



## Ricky Gervais Gets Animated

Wildbrain's Marge Dean describes the making of *The Ricky Gervais Show*.

By [Bill Desowitz](#) | Tuesday, March 23, 2010 at 2:03 pm

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Ricky Gervais looks like a cross between Fred Flintstone and Barney Rubble. Courtesy of Stephen Merchant, Ricky Gervais, Karl Pilkington and HBO.

Ricky Gervais' record-breaking podcasts have been turned into an animated series on HBO (Friday nights, 9:00-9:30 pm), animated by Wildbrain and produced by Media Rights Capital in association with Wildbrain. The Ricky Gervais Show is voiced by Gervais, his long-time collaborator Stephen Merchant and colleague and friend Karl Pilkington, whose offbeat musings inspire many of the episodes, including his suggestions for population control (women give birth shortly before dying); his thoughts on charity and excerpts from his journal, read by Stephen. Plus there are the merits of 20th century inventions and the regular feature, "Monkey News." Marge Dean (Back at the Barnyard, [The Ren and Stimpy Show](#)), supervising producer from Wildbrain, tells AWN about the making of The Ricky Gervais Show, whose sixth episode airs Friday.

\* Note - after this article was posted, The Hollywood Reporter announced that HBO has renewed the show for a second season.

Bill Desowitz: What's the process like animating these podcasts?

Marge Dean: We took the podcasts and didn't re-record anything, so for somebody like me, a production person, this was a dream production -- we had no actors and no script. And so we were able to jump in right away. We talked to

Ricky about the podcasts and how they were organized and basically he said he wanted to do them in order, starting with season one and making episode one the first episode of the series. That's because the storylines build and there are a lot of references to the podcasts.

**BD:** *Have you made any alterations?*

**MD:** All we did was trim them a bit, but he was particularly sensitive about taking out British references that the U.S. audience wouldn't get. And then we'd do a transcription of the cut dialogue and send that to Ricky and to HBO and get their notes on it. And with the transcription we would add animation beats for the whole 24 minutes of the episode and then send that off to everybody to get their notes. And that's essentially our script.

**BD:** *And after that?*

**MD:** Then we handed that off to the storyboard artists and, working with the director, they would board the whole thing out like a regular show, then we'd build an animatic and send that to Ricky and HBO and get notes and do the revisions and we'd lock out the animatic. Then it becomes more like a regular production: we do all our design, we animate this project completely in the U.S., in-house, in Sherman Oaks, using Flash and After Effects to composite.



The animation makes the Karl kidding appear less mean-spirited. Courtesy of Karl Pilkington and HBO.

**BD:** *And how many on staff?*

**MD:** At our peak, 60 to 65 people.

**BD:** *And [Craig Kellman](#) directs and serves as art director?*

**MD:** Yes, the style was very much from him, but it was conveyed by Ricky initially.

**BD:** *And what style was that?*

**MD:** Ricky said he loves [Hanna-Barbera](#) and wanted it to have a lovely, sweet, funny feel to it because they rag on Karl and it could seem mean-spirited, but because they're funny drawings, it softens that harshness.

**BD:** *And what was Ricky's concept for his own caricature?*

**MD:** We did one pass of drawings and told us that we were over thinking it and that it was way too sophisticated. And then he did some sketches of the three of them and sent them to us and then we did another version just to make them more animation characters -- and he loved it. At some point he thought his character should look like a combination of Fred Flintstone and Barney Rubble, which is pretty much what we got.

**BD:** *What about the backgrounds?*

**MD:** That was especially Craig. When I asked him what his inspiration was, he said Hanna-Barbera and Jay Ward and that whole era of animation. We were fortunate to get Craig to work with us on this: he's an amazingly gifted designer.



The '60s are alive and well in this week's episode six. Courtesy of Karl Pilkington and HBO.

**BD:** *What background stands out in particular?*

**MD:** In the first episode there's this great little walk cycle where Stephen is talking about traveling the world and we go to every place in the world. I just think that they're all just beautiful and painterly.

**BD:** *How quick a turnaround do you have for each episode?*

**MD:** Given that the first season it takes a while to figure out what the show is, we're probably talking around 23 weeks.

**BD:** *How many podcasts were there?*

**MD:** I know there were four or five seasons, and the first two seasons were 13 episodes, coincidentally. But the subsequent seasons were shorter. So we hope to keep going until Ricky tells us otherwise. But since we haven't received an order for a second season, we haven't sat down with him and said, "OK, now what?"

**BD:** *And what's it been like working out the timing?*

**MD:** Ricky's very sensitive to comedic timing. Once we cut a few seconds off a pause and he told us that it was important to put it back in. So we're pretty faithful to the podcasts, but there were times when we had to open it up a little bit to play a visual joke out. And then other places we tightened it up. It's been pretty straightforward.

**BD:** *What does Ricky think of the series?*

**MD:** He was in town for the Emmys and we got this call saying he'd be there in 20 minutes. So it was pretty cool to have him watch the first episode with everybody. He was really intense: he sat with his legs crossed and he had his hand on his chin. He was focused, and he came up with some really astute comments. And he was very gracious with everybody: he talked to each person and looked at what they were working on and made jokes. It was very exciting for us. He said he'd like to do these forever. That's what I hope.

*Bill Desowitz is senior editor of AWN & VFXWorld.*