



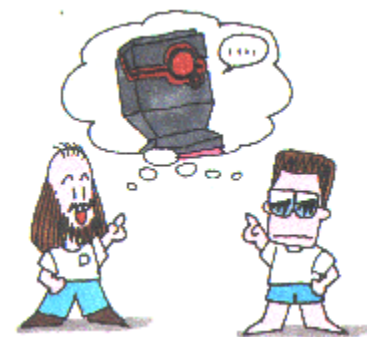
The Sharon Apple Project

This page details the efforts behind [The Sharon Apple Project: The Making of Sharon at Anime Expo 96](#), as presented by [Usagichan Company](#) and [Apricot Systematic](#) for their AX96 Memories. Story told by [Scanner](#).

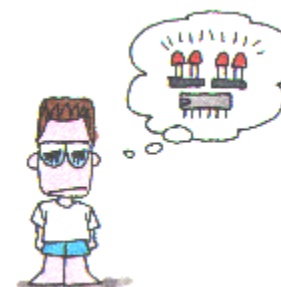
It all started out innocuously enough. **Emmo (Mark Chadwick)** and I were watching the AX'95 masquerade as we were taping it for posterity. Out came that year's hit of the costumes: the **God Gundam costume**, complete with its little blinking lights. I was saying to myself: "That is a good costume. Yes, that is a really good costume. It is not what I would do though." But since I had never been in a masquerade, what would I do? Then it occurred to me when the entire audience stood up and saluted "Sieg Jion! Sieg Jion! Sieg Jion!" at the top of their lungs: Would it not be neat if the audience was chanting "Sharon! Sharon!" as they were during the scene when Sharon Apple first appears in the OAV of Macross Plus. I turned to Emmo and said: "You know what. **We should make a Sharon Apple costume.**"



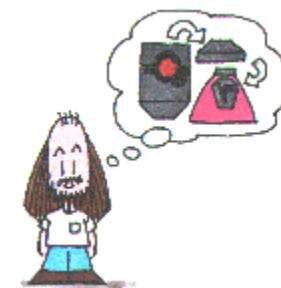
With that the project started. Planning went slowly and so did the gathering of equipment. We already knew what we wanted to do: to have the audience go crazy as Sharon rolled down the aisle to the opening of Santi-U. We of course had to do a job that we would find acceptable in terms of the construction of the box.. it would have to have lights that did a good job of zooming along the gap near the top of the box. We would need a nice glowing red eye, and the box had to shine like.. like.. like **freshly polished acrylic!**



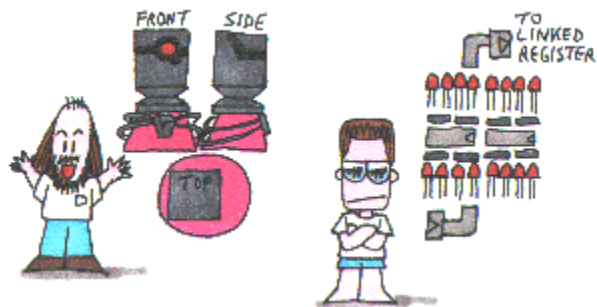
I appealed to Emmo for the electronics. He could certainly design a circuit that would do a good job in terms of appearance and once I mentioned the idea to him you could see the little circuits being soldered in his mind. There were some misgivings amidst our burgeoning enthusiasm: it would require a lot of LED's, and at US prices they are a bit expensive since we were thinking we would need at least 200, plus a couple of the large ones for the eye. Luckily for us we were both going on a trip to Japan with several other friends in early August and Emmo knew exactly where to go in Akihabara for cheap LED's. To the tune of 100 nice red LED's for 700 yen.



With the LED's secured we began the slow (and often procrastination filled) process of designing Sharon. My project was the actual box, clothing, and pedestal design. Emmo's project was the light array and power supply. We both worried a little about sound, but eventually we figured we could trust the house sound well enough to just let the tech crew play the cd for us. We had a little trepidation about that though, until we figured that we just would not have time to mount Emmo's Bose sound system inside of Sharon and the power supply would become a little bit problematic (although we did not fully rule this idea out until about two weeks before AX'96.)



There were a total of three visits down to the Los Angeles area where Emmo and I could meet and discuss our plans. I had a cad model of the basic unit pretty well done, Emmo had the basic shift-register circuit design pretty well done as well.



