today. Welcome.

>> Thanks.

>> Now, the graphic novel, I want to talk about that because that's become a real literary form along sides the prose, text-only novel, is that because weird generation that kind of grew up with Marvel Comics which told short stories in graphic form with real character development, it was a lot more than your--your typical comic book of our parents' time?

>> I'm--I mean, I don't know. I grew up reading what was available and that included mainstream comics. Marvel Comics, DC Comics, so, mainstream superhero comics. At a certain point, I was--I grew to an age where I just wasn't interested in reading another superhero comic and luckily, I discovered underground comics which dealt with sex and drugs and the things that I was starting to becoming interested in and you know, that age in my life, and--

>> I remember "Fritz the Cat,"

>> Okay, that was by Robert Crumb.

>> Yup.

>> One of my heroes. He created the--he was, he was the creator of Zap Comix. He did the famous "Keep on Truckin," the--you still--you still see those little "Keep on Truckin" mud--mud flaps out there in on trucks. Anyway, it was those underground comics that were really the first--the first comics that were not--not created only for only as a--as a means of commercial, I don't know how to explain it. The first really personal comics that were created by artist that were--that really just wanted to tell their own story and weren't interested in--in I don't know, creating a love comic or a superhero comic, or a something that would fit into a genre.

>> Or a funny animal comic.

>> Or a funny animal comic, exactly.

>> Yeah. I mean not--not to demean Mickey Mouse I mean--

>> No.

>> Mickey Mouse had his own value and continues to have value today apart from a tens of billions of dollars a year he made possible.

>> Right.

>> For the Disney-ABC organization but leaving that as aside for the moment though, the graphic novel telling a story, I wonder how much it owes to--and I mentioned Marvel Comics and Stan Lee, not just because they're still around and they're still doing things that--that have a lot of influence on both live-action film and at cartoons today, but they did something that you hadn't seen before, that is to create characters not only with momentary problems to solve like Mickey Mouse had to deal with Peg Leg Pete and all that, but we're talking about a guy like the character of Peter Parker slash Spiderman, he was somebody with continuing angst with problems in his relationship, with problems figuring out who he was , he was having an identity crisis and all that, I got to tell you college students who were watching and reading that in the 60s really related to it and saw it as something similar to a real-life short story. And I wonder if that kind of percolated in and helped pollinate the graphic novel in some way because it was a real story about a real grown-up person dealing with grown-up problems.

>> Yeah, I think--I think I probably had some--some kind of influence. I know that that was something that I read and--and it's funny, you were speaking about Spiderman or Peter Parker. I remember reading that and I guess in my mind, I was reading it 'cause it was a superhero comic and there was a guy, you know, dressed up in a costume beating up--beating up criminals. But in reality, I think I probably preferred the story of Peter Parker which is much more like a tradition--like a romance comic. It was like a--it was like a--a story about this kid who's trying to, you know, take care of his ailing aunt. He's trying--he's got a girlfriend that already--he's trying to maintain a girlfriend. All those things, those were--those were things that I wasn't supposed to like but I ended up reading those stories and responding to that part of the story.

>> And Peter Parker eventually grows up, he marries Mary Jane, and lo and behold, he's got family problems to deal with--

>> I--I never--I never got that far. That's even--I--I you know, I read up 'till--I'm trying to think of the year, probably, 1968-69 or something like that.

>> Yeah, I mean--

>> So I don't--I don't know what happened to Peter Parker.

>> He grows up further and he's had to get a dealing of this phase of his existence with adult problems of trying to reconcile a family, a career, and his rather unusual hobby of crime fighting.

>> That's fine.

>> All at once, I mean, this is a guy who really has all the problems we have and then some, magnified.

>> Yeah, you--you were talking about graphic novels before. I think--I think the idea of--or the interesting graphic novels recently just has to do with the fact that there are enough interesting authors that have been working long enough to put together these stories. There was an original wave of, I think, the term graphic novels came out, I remember hearing the first time when Art Speigelman's Maus came out. There was a couple of other books. There was Watchmen, Frank Miller's The Dark Knight which was a story--a kind of a new version of Batman

and a darker, grittier version of Batman. And those books came out and people start talking about this thing called the "graphic novel," a longer, more serious book in comic form. And at that point, there just weren't enough other artists or authors that were working in that form to kind of create new books and fill, you know, fill the bookshelves with graphic novels. So the promise of that, there's the promise of this kind of new form early on and it took a while for enough artists to kind of, to create good interesting stories.

