

# A Few Minutes With... **BRIAN SOMMER**

**A**t Voicetrax, we love to bring you the inspirational personal stories, you may not know about, that are behind the remarkable people that make up our amazing community. Incredibly popular Voicetrax Guest Director Brian Sommer is a force to be reckoned with. His list of credits is extraordinarily impressive. But before you label him a character actor (a label he would undoubtedly wear with pride), you should know that he has navigated numerous genres of voice-over including commercial, narration and toys as well as his enviable and extensive list of video game roles that include *The Walking Dead*, *League of Legends*, *Assassin's Creed*, *Gears Of War*, *Diablo* and *The Wolf Among Us*. We sat down with Brian to get a peek behind the curtain...

**Voicetrax:** *You've been interested in voice-over for most of your life. Where did that begin?*

**Brian Sommer:** It all started at Disneyland. My family would go down there once a year when I was a kid. It is an incredible repository of fantastic voice-over performances within the different attractions. Actors from the Golden Age of radio and a lot of vaudeville veterans including my personal idol, Paul Frees. Paul was the Ghost Host at the Haunted Mansion and voiced my absolute favorite ride (now defunct) called The Adventure Through Inner Space. This ride was void of any type of modern special effects. You see, we used to use this thing called our imagination back in the day, so the driving force for the ride was Paul's narration. It had an immediacy to it. It was so engaging that it drew me in and I was hooked.

**VT:** *Where you a performer as a child?*

**BS:** I enjoyed performing but I really didn't view it as a "performance", it was just play. Sitting around the dinner table with my three brothers doing voices. We did radio shows and commercials in the back seat of our station wagon on a tape recorder. Whenever we would go to visit family, we'd be driving home late at night and the KSFO radio station would play old radio dramas. It fueled my imagination. I was also the guy that did the daily announcements at school. Anything to get behind a microphone. I was captivated, but I still didn't realize it was a career. I mean I knew people were doing the voices. I didn't think Captain Hook was a real guy. I knew it was Hans Conreid being incredibly brilliant, but I didn't necessarily think it was something that a kid from Northern California could break into.

**VT:** *You went down another career path and became a police officer. As you were working in that job, at some point you must have realized voice acting was an actual job. When did the thought of being a voice actor creep back into your consciousness?*

**BS:** When I heard Samantha Paris being interviewed on the Ronn Owens radio program. Hearing her speak, I realized there is a conduit into the industry. There is a clear way to break into voice-over. But still I can't tell you how many times I wrote the Voicetrax number down and threw it in my desk. It was actually three years before I made the initial call.

**VT:** *And why do you think you hesitated?*

**BS:** It's a good question. Any number of silly excuses, too busy, this can't be real, it won't work, can't earn a living, blah, blah, blah, that as I soon learned after making that call, were not at all true.

**VT:** *You've had an amazing career so far, but recently you expanded your opportunities by getting signed by DPN Animation in Los Angeles. How did that happen?*

**BS:** When I started my voice-over career you had to be in LA to do big-time animation and I didn't want to move there. Fast forward some years, and the agencies in LA started opening their minds to signing actors from out of town, but my "other" job did not afford me the flexibility to fly down to LA for auditions and sessions. It came down to the fact that I wasn't in a position to dedicate the time to making it happen. And I'm the type of person that I don't want to do things fast, I want to do them right. So I continued to work in voice-over in San Francisco, taking private lessons, concentrating on doing the work and getting better. When I finally retired from the other job I was able to focus on the LA animation market. I heard about a class at Voicetrax that was being taught by one of the biggest animation agents in the country, and I thought what better opportunity to get an honest, brutal LA-brand critique of my work. Long story short, a few months later that agent offered me representation.

**VT:** *Approaching nearly 20 years in the business, what still thrills you about doing voice-over?*

**BS:** The script is all typed out, but all over it are my hand-written notes with arrows, x's, cross-outs and new additions. THAT's the creative process that I find fascinating. I'm not interested in being on camera or on stage. I want to be in a recording studio. I love the saying: "Do something you love and you'll never work a day in your life". If the phone rings and it's my agent, I can't remember ever going, "ah, shit".

**VT:** *What do you still have to learn about voice-over?*

**BS:** Everything! I never ever want to get to a point where I think I know everything about this business. There are so many voice actors who I haven't met yet or people who haven't gotten into the business yet, and they're going to have their own take on this stuff and I'm ready to be inspired by them. I'd love to sit in on the auditions just to see how many different ways people take a character even though they're looking at the same script.

**VT:** *What would you tell first-year student Brian that you know now?*

**BS:** It's not about the voice. All of my heroes were big-voiced announcers. So the very first piece of commercial copy I ever read at Voicetrax, that's how I did it. It was the biggest hurdle I had to get over, especially since I grew up "doing voices". Learning that voice-over is all about acting changed the trajectory of my training and ultimately my life. I am where I am supposed to be, doing exactly what I always wanted to do.



Brian Sommer as the Master of Ceremonies at the Voicetrax Holiday/  
Finding the Bunny book launch party