It was not until about two weeks before AX'96 that I finally figured out where to go for all the proper plastic and that I could actually assemble the unit: **TAP the fantastic plastics place!** The store members at TAP got to know me quite well over the next week as I ordered \$408 of custom cut 3/16" & 1/8" black acrylic. I still need to go back there and show them just what we built with all this plastic. They were certainly curious (the parts list included 49 different pieces of plastic not including the eye piece and the little hooks and other pieces of assembly work.)



This is also about when Emmo shifted in to overdrive and began designing the circuit for real (after at least two re-designs) and started soldering. The soldering project became one of the biggest time sinks in this project and sucked in several innocent bystanders (even some who before then had never held a soldering iron.)



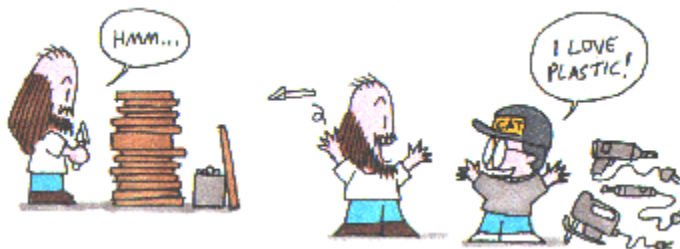
We even had **Hiroki Onodera** who was doing a little trip to Japan before AX'96 run off to our favorite shop in Akihabara and buy us 200 more LED's "just in case."



There was a brief period (of about two hours) when I figured the initial cost of all the plastic and how much work we had to do in a week when it almost did not happen, but a co-worker said that we had to do it because it would be so cool. That tipped us over the edge. We ordered the plastic and began to learn how to work with acrylic.



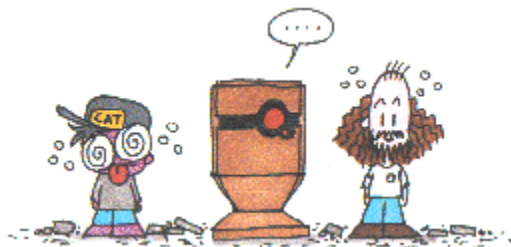
In one week we started piecing it together. I say "we" because at this point **Lionel Lum** showed up on the scene and offered to help. Which is a good thing because without his dremel tool and jigsaw this also would not have happened, not to mention the sheer help of having an extra set of hands and another mind to puzzle over how to assemble the base of Sharon.



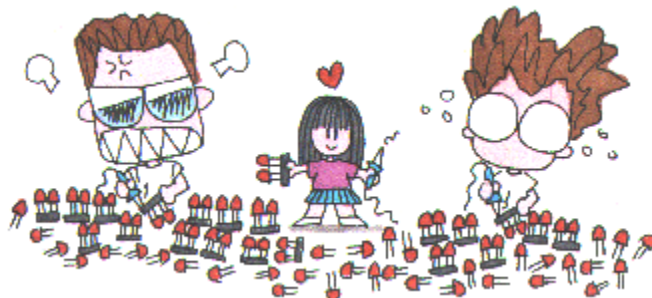
Carolyn, my better half, also provided invaluable assistance from time to time as well as did **Peter Gruhn**. Carolyn took over the task of assembling Sharon's skirt. That saved me about three days of work I had no time to do because we were too busy just trying to cut and glue Sharon together.



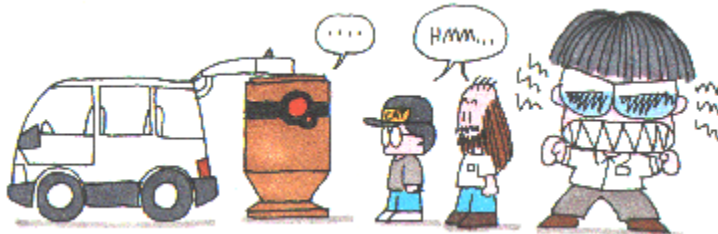
After one week of grueling assembly, several mishaps, and one major design change the Sharon Apple box was ready to head down to LA (all of this assembly work was taking place on the patio of our apartment in Mountain View.) We still had not assembled the actual pedestal that Sharon was going to rest on (a wood frame on a set of coasters.) But we figured we would do that Saturday before the masquerade actually started.



Meanwhile down in LA, Emmo was madly redesigning the circuits and soldering circuit boards together. The actual circuit was rather neat and modular, but I will skip the details. Suffice to say for the chip-heads out there that we had one HUGE shift register. During this time period Emmo had enlisted the help of **Erika Sato** in the soldering efforts, being the ever helpful and concerned person she is. During the convention we even got **Ken Kindsfater** to lend a hand, he not having touched a soldering iron for several years at that point either.