>> Is it harder for it to take off simply, because you got to be both talented as a story teller, as a creator of character like a novelist, and talented as an illustrator, turning those images that you put on the page into something tangible and visible that you're going to be seeing with more than your mindset. You're going to be--you're going to have two talents going at once. So I wonder if that, in a way, does it limit the genre but it limits the number of people who could really get a chance to do it well?

>> Well, you do--you have to use both those skills exactly. You need--it's also something that's incredibly time-consuming when you're writing prose, you can--you can sit at the typewriter and write in real time. If you're drawing a story and you're--depending on how intricate your style is, it takes a long time to create a page of artwork. And as you're saying, ideally, it's a perfect combination of writing and drawing where those two things meld together where if you take away the words, you're not going to understand the pictures. If you take the pictures away, you're not going to understand the words. It's really combining those two forms of when they work best.

>> Is the closest thing to it, what a lot of moviemakers do when they story board?

>> I think there is the--I've done an animated film and there is a feel--there seems to be a connection there. I mean I've heard people say, "Oh great, comics are, you know, this kind of--they're like a story board." I don't think they really are in reality. I think--I think when they work, they--they're a very unique form. They're not prose. They're not a movie. They're not photography. They're not illustration. They are a combination of words and pictures that work together.

>> It's kind of a place though to me, just as a reader, that it sort of crosses a certain frontier and the person who's creating it really ought to be called instead of an illustrator, author. I mean, you're authoring it--

>> Yes.

>> Rather than just illustrating it. It's literature, and it's not just comic art. It's something else. It's in a way because it does more and it fulfills a greater ambition. It's more like a novel than anything else. It just happens to be a novel that's all partly pictures and partly in words so I wonder if did--would you say that maybe what you're doing is authoring more than anything else?

>> I don't put a label on it but I mean, that's a fair--it's a pretty good description of it. It's telling a story, that's the main--the main function is telling a story and in my case, I'm doing it in comic form.

>> Why comic form incidentally rather just using text? What is it about that comic form, about that illustrated form that gives you that ability to do something but you could do just from the text?

>> For me--for me, it's really just the way I think. And I think it has to do with the fact that I grew up looking at comics and thinking about comics. The few occasions that I've sat and tried to write prose, I failed miserably. I just--I don't have the skills to pull that off. On the other hand, I have the skills to combine images and narrative and dialogue and put that together, assemble those things together into a story.

>> Its tough to create a visual image of the character just in words. So for starters, do that--does that give you a head start by being able to create an image that you instantly get a sense of who that character is, a little bit about the visual mannerism?

>> It's a set of tools. It's a unique set of tools. For example, in the past, I primarily worked in black and white. That was out of choice but recently I've been working on color. And working in color, I suddenly have another set of tools that I hadn't really worked with before. I can show--with color, I can show things that I don't have to describe. I can show a pink bread spread. And the next time, you see that pink bread spread in another situation. You don't have to have that described to you. There it is. It's an object.

>> Or you can show somebody's complexion and tell a lot about that person, what about that individual.

>> Exactly, sure, sure.

>> Strong and vigorous or kind of sickly or however.

>> Exactly, right.

>> And the visual look of the person whether that person is gone or really filled out.

>> Right. Well, I had a character in my recent book where the father is starting to look a little yellow by the end of story. So we know that he's got cancer and starting to, you know, he's starting to have some--some health issues. So yeah, I can show that. I don't have to explain--you can see him not looking so good and having a yellow complexion. So yeah, there's--there's things that are--there are tools that you can use.

>> Or if you make him reddy, you could cure him basically by making him reddy or suggest at the same time that maybe he's been making too many visits to the local bar.

>> There you go, exactly.

>> And you can plump him up or make him thin or do anything you want to with him.

>> Right.

>> And you get and--one picture, it will tell a thousand words.

>> Exactly. For example, I have a character who--who ages throughout my story. I've got different volumes that are coming out. And I always make sure or I make sure that even though he's changing, he has one--he has a scar on his eyebrow. So you know that--you'll instantly see this little scar, you'll know it's him. Even though he's starting to, you know, his hairstyle changes. He starts filling out ages.

>> Maybe the hair gets a little grayer, a little thinner.

>> Yeah, so I need some little--some little symbol, some little thing that you'll--you're going to instantly know that that's him.

>> And it's him only, he's getting older.

>> Exactly.

>> Time is marching on so to speak. Well, is it something incidentally that there is a clear line of demarcation where comic book becomes graphic novel, and where is that line of demarcation or it's just one of things that you know it when you see it, you know it when you're there?

>> A graphic novel is just a term used to define a big comic book as far as I'm concerned or yeah, a collected comic. It's just--it's a way of describing what I used to do. You know, I used to say, "Well, I do comics. Well, they're for adults." And then suddenly someone thinks of some kind of x-rated comic. I really didn't have a term--it functions as way of describing a collected book of comics I guess.

