

Can We Be Friends?

Back in December there was a stir in the Propeller forums having nothing to do with the imminent release of the newest *Star Wars* movie. It seems that technical editor, Bryan Bergeron, made statements about the Propeller that were neither flattering nor accurate in the eyes of those of us who actually use it. While I don't believe that Mr. Bergeron had any malicious intentions, I'd like to address each of his statements to set the record straight – from my point-of-view, that is.

Bergeron: *They're are not afraid to invest time and money on seemingly wild schemes, all in the name of experimentation.*

Parallax has a long history of reasonably-priced microcontrollers, free development tools, outstanding support for their products, and the Propeller is no exception. No, it's not the cheapest micro out-of-the box, but Bergeron's statement suggests that budget-conscious experimenters should avoid it. The new FLiP module is a great, low-cost