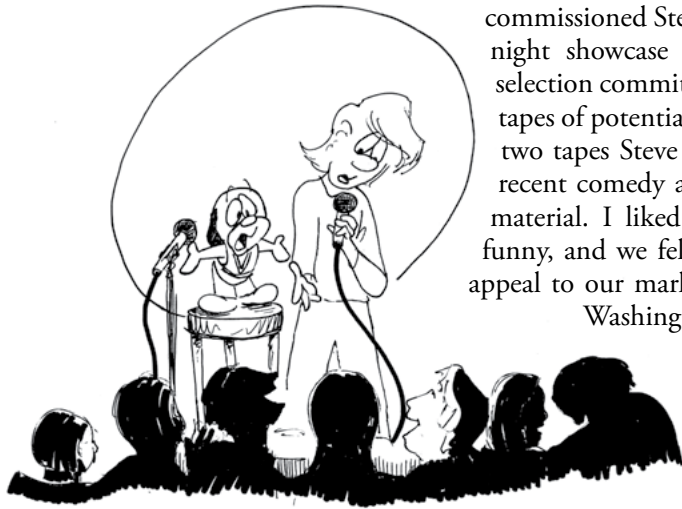


The Wonderful, Happy, Cartoony World of Steve & Bluey

The Stories:

Written & Illustrated by
Steven Fischer

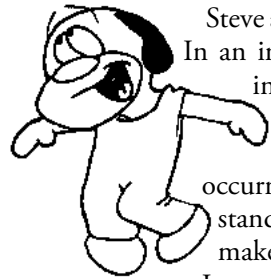
BLUE DOG PRODUCTIONS, INC. MARYLAND, USA



I remember a time when we first commissioned Steve and Bluey for our Friday night showcase series. As is customary, a selection committee met and reviewed demo tapes of potential performers. We listened to two tapes Steve and Bluey sent, their most recent comedy album and a demo of older material. I liked it a lot. They were super funny, and we felt Bluey, a total nut, would appeal to our markets in New York City and Washington, DC. However, some

on the committee thought Bluey's spasms were just a gimmick covering a lack of substance in the material.

The guys were playing at The Gypsy Club in the Village, so, in an effort to resolve this dispute, we went down to see the show. Bluey did his thing, he had hyper attacks and ran around the stage like a spastic. But to me his spasms weren't gimmick; this *was* Bluey, and the audience loved it!



Steve and Bluey had a routine that commented on life's crossroads. In an instant Bluey turned into Inner Conscience literally at the intersection of two roads.

"I'm at the crossroads," he starts. "I stop. Something flutters past. It's opportunity, Steve! Opportunity! Then it occurred to me. I have a choice! I can turn left or right or I can stand right here. Free will! You know what that means, Steve? I can make my own decisions! I can make my own choices. I can do whatever I want! I have free will! Of course, that means I'll have to be accountable for it, which means taking responsibility. I'll have to be an adult. Can't goof around. That might take effort. I might actually have to do something. I might actually have to consider how what I do affects other people. And then there's the pressure, and the headaches. You know what, Steve?"

"What?"

"This free will business stinks!"

And then Bluey incorporated his version of a routine Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis used to do. A moment of enthusiasm turns to despair.

"I turn left. I start my own business. It's a hit! The people love my store! I make millions! I date the most beautiful girl in town! Then it happens. The customers stop coming. Sales drop. I'm out of business! The girl dumps me! I'm bankrupt; I'm ruined! I'm out in the street, I'm cold, I'm hungry, and Steve?"

"Yes?"

"I'm back at a crossroad again."

My husband Bob made an observation I thought was insightful. If all Bluey did was be spastic, he might be in danger of relying on a gimmick, but he found ways to incorporate his signature spasms into routines. As he was deciding which way to turn at the crossroad, he convulsed his body to the left as though being pulled by an invisible force. Then he'd convulse in the other direction as though pulled by another temptation.



More importantly, the audience simply loved them. They howled with belly laughs, rolling on the floor. There was nothing left for the committee to consider. We booked them for the showcase.

Betsy Newhouse
Director of Programs
Alive Broadcast, Ltd.

I whispered to Jim Mardi, "What are they doing to your studio?"