>> But it's not Robert Crumb.

>> I mean, you can--its just--

>> Could be but could not--

>> It could--I mean Robert Crumb just did recently did the Book of Genesis, did his version of that and--

>> I love to see that.

>> Well, a lot of people love seeing it. It sold very well, and did very well, so I guess that's a graphic novel. I don't know.

>> Yeah, it's certainly would be and of course, in a lot of different levels too. But is it something that when itself best to certain kinds of characters and certain kinds of plot lines, I mean, are there certain things that just work best as a graphic novel, and others that would work best in pure text prose?

>> I don't think--I mean, I think it really has to do with the author. It depends--it depends on who's telling the story. I think that you can tell any story, whatsoever. It's the skills--skill of the author. You name it.

>> What kind of--of story do you like to tell best? Is there anything that really would describe in a nutshell the kind of story that you love to work with?

>> God. [Laughs] Obviously, I don't have a something in a nutshell--

>> Yeah, 'cause you got--you got all over the place.

>> I tend--I tend to return to a lot of pretty dark themes in my work I guess. With Black Hole, we've got a story where a group of teenagers are afflicted with this plague, a team plague that manifests itself in different ways. So the idea of this disease that's--that in a way is a metaphor for adolescence. So, a lot of my stories deal with transformation, physical transformation. There's a certain kind of horrific element to a lot of my stories but I'm not--I couldn't narrow it down to a nutshell description.

>> That's interesting as well because that's another thing that you may be--have in common with Stan Lee. [Laughter] That that kind of story line as a continuing story line for either a character or a group of characters, he likes to do that kind of thing too. I wonder if this weds itself particularly, to that--to that kind of depiction, that ind of [inaudible]--

>> I have actually drawn pictures of Peter Parker and his friends with some diseases but I don't think that Marvel Comics would appreciate that.

>> Oh, yeah, that--in other words, you--you're not going to try to poach a copyrighted character?

>> No, no, no, that's not going to happen.

>> Yeah, well, there was a guy--

>> These are my personal notebooks that nobody else can--

>> As this thing--there was a guy whose name escapes me right now, who had a little bit of really nasty fun with the Disney characters--

>> Sure, sure.

>> --a while back. I've sure you know that what I'm talking about who--

>> Yes.

>> Depicted Mickey Mouse with a Joint, among other things.

>> Among other things, exactly.

>> Yeah, among other things and depicted all of the beloved Disney characters in all sorts of strange adult pursuits.

>> Right.

>> And I guess they came down on it hard.

>> Disney is very careful about protecting their characters, and they did. Yes.

>> Yeah, they will protective them to the point of well, engaging a lot of lawyers there. So, is this art form litigious at all or have you got the same kind of freedom that you would with any literary form?

>> Ah, I mean hopefully, it's the same freedom of any literary form there. I mean if you--if you're stealing outright, I guess that's usually the--usually a problem. I'd mentioned Art Spiegelman's Maus, I was over in a--at a festival in France recently, and there was a small publisher so that did a parody of Maus called "The Cats," where they replaced all of the--they used the actual book and just replaced all of the mouse heads with the cat heads. And, yes, so that was--

>> And that would make no sense whatsoever.

>> It all made Disney's--

>> [Inaudible] Art Speigelman's narrative, really.

>> Well, I think it would, yeah. I mean can explain what their motivations where as a parody or, I'm not sure. Anyway, they--there was a legal action taken then and the book is no more.

>> And I can understand because again, it really made no sense of the Spiegelman universe but even leaving that aside, I often found it fascinating that the way he shows all of the animals to portray certain characters, and all Americans ended up as dogs for some reason. [Laughter] Never figured that--I often meant to ask him that and I had a chance to interview him one time. And I asked him about that, he just basically said to me if my memory serves me correctly, that, "Dogs seemed to be a good animal to describe an American." I don't what that meant.

>> Yeah. He's--I mean, he's discussed that law as far as, you know, if you're a Polish, you are a pig. I mean a lot of Poles were not too happy about being depicted that way. I remember a discussion--his wife is French and you know, "Oh, okay, you'll be the depicted as a frog." And she said, "Wait, wait, you know, I could--"

>> No, he turned her into another mouse.

>> I converted to Judaism so, you know, that doesn't seem fair. I think she knows.

>> She got to be a very attractive looking mouse.

>> And there you go, of course.

>> And I think the dogs, if they were significant in anyway, we're just suppose to be well, we're kind of nice, amiable, friendly, slobbering puppies and that's the average American.

