

Sita Sings The Blues

Nina Paley is not a conventional filmmaker. On February 28, 2009 she released her movie entitled "Sita Sings the Blues". But she did so in a very different manner from almost all other filmmakers. Nina released the movie for free. Free to everyone who wants to see it. From the home page of the movie's web site - <http://sitasingstheblues.com>:

"I hereby give *Sita Sings the Blues* to you. Like all culture, it belongs to you already, but I am making it explicit with a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike License. Please distribute, copy, share, archive, and show *Sita Sings the Blues*. From the shared culture it came, and back into the shared culture it goes. "¹

Nina Paley created the movie almost entirely by herself, as she explains on her web site. Not only did she put in years of her own time and energy, but she spent a lot of money on legal rights to the music, buying equipment, and running her web site.

Movies cost a lot of money to create and distribute. And almost all films are made with a profit motive: The people who finance the production of the movie want to profit from their investment. So do the filmmakers. So do the distribution companies. So do the retailers who sell access to movies in DVD format and through the Internet (i.e. Netflix). So do the broadcasters who sell advertising in exchange for the showing of the movie, which they have to pay for.

Everyone wants a "cut" of the profits.

That is what the movie business is about, right? Investors put money up and every works to profit from the showing of the movie in many ways and in many places around the world.

Sita Sings The Blues: The start of a different paradigm?

Virtually everyone who watches movies at home on their televisions is involved in an ongoing revolution in the entertainment "industry". So too is everyone who listens to music on their computer, stereo, or personal music device.

This revolution centers around the question of who controls the movies and music that are created by artists. Control, in this case means:

"Who controls the viewing of movies and the listening of music?"

Some of the questions that are being debated, often hotly:

- Who "owns" what people produce as art and culture? For example, if someone sings a song in public, who owns the "performance" of that



¹ Accessed October 24, 2010

song? Or the song itself? Does the singer own it? the song writer? A company who bought the song? Can art and culture be "owned"?

- What is "intellectual property"?
- How do artists get paid for their work? Why do artists create art?
- How can "sharing" films and music over the internet be considered illegal when libraries allow you to borrow films and music, without cost?
- One country might have very different views of "intellectual property". A country, such as Canada might allow "downloading", but make "uploading" illegal. In another, like the USA, both are illegal, with criminal-level punishments. If there are different viewpoints, is there a "right" and "wrong", or is it simply the matter of the biggest country bully wins? Are intellectual property laws that differ between countries enforceable at all in the age of open networks such as the Internet?

The Music Industry: On the "bleeding edge"

There are a few hints at what is coming. The music industry, which once generated \$40 billion at its peak in 1996², is now changing dramatically. Though pay-for-download sites like iTunes and Amazon.com do generate a lot of sales, music is now primarily shared for free, typically with those under 25 years of age. Some of the older generations still buy CD's, but these purchases are in steady decline.

The big shift in the music industry is from selling music to selling performances. In the past, performances were used to sell records, tapes, and later, CD's. Now the music is the marketing tool to sell performances. A complete reversal of the paradigm.

And a shift of power, from the *owners* of music, to the *performers* of music.

A performance is unique, live, and non-replicable with technology. It is an experience that is shared between the performer and the audience.

One innovation in the music industry taking place in Europe and now moving to North America is the advent of a new kind of music selling system. Called "Spotify", the Swedish music streaming service let's subscribers pay about \$15 per month to access 13 million songs³. As of July 2011, the service had 1.5 million subscribers⁴.

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² <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/3622285.stm>, accessed October 2, 2010.

³ Businessweek.com, "Daniel Ek's Spotify: Music's Last Best Hope", July 13, 2011.

⁴ Ibid.

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Questions to consider

1. Review the web site, and related sites linked from <http://sitasingstheblues.com>. Watch the movie.

How does Nina Paley expect to make money to profit from her efforts, or simply to make a living, when she gives the movie away for free?

2. Find multiple perspectives about film copyright and intellectual property debates. Use online resources of any kind. Three resources to get you started:

<http://www.cbc.ca/money/story/2009/03/17/f-sita-sings-the-blues.html>

<http://www.pioneerone.tv/>

<http://creativecommons.org/>

In your own words, summarize fully and clearly the two opposing viewpoints in the debate.

3. What are some possible future scenarios for the film industry for making profits? How can they innovate to find profitable new streams of income if movie viewing revenues do drop due to movie sharing on the Internet?

Like with the music industry noted earlier, consider "power" in your explanations - those who have more now and those who will have more in the future.

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Attached: A donation response letter that may be of use in this case.



Dear Paul Kurucz,

Thank you for your October 22, 2010 contribution of \$15.00 in support of our artist-in-residence Nina Paley's award-winning freely-distributed film [Sita Sings The Blues](#). In the past 3 years since the film was released, it has been viewed and/or screened in all corners of the world, and has accomplished the following:

- over 500,000 views on Youtube alone;
- over 350,000 downloads from the Sita website and Internet Archive (archive.org);
- fan-created subtitles available in 25 different languages on our Sita Sings The Blues Wiki page;
- over 1,000 donations to the Sita Distribution Project fund; and
- numerous awards won at film festivals around the world, most notably Roger Ebert's Ebertfest, the Athens International Film Festival in Greece, the Seoul International Cartoon & Animation Festival in Seoul, Korea, and the Cairo International Film Festival for Children in Egypt.

While Nina continues to promote *Sita Sings The Blues* and make appearances at screenings, she is also working on many new projects, the most visible of which are the short animated [Minute Memes videos](#) that educate artists and the public at-large about cultural production and the limits of current copyright law. These videos are created in partnership with [QuestionCopyright.Org](#) and are funded by a grant from The Andy Warhol Foundation and the many small and large contributions from supporters like you. You can see our latest Minute Meme and learn more about the project, by clicking [here](#).

Thanks again and please spread the word!

Sincerely,

Karl F. Fogel  
Executive Director

Camille E. Acey  
Head of Organizational Development

**P.S. As a growing non-profit, we have recently completed a long overdue revamp of our internal information systems to handle the increased level of activity. If you received a prior receipt for the same donation, please disregard this notice. If your donation was made more than one year ago, please accept our apologies for the delay.**