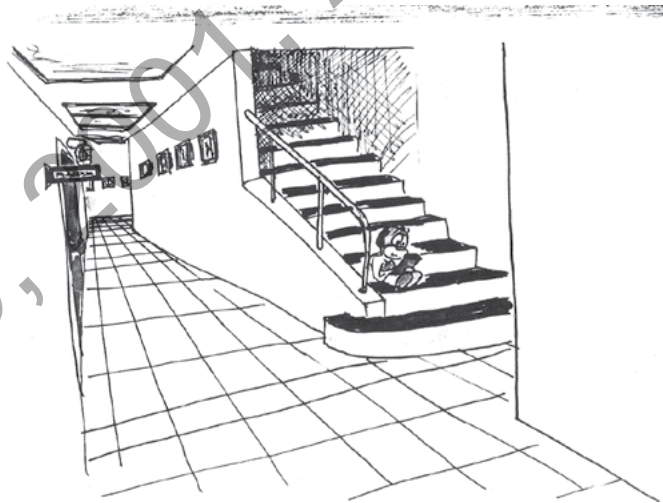
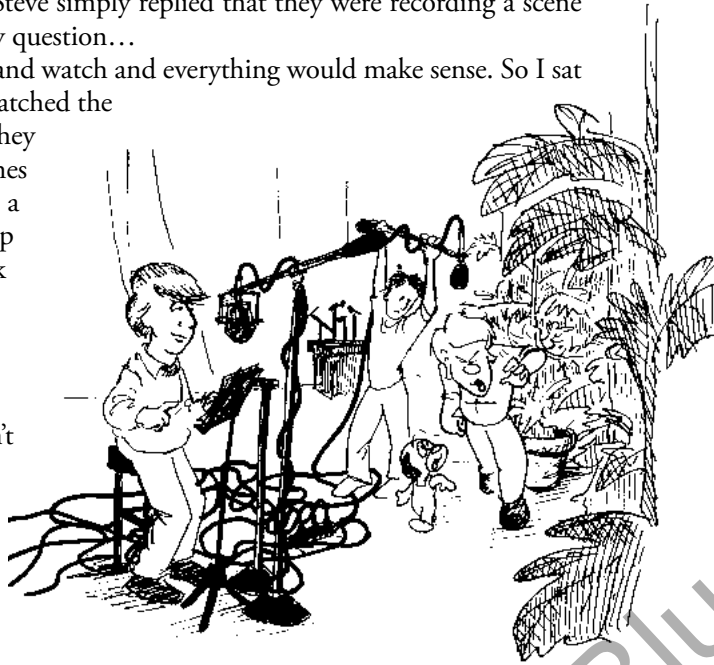
Jim smiled, "It looks strange, but it's a super sound."

They were awfully elaborate for a radio production. I'd never seen anything quite so over the top. They had filled an entire recording studio with plants and potted trees and dirt spread out in a shallow box, 3 feet by 10 feet. The walls were covered with pictures and posters of forests and trees. They even built an elevator complete with a working door! I asked why they had all this stuff. Steve simply replied that they were recording a scene that took place in a forest. Ask a silly question...

The narrator told me to sit back and watch and everything would make sense. So I sat on a sofa in the control room and watched the actors through a glass partition as they walked in a wide circle pushing branches out of their way. A microphone on a boom above picked up their romp through the "woods". I wanted to ask if anyone else thought this was silly. After all, this was radio, not film or television. No one would ever see those branches and trees. Why not just add a sound effect later? I didn't ask, though, because everyone was so engrossed in the work. Paul sat at the mixing board and studied the sounds with a critical ear. Jim sat next to him following the action from the script. The narrator was sitting with me on the sofa studying the action with sharp eyes.

They would complete a scene, talk about it, change it and do it again. Bluey was always taking a notebook with him into the hallway. He'd leave for a while, then return, and everyone would rush to see what was on his paper. Apparently, he was writing the scenes they were recording. They didn't even have a finished script! They would listen to the parts they'd edited and someone would say, "We should have this happen next..." And they'd dream up some scene. Then Bluey would go into the hallway and write it into the story. He'd sit on the stairs. Then everyone would look it over, rehearse it, and record it. It was incredible. They worked quickly and seemed to be able to create on demand.

When I returned later in the day, Jim played back the finished forest scene. I don't know how they did it, but that romp through the woods completely captivated my attention. It was only a couple of minutes, but it made me want to hear more. It really sounded like they were walking through a forest; but it wasn't just the rustling of leaves. It was something else. Steve put it best when he pointed out a moment when one of the actors accidentally stumbled



and his voice broke in a natural way. "Those are the things you'd never get if the actor just stood in front of a microphone and read lines," he said. "Those moments make the performance."

At the moment, I became a fan.

Joseph Bucker, Account Executive
about visiting a recording session for *The Magic Lift*, Spring 1993



It was the week *The Magic Lift* premiered. Jim invited Bluey and me to a party held at one of those Victorian mansions in the quaint seaside town of Chestnut. The home belonged to one of Jim's friends, a prominent physician, and was tastefully decorated in early Colonial.

We entered the Great Hall and into a sea of people. The floors were of heavy, old wood; the walls paneled and lined with fine paintings. The room was illuminated with golden light from two enormous chandeliers. Carried among the murmur of guests was the elegant sound of a string quartet.

Servers in tuxedos offered hors d'oeuvres so artfully prepared they looked as luxurious as the house. There was smoked fish carpaccio with beetroot puree, small nests of potato with sour cream and salmon, polenta with sun-dried tomato and pine nuts, *pâte de fruit*, and imported Swiss chocolate!