>> You'll have--

>> An amiable slobbering puppy who [inaudible] well and maybe a little clumsy.

>> You'll have to--you have to discuss that with Art.

>> Yeah. I mean, that--that was as close as he came. That was as close as he came in discussing it, which is kind of going along that line there. I'll take amiable slobbering puppy. I don't mind that. That's a nice image to carry with us. At the same time, there's one other thing I wonder about. When we're dealing with this kind of art form--I mentioned story board for a reason too. Is it pretty close to getting toward a cinematic art form in which, the image of a story board represents a scene--

>> Right.

>> I mean, are these things that can easily be translated to--?

>> For me, I don't--again, I have worked in film and I worked in a fairly short animated film, maybe 15 minutes. It was part of a feature length collection. And one thing that was interesting is that the producers wanted us--wanted all the different artists that were involved to be involved in every stage. So I started out writing a rough screenplay. I did the story boarding and everything felt fairly normal for me. I was drawing--I was drawing an image for the scene. I was writing down narrative that felt pretty close to comics. But the next stage which is called an "animatic" where you do a very rough, rough animated version, timed-out version of the movie on film or in video, that was when I suddenly was out of my realm and the--and the difference is, is that you're dealing with it a whole other set of tools. You're dealing with--you're dealing with something that happens in time, whereas in comics or--in comics, you're sitting and you're reading a page and--and the way your brain is functioning, it's just very different than sitting in theater and watching something unfold on the screen in front of you. With comics, you can turn the page back. You can skip ahead, skip back. Your brain--you're looking at--you're looking at a set of images on both pages and how those images relay to each other. There is just--there is just a different--you're taking in the--the images in a very, very different way.

>> Did you have to actually create rough animation in the way that they traditionally did it in the days before CGI when they would just have to make a drawing, then another drawing?

>> No--

>> The next frame that's only a very little bit different from the one before and on and on and on until you get some fluid motion going?

>> No, no, I would--that would never--I never would have made it through. No, I was working with an animation studio and they actually made--it was a 3D computer programming that they were using. So they literally built the--built the characters in 3D on their--on their little computers based on my designs, so yeah. And then proceeded to animate them and I had--had to act out all the characters and then tell them how to make those characters move.

>> Did you have to voice them?

>> No, I had--no, that would have been bad too. This was a French production so, I never would have been [inaudible] me or get through the French but I did--I did interview the various actors and actresses that were--that were used as voices.

>> 'Cause I was trying to imagine doing it the way Mike Judge did Beavis and Butt-head or I guess, he's about to do it again.

>> I don't--yeah, I don't know.

>> He's coming back with more Beavis and Butt-head now after I guess, about 10 or 15 year break, and I was trying to imagine what it would be like to not only animate the character but voice that character and personify a character. Why he'd want to be either Beavis or Butt-head, I don't know, but he did.

>> The first--on the very, very first rough go through, yeah, I used my voice to--for the pacing and everything but yeah, we definitely needed real actors and actresses after that.

>> Uh-hmm, and the--I don't know, what's your thought 'cause I guess you did some things if I'm not mistaken for an MTV series, Liquid TV.

>> Right, you mentioned Beavis and Butt-head so--

>> Yeah, that--that also premiered in Liquid TV.

>> Right. So yeah, there were--that came out the same time. This was--this is actually a live-action piece based on a character whom I called "Dogboy." And it was--it was done by a--it was filmed by--filmed and directed by a British director. And it was--we did ten different short segments that appeared on--it was called "Liquid Television" that appeared. It was half an hour. I was primarily an animated program that was called "Liquid Television" on MTV. So ours was--I think ours was the only live action piece.

>> And then he came up with Beavis and Butt-head--

>> Right.

>> And now, he's coming back for an encore and in between, he did King of the Hill, which was kind of--I don't know, it was kind of a conventional animated sitcom.

>> Right.

>> Which is a whole--could you ever see yourself doing something like King of the Hill?

>> No. [Laughter] Quick answer, no. I mean [inaudible]--I mean, people have asked me about--I mean, I enjoy doing the animated movie that I did. It was--it was really done under ideal circumstances. It was done with a great--really great producers that really wanted my, you know, they--it wasn't--it wasn't only-- they weren't only thinking about it as a commercial enterprise. They really wanted that each--each artist to get their vision up on the screen. So that was--that seemed really ideal to me. On the other hand, I also realized that I'm--I'm not that great working in a collaborative medium. The great thing about comics is that you can just about anywhere you are, you can sit down with a piece of paper, pen, and you--you have control of--over the final product. You--you write, you draw it, you can do--you can really, really control every aspect of it, whereas with the movies or film, you're really relying on other people. You're relying on a voice of the character to define who they are.

