

How a college encounter led Jeff Bergman to Bugs Bunny and 'Space Jam' sequel

By Joshua Axelrod
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Jeff Bergman must have been feeling loony when he showed up unannounced at Mel Blanc's hotel door.

It was late March 1981, and Bergman was a University of Pittsburgh junior with dreams of becoming a professional voice-over artist. So when he found out Blanc, the original voice of Bugs Bunny and many other "Looney Tunes" characters, was performing at David Lawrence Hall, he jumped at the opportunity to attend.

He somehow found out where Blanc was staying and "something compelled me" to knock on his door at 10 p.m. A voice that sounded vaguely like Barney Rubble from "The Flintstones" (who Blanc also voiced) came from behind the door and Blanc

came out in his bathrobe. After Bergman explained he was a fan who had just seen his lecture, Blanc asked, "Are you Jewish or Italian?" Bergman said he was Jewish, and that was enough for Blanc to invite him in for a chat.

"That really was a watershed moment for me," Blanc told the Post-Gazette. "That changed the whole trajectory of my life, that one 45-minute meeting with him."

Blanc died on July 10, 1989, which happened to be Bergman's 29th birthday. Three weeks later, Bergman auditioned for CBS' "Tiny Toon Adventures" and, after securing that gig, took over the role of Bugs Bunny from Blanc. He's been Bugs' primary vocal actor ever since and will be voicing that wascally wabbit, Yosemite Sam, Sylvester the cat, Fred Flintstone and Yogi Bear in

"Space Jam: A New Legacy," out now in theaters and streaming on HBO Max.

"When it became apparent two years ago that it was going to happen, I was so excited," Bergman said of the sequel to 1996's "Space Jam." "I was like the horse that wanted to race. ... When I found out I would be Bugs, I was speechless. If you hang in there long enough and be persistent, good things will happen for you."

After years of rumors followed by a lengthy casting process, Bergman got word in March 2020 that he would be playing Bugs in the "Space Jam" sequel. He met with director Malcolm D. Lee, but then the COVID-19 pandemic shut down in-person production and required everyone involved with "Space Jam: A New Legacy" to "put our technical big-boy pants



Courtesy of Warner Bros. Pictures/TNS

LeBron James with Bugs Bunny in "Space Jam: A New Legacy."

on," as Bergman put it. He estimated that 95% of his vocals were recorded remotely.

Bergman recently got to see a screening of "Space Jam: A New Legacy," his first time in a movie theater since February 2020. He said his "head almost exploded" watching the transitions from 2D animation to 3D basketball action that included at least one representative from just about every intellectual property owned by Warner

Bros. Any trepidation he felt about fans of the original embracing this new "Space Jam" immediately evaporated.

He was most impressed by star LeBron James, who he said "really gets into it" as an actor.

"This is a story about a father and a son," he said. "There is a real element of empowerment and knowing you have to stand in your own power and own this and be passionate about what you want to do."

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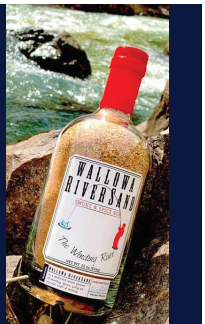
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