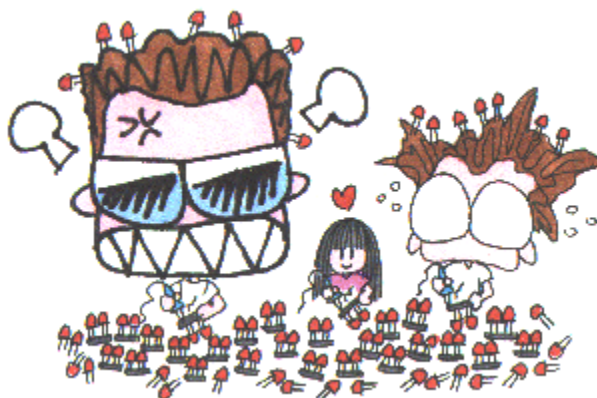
Back up in Mountain View we were faced with another dilemma. **Sharon was big**. Not just big, kinda huge. So huge she would not fit through a door without some creative tilting. So huge that she would not fit in to the back of the van through the door. We actually had to remove the middle set of seats in the van, slide Sharon through the side door, push Sharon towards the back of the van (resting on a set of wooden blocks that would become her pedestal's frame) and then put the middle seat back in, and THEN pack all the luggage for four people for a week at expo back in to the van. This prompted **Albert**, the con-chair, one of the four people to say "**She ain't coming back up this way man! uh-uh! Ain't doing it!**"



So with that behind us we got the box down to LA with little mishap. You should have seen the look on the bellhop's face when we asked for a cart to ferry Sharon up to our room.



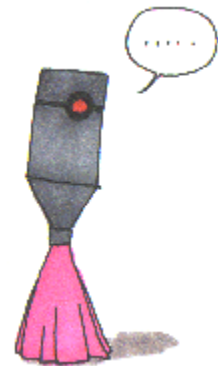
Now, Sharon was the right shape and all, but she was still totally covered with the brown masking, so none of us had seen her in her full glory. Emmo finally arrived, and he had to finish soldering. Suffice to say that people were soldering straight up and during the opening of the masquerade.



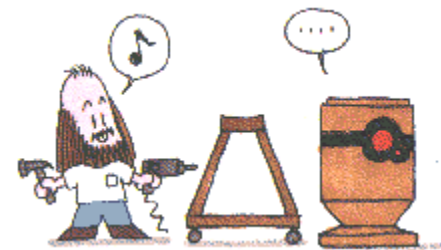
We also have **Peter Lin** to thank for figuring out how to make the face plate for Sharon Apple's eye look so much better. This is one of our last-minute great secrets.



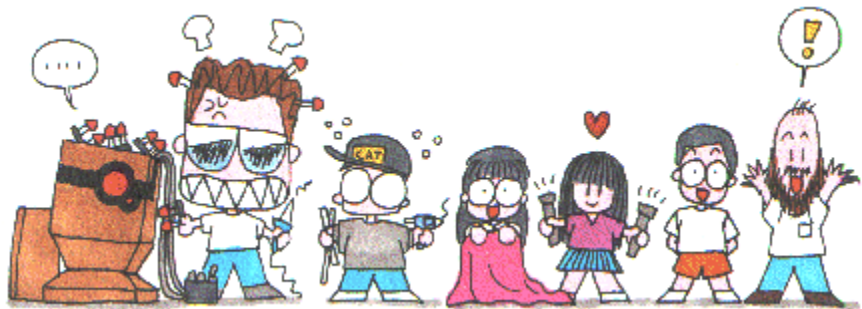
I remember working in con-ops when word reached us that there was **another Sharon Apple box** at the con. I was immediately devastated. I had been worrying about this since we started working on Sharon.. what if someone else got the same idea. Now it had come true. But, when we saw the competition (which was set up in the dealer's room) our sails reinflated and we started working with fervor. This was no competition: a ply wood box nailed together with just a red light for the main eye... it was not even to scale! **We were going to blow them away.** I heard it said that when we came out during the masquerade we **'demoralized upon sight.'** While this is probably not true, it certainly made me feel good.