You're relying on animators. You're relying on so many things. It's also incredibly expensive to--

>> If you're lucky, you get a Dan Castellaneta to do with the whole--voice of Homer Simpson and it's magic. [Laughter] If you're not, oh, well.

>> There you go.

>> And we'll talk more about that with Charles Burns who is the latest speaker of the Visionaries in Motion series at RIT. He'll be speaking at Webb Auditorium on the RIT campus this evening this evening at 8, and he's with us now on 1370 Connections. I'm Bob Smith. We take a short break. We're back in a moment.

[Music]

>> 1370 Connection continues at WXXI, Charles Burns, the man best known for his contribution to the art of the graphic novel is here with us right now. He is speaking as the latest of the series of the Visionaries in Motion lecture series at Caroline Werner Gannett Project at RIT's Webb Auditorium this evening at 8. He's here with us right now on 1370 Connection. I want to find out if I can and so [inaudible] you're invited to ask questions that you may have on your mind at 263 WXXI, 2639994. Lines are open for you right now. Looking the graphic novel, first of all, [inaudible] a lot ways to where maybe inspired by film noir.

>> Huh, I mean, I know that I've--I've--well, visually, I've been inspired by film noir in my works, I don't know whether I--I don't know whether that was--be kind of a general statement I could make about--about the--about graphic novels in general. But I mean, I--that certainly, I don't know why I'm attracted. I mean, I've always been attracted to black and white. I was attracted to comics that were influenced by film noir as well. So a lot of comics from the late 40s and the 50s, I've kind of gravitated to that--the look of those comics, imitated those from my, you know, in my earlier work. So there was--that's an element in my work but I couldn't generalize it.

>> But film noir does have a resonance for you?

>> Yup.

>> Quentin Tarantino, a lot of people say that he's translating graphic novels and the graphic novel style, at least in his work over the last 15 or 17 years from Pulp Fiction on to live-action cinema. Is there a tie there and what do you think of--first of all, works like Pulp Fiction and then fast forward to some of his later stuff, either the Grindhouse film or parts 1 and 2, and now, we here there's going to be a part 3 of it. I don't know how he's going to do it of Kill Bill.

>> I--to be honest, I haven't paid that much attention to Quentin Tarantino. I'd--I like Pulp Fiction, good enough. I mean, there was--there were certain points that certainly made me wince and my wife has to leave the room.

>> What made you wince in it?

>> I guess the part--the parts--I guess the things that make me wince are not kind of typically spooky, horrific things but more of psychological things. I don't know whether I can recall exactly the scene but I don't know. When--when

bad to torture is going to be done, I guess I--I tend to have a visceral reaction to that.

>> Is that what may have turned you off, if anything turned you off to Kill Bill parts 1 and 2, which they very well be one of the most graphically violent films I've certainly ever seen.

>> I don't--I don't mind--I don't--a lot of graphic violence can be almost comical. I don't know. That's not that per se. I did--I remember watching it, and I can't tell you a lot about it. I can't remember that much about it, so it didn't really stay with me that well.

>> But I couldn't help but think to myself, first of all, it was graphically violent in every sense of the word. It had a kind of stylized aspect to it, and at the end of it, of course, when it seemed to resolve itself completely, then I heard recently that there's going to be perhaps a Kill Bill part 3, and I don't know how you do that.

>> I don't know.

>> Bill's been killed. [Laughter] So how--so how do you do--if Bill has been killed, how do you kill Bill?

>> I don't know.

>> Die a thousand deaths? [Laughs] I don't know, death of a thousand cuts? I don't know how you do that but he certainly talks about another illustrator, where everybody probably knows his work pretty well, maybe better than everybody since Walt Disney, is Matt Groening?

>> Right.

>> Your thoughts about him, what you know about him, what you think about what he's done over the years up to and including 500 episodes and counting of The Simpsons.

>> Yeah, well, I met Matt--Matt Groening in college. We both went to the Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington. We we're there along with Lynda Barry who was another cartoonist.

>> Oh, I have the pleasure of meeting not too long ago. I think a few years ago when she came here.

>> All right. So we just happen to be there at the same time. I met Matt, he was working--I was working in the school newspaper doing comic strip and laying out ads for the paper, and Matt was a writer and an editor while I was there. So, that's how I met him, and he had--he did a few little sketches and drawings occasionally but I never thought of him as a cartoonist per se. But I was really aware of him as a writer and he had an incredible sense of humor at that point. We did a parody of one of the local papers while we were there and it was--I can still pull it out and laugh at some of his parodies. He did a parody of the local television stations at the TV Guide, and it's hilarious. Matt went on to start his--one of his--one of the first kind of syndicated weekly comic strips Life in Hell, and along with Lynda Barry, Lynda Barry had the syndicated strip, and Matt, those are the two of the first kind of very successful weekly strips.