I immediately became self-conscious. I was horribly underdressed. While everyone was dressed professional-casual, I'd carelessly flung a beach shirt over my t-shirt. I felt like a kid, and for the first time realized how inappropriate that was, at least for an affair like this.

I covered with humor as I sampled the polenta: "Gee, this sure beats the cheese and crackers I served at my party."

Jim laughed politely.

We had only been working together a few short months, and our friendship was still new. When we first met, I saw Jim simply as a nice man, professional and courteous. But now, seeing him so harmonious among this luxury, I began to see him in a new light. He carried himself as someone accustomed to refinement. He knew how to behave. He was accepted.

I, on the other hand, felt like a fish out of water. Wealth and privilege was an alien world to me, yet I immediately appreciated it. I was standing outside a world I suddenly wanted to be part of, but it would take time before I was ready.

I was offered a glass of something that looked like ginger ale. I took a sip and my lips winced involuntarily.

Jim smiled knowingly. "That's Prosecco. It's a sparkling white wine."

He could tell my taste buds had yet to mature, but was generous with his comments. "It's an acquired taste," he added.

We mingled with the guests, a wide range of doctors, lawyers, educators, artists, and entrepreneurs. Bluey, easy to adapt, quickly found a conversation to join.

I noticed Paul spent much of the time huddled with a small group of scientists engrossed in discussion about a new method for confining electrons to artificial structures – *a conversation way over my head!* I moved on.

Jim and I found ourselves in a dining room dominated by a long table that could seat twenty-four. As we selected savory treats from rows of silver trays, Jim introduced me to his friend, the doctor. Our host.

He was a friendly and unassuming man with a white beard trimmed close to the face. He took my hand with both of his and greeted me warmly.

"I'm so glad you've come," he began. "Jim has been telling me about the work you are doing, and has given us two of your comedy albums. My son has quickly become a fan. He loved *The Magic Lift*, and he wants to meet you!"

I tried to respond, but the man kept talking; he was so full of life!

"I like your shirt," he said, feeling the material. "The design!"

He was referring to a pattern of hand-drawn zigzags, swirls, and wedge shapes.

"I'm sorry. I underdressed."

The consummate good host, the doctor dismissed the very notion with a flamboyant wave of his hand. "Nonsense! You're an artist!"

Once again, I covered with humor. Referencing the design I said, "Wouldn't it be great if it turned out these were petroglyph symbols for beer, and all it said was: 'Let's Get Drunk'?"

The doctor laughed, so I continued.

"And I'm walking down the street, and some crazy guy from the Temperance Society, who also happens to be an archeologist, walks past. And he's like, 'If I see one more ad for alcohol, I'm gonna...'"

Without missing a beat, the doctor added to the scene, pulling up his arms, bracing against an imagined attack.

I was so taken by his unexpected playfulness that a big laugh escaped before I could stop it. And the doctor, loving every minute of our spontaneous fun, doubled over with a hearty guffaw. I liked this man immediately!

He was soon off, navigating the crowd, seeing to everyone's needs.

Jim and I took our plates and drinks (wine for him, a cup of tea for me), and settled into the parlor: an oak chamber, intimately lit, filled with leather bound books and polished furniture. We found two chairs in the corner.

Sitting down suddenly felt like my first real moment of rest. Then it occurred to me that, in a sense, it was. Popping into this seat was like punctuating the chaos of the last two years. It had been non-stop struggle, a rollercoaster of emotional ups and downs, with tremendous loss and tremendous gain! Bluey and I nearly lost all our savings, the comic strip and several other projects tanked, and, most significant for me, we parted ways with Hannibal. But just as hopelessness set in we signed a deal with Galaxy Film Studios, *The Magic Lift* was produced (and sounds great), we were offered more work, and our financial woes disappeared. That's a lot to deal with all at once.

"How does it happen, Jim?" I caught him just as he sipped his wine.

"How does what happen?"

"This time last year, it felt like Bluey and I were lost at sea, desperately treading water without life preservers, and about to sink. Now I'm sitting here, in a luxury home in Chestnut, sipping tea with Jim Mardi. How did this happen?"

Jim laughed, taking the edge off the seriousness.

"How does it happen? Are we all at the mercy of Lady Luck?"

"Luck?" Jim said, suddenly serious. "Is it luck that you guys work so hard? Is it luck that you didn't give up? No, Steve. It's not luck. As the saying goes, 'Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity.'"

He looked me square in the eyes.

"You're here because of tenacity, because you didn't give up, and because you and Bluey have real talent. You're developing skills, and you are willing to work very, very hard. That's why you're here."

"You sound like Hannibal. He'd give pep talks like that."

Jim sensed the subtext.

"Look, I don't know what went on with you two. It's none of my business. But don't feel guilty."

"It's hard to shake. You know, the way it all happened. I don't know how these things get to such a point... where people aren't friends anymore. Did Hannibal do something? Did I do something? Did we both do something? I just don't understand how two friends reach a point where they're not friends anymore."