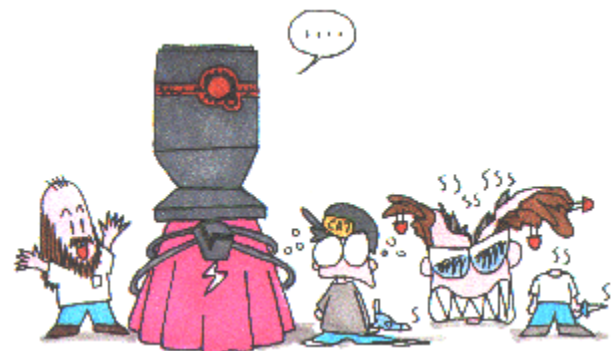
It was during this Saturday that I built the frame for Sharon out of brute-force engineering methods (lots of screws and nails). Again thanks to Erika for running out to a nearby hardware store and securing just enough screws to finish putting Sharon together. Also a very big thanks to **Shaun** of the VTech front for having tools on hand to make the job another magnitude easier to complete. There were several close calls here as I had found I had to hack away at several pieces of wood to make sure it would all fit together still.



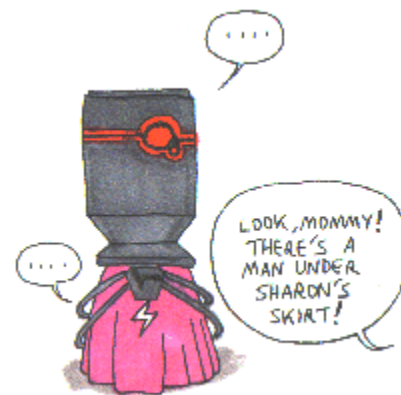
Then came the final bit of assembly during the masquerade. We were working in the dark with several small penlights being used to illuminate Mark's fingers as Lionel madly hot glued the circuit boards to the mounting frame (We now call Lionel "Hot-Glue-Boy"). Emmo was doing his usual cursing about how it would suck and would not work.



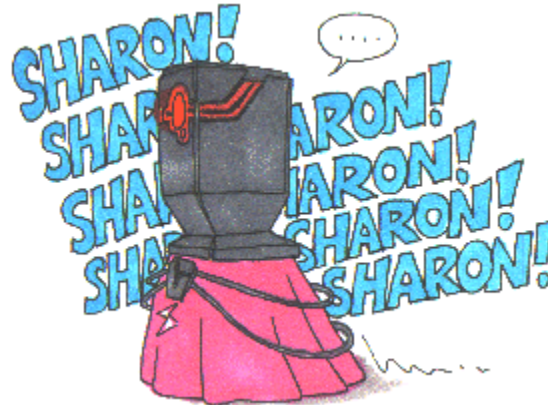
By this time I was getting impatient. **I wanted to see Sharon!** So we started stripping off the brown masking and, oh, was she a sight to behold. Even more so when mounted on the frame. We covered Sharon up, mounted her on top of the frame and started the wait.



By this time, the masquerade was in full swing. I was the locomotion for Sharon sitting inside her skirt (now tell that to a fan-boy of Macross Plus). I had practiced earlier walking around with the frame. Basically it was a walk in a crouch.

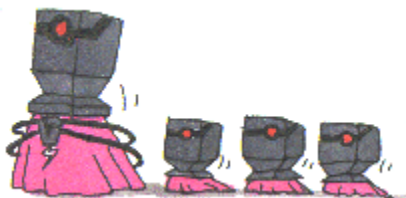


When the time came near for Sharon's debut, we wheeled her to the far end of the aisle. I wish I could have been outside to see just what other people saw. I still wonder how many people were aware of what we were doing. When the time came for to roll I started walking in my crouch, holding my breath all the while queuing off a set of blinking lights every now and then. I remember worrying constantly all the while not to have my feet travel to far or they would snag on the back of the frame that Sharon was resting on. I could dimly see through the fabric as the cameras began flashing. Talk about a racing heart, I had not been on stage in 12 years and this was quite the rush. The audience was chanting "**Sharon!**



Sharon! Sharon!" Our dream had been fulfilled. Since this was all that we were really after we had made Sharon a non-competing entry in the masquerade and I was very elated to hear a comment of "Thank god!" from, I presume, one of the other contestants.

And that is the main part of the story of the **Sharon Apple Project**: We did it all just to get that 30 seconds of effect as Sharon rolled down the aisle.



The staff of the **Sharon Apple Project**:

Mark "Emmo" / "Emerson" Chadwick

Peter "I Was There" Gruhn

Ken Kindsfater

Peter "Special Eye effects" Lin

Eric "Scanner" Luce

Carolyn Lee Luce

Lionel "Hot Glue Boy" Lum

Erika Sato

John "Pomru" Yung (for his assistance in Art Show)



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