And based on that alone just on his Life on Hell strips, he was incredibly successful early on. And I remember--yeah, I guess, I guess I probably saw the first episode or the first Simpsons that was on the Tracey Ullman Show. It was on a little--it was like a little--I don't know, it was incredibly short and a much cruder version. That was maybe like just a little--it was not--it wasn't a full program, it's just a little--

>> Yeah, three-minute interstitial.

>> Yeah.

>> Somebody at FOX Television, had a genius moment when they said, "I wonder if he can make a series out of this."

>> Well, I think the reason that they said--my memory and I could be wrong in this, my memory is that why the Simpsons are the Simpsons is that he did not want to use his Life in Hell character, so he created a whole separate family as a new set of characters. So he would--so he'd be able to maintain copyright control of his Life in Hell characters.

>> And so, he ends up creating characters who make life hell for everybody around them.

>> There you go.

>> [Luaghs] And go [inaudible] through life as well. 263 WXXI, we're talking with Charles Burns. We're going to have to talk with Sam, checking in on the line. Hi Sam, you're on the air, welcome.

>> Hi, how are you guys?

>> We're doing great.

>> Good.

>> I would like to ask your guest, how he would compare what's become known as graphic novels in an American sense as to graphic novels which we always called anime comic books, which originally started--I don't know if he remembers, they were in a various--the books themselves were very small comics and they were-- they were in Japanese. They didn't start, I think, producing them in America until I think in a company out of, I think, South Carolina in [inaudible], you might be familiar with, started dubbing tapes, Bubblegum Crisis, Bubblegum Crash series, and stuff like that, so, I've always been a comic fan but I was always fascinated by the cultish anime, that kind of hit America and in the well, I kind of grabbed, held on to it in mid to late 80s. I would--how did--how would he compare the Americana as compared to the Japanese--Japanese comics and I don't mean, the VIZ stuff that like Naruto, I mean real graphic novels that come out of Japan better, the real adult graphic novelty as he was explaining that he is an adult graphic artist, I mean author, an illustrator. Any comment on it or--

>> Well, well sure yeah, with my understanding in it, and I've--and I was aware of Japanese comics before they were-before they were really imported here. There are few books that came out that talk about the history of Japanese comics so, I was aware of them fairly early on. I'd actually go to a--when I lived in

Seattle, I would go to Japanese stores that would carry the imported--imported Japanese comics. I think the difference, the primary difference between the Japanese--the Japanese comics and the American style is really just a different kind of tradition. In Japan, there'd be huge, huge weekly comics that would sell up to a million copies, over a million copies per week, and they were really--they were really design as a consumer product the same way, you know, a weekly television show would be. You'd have serialized comics, some good, some bad, and they were really looked at as this kind of something I'd be disposed of it. It wasn't something that was held onto. The very popular characters would eventually be collected into--collected into books and republished, but it was primarily just a source of entertainment if you're sitting on the subway for half an hour, you would read, read a manga, you know, or there's these big--these giant comics that you would be turning the pages very, very quickly. So, that--I think that's one difference, the other difference is that--that they really--there was more of a--there was a different kind of audience too. There were--there were very specific comics that were created for children. There were comics created for young married women. There were like erotic comics that were created for women. There were adult comics for men. There were baseball comics. There were--comics about golf, if you are interested in golf--

>> Right.

>> --you could read a entire comic about golf.

>> Yes, a complete array of a selection. I'm also curious as to one thing that I noticed. I'd stop reading manga a while ago just due to the cost of it all. I mean, waiting each month for that next volume to get, you know, to go to a real comic store and get those stuff. You had to wait like every month for it to come in, put your name on a list because they would only import so many, and then you know, then you had to start another series because you can't wait a whole month for that so, you got like several series but you know, going at once, and then it was like, "All right, this just drives me nuts," so, then you start hitting up the local stores where like you're getting a lot like VIZ, it's like started buying up a lot of copyrighted stuff then, then now it's pretty much a mass media thing. But one thing I found that was interesting was that as the--we call the Japanimation, it's--before it was called anime.

>> Sure.

>> I found it interesting that the characters, I don't know if maybe you can comment on--on the artists, the way they over embellished certain features of men and women, and I'm not talking about like the like adult, adult stuff--

>> Yeah.

>> I don't know if like, you know, like--

>> Are you talking about those big eyes? Is that what you're talking about?

>> Yeah.

>> Because it's all stylized right.

>> When they draw their characters, I eventually thought, I said maybe there are some sort of a fascination with the certain American features which like the

blue eyes were--were very popular in--in, like anime, certain features that as a person that lived in Asia, Asian women don't have but in their comic books were well endowed with or colors of hairs that is not common over in Asia.

>> Not really common naturally in America either.

>> Yeah, yes, sir. And so--I mean, there's sort of--does the artist or your guest feel that there is some sort of maybe a correlation of or of like some sort psychosocial thing going on there as far as like with, you know, between something that Asian women don't have that maybe certain artist or the--the artist of that world might find that they import that, that America as in type of fit--those features in their artwork?

>> Pale, blond, blue eyed, angular, whatever you want to say?

>> Yeah, I don't know. I know that there are a set of--there are a set of, I don't know, styles that are very prevalent in Japanese comics. I think that the big eyes came--came from some of the very early Japanese cartoonists who were looking at very early American comics, and imitating those big eyes that they saw on the screen of, you know, of Walt Disney comics and things like that. There are some very odd--there is--there is odd things that are--that you don't find in any other countries of, I don't know, some symbols of--if someone it's getting upset, a big vain pops out on someone's forehead. If they are crying, a big bunch of--a big balloon of snot comes out someone's nose. [Laughter]. So there's things like that that are very unique to Japanese comics and they--and they, you know, they're just--they are symbols that are--that are--I don't know.

>> Hey, thanks, thanks very much Sam, for checking in. That--that makes me wonder, come to think of it when you--talking about the [inaudible] of it. I mean, it goes to an extreme when you're talking about big eyes. I mean, you'll look at a Matt Groening character has eyes that pop out just like they have protruding mouths and teeth and the rested, weak chins, but it a--but it's a sort of theatricalization to the extreme. And of course, Walt Disney's characters, most of them like Mickey and Donald have big eyes.

>> Right, right, exactly.

>> And unusually big eyes, in fact, even for the size of the character. So maybe they're--but he mentioned something else about--Sam did just before we go to the next color about the influence of the anime. I've--every ones in a while, dipped in with the Cartoon Network, which I've got to admit, I mostly tune into to watch the classic Warner Brothers--

>> Uh-hmm

>> --comics that they have. Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, Elmer, and all the rest, and Road Runner, and Wile E. Coyote, I figured, pretty prominently in every day's production. But they also have a lot modern cartoons that look a lot like they're borrowing a lot pages from anime, and even a lot of pages from the graphic novels. So is it moving over in--into the cartoon realm into some of the adventure stories that a lot of their day time and night time programming seem to like to tell.

>> I have to confess that I--that's just a world I don't know much--I don't know much about. I mean, my daughters when they were younger were watching the kind

of mainstream movies that were coming out. So I'd kind of be walking through the room but it's not--it's not something that I keep up with. I'd--I'd--it's not something I'd be able to talk about with much authority.

>> Looking at their schedule Daffy and Yosemite Sam are a lot funnier and more entertaining, and my personal opinion, that's just mine. 263 WXXI, we've got Keith on the line. Hi, Keith, you're on the air.

>> Robert, how you doing today?

>> Doing great, all right.

>> I got a comment, maybe it might be attributed to, programs like The Simpsons and South Pack--South Park, I don't normally look at those as series because the characters have the ability not to get older, not to change, you could put the absurd and ridiculous and make a very interesting show, where a television program like Two and a Half Men when it first came out, it was about two brothers and a little kid. Well, it's still Two and a Half Men but now this--the half man is a young adult.

>> Yeah, he's reached at least three quarters size, hasn't he?

>> Right, well, that's more of a series. Again, that's just the way I look at it. I do enjoy The Simpsons but I think what makes The Simpsons good, and with South Park is, you know, making--make a whole episode on the absurd and have it be somewhat relevant to today and make it funny whereas some of other shows are little bit more difficult to do that. Big Bang Theory, which I, I watch, I think it's very enjoyable, very well, very well written, and the characters are growing but it's going to get to the point where "Okay, they're going to get married. Are they going to have children?" That becomes more of a series whereas The Simpsons was to me, well, they'll stay as a show but that's just semantic.

>> Well that's--

>> The other thing too is--

>> That's interesting. You know, that's interesting in that you've licked up a lot of these genres and seeing how they cross-pollinate and looked at the sitcom genre. Animated versus non-animated and--and, and time is frozen for The Simpsons. Bart will always be in fourth grade. Lisa will always be in third grade even though she say's like she's about 23. And Homer Simpson will always be in his--in his late 30s and stuck in a dead-end job that he is doing just to keep a [inaudible] over his head. And you get the sense that time freezes for these folks, even as it moves on for everybody even around them. You wonder, I mean, it's another--it's another world completely but at the same time, there are some of the sitcoms in live-action starting to get to look more like cartoons. I'd rather even go to get a degree to which Charlie Sheen seems to be behaving like he is a cartoon. But--but that's another story entirely, but I guess, is life imitating art or art [laughs] imitating life or what?

>> Got me.

>> Is there--

>> Sorry.

>> Yeah I know. Is--is there something that you can use creatively in all of that too and have a little fun with?

>> Yeah, I don't know. I mean, I think--I think so many--I think so many comics even the--you know, like the classic comics really were based on a set of characters that did not age. That was pretty--that was--that were not really based on aging so you add a serialized comics on newspaper. That--yes, Blondie and Dagwood. Blondie is always going to be at certain age. Dagwood is always going to be at certain age. I think, his kids got a little older actually, but then they--then kind of--

>> They froze as teenagers.

>> Yeah, I think they started out as kids and they froze as teenagers. But generally speaking, you have a set of characters that, you know, that--that stay frozen in time. There were a few--there was a few--there's a--a series called Gasoline Alley where the kid was found on a door stoop way back when and grew up to be a father and had children.

>> He's an old retiree now. I think they--did they still have that--that strip? I think they do.

>> I couldn't tell you but I--but I--I know that's one of the few cases where you got a--

>> He's an old retiree. Now, he's collecting social security. [Laughter] And then, they've had a couple of generations go along since then.

>> Right.

>> But--yeah. That doesn't happen much. Time does stand still.

>> That tends to be the case.

>> Bugs Bunny is still who he was in 1940.

>> That's true.

>> Daffy Duck is still who he was in 1950. Mickey Mouse, in some respects, is still who he was in 1928. Oh, he's eyes are a little bit different. He have--his eyes have pupils and--and whites in them now but other than that, he--he's still what he was in 1928. He's been the same for 83, going on 84 years, and still--and still going on. But that's--it's world of where time is kind of out of time. It's separated from time. Does that give you possibilities that maybe somebody working in regular forms doesn't have?

>> Yeah. I--I don't know. I don't know if something is unique--unique to comics. I think it's primarily just kind of keeping--keeping a good thing going in a lot of cases. If you've got--if you got a successful set of characters and you--and you--and you're happy with them and they've, you know, they--you've worked in--worked out their characters, I think that, you know, I think that's--that's usually the case that you stick with those characters.

>> And you don't have to deal with the advancing age of the character or the performer.

>> I mean, I've been--I've been in situations where, for example, I've got a--I've got a character El Borbah that was this kind of big Mexican wrestler who was--who was also a detective, and I did that very early in the--when I was starting out doing comics. And--and I--I created the character and drew the character and enjoyed the stories when I--when I wrote them. But at a certain point, I moved on. I was ready to move on. I've said all I had to say using this character and I still occasionally have people come up to me and say, "So, are you ever going to do anymore El Borbah character--El Borbah stories?" And I guess if they presented themselves or had the kind of need to do that, I--I would. But for me, it's a--it's a situation where I've--I've created a character at a certain time and they kind of served their purpose and I moved on to--to another story, a different kind of story.

>> X'ed Out, where is it going?

>> That's what everybody wants to know who--who read the--read that book and was left with his cliffhanger. The--that the second book which is called "The Hive" is coming out on October. So, I've planned a series of three books that are in a way, they are self-contained but in a way, they're--they're certainly can tell a complete story once they're all put together. And the format's based off of a French-Belgian format of--they're called albums over there but it's a--it's a style of--it's a size and a format of comics that--that--that Tintin comics were--were published as. And I--and I've based my comic on--on that size and format. So, I'm working on the third and final edition, and it'll tell--tell a--all the mysteries that will be solved.

>> So, stay tuned.

>> Stay tuned, exactly.

>> Charles Burns, thank you very much. [Background music] I wish we have more time to chat but unfortunately, we can only say thank you right now. And of course, remind you, if you want to hear more, I'm sure you do. You go to RIT's Webb Auditorium this evening at 8 o'clock as Charles Burns will be the latest of the series of presenters in the Visionaries in Motion series, and we thank you very much for being with us at this hour.

>> Oh, thanks.

>> You're on 1370 Connections from WXXI AM and FM-HD2, Rochester. I'm Bob Smith. It's been a pleasure.

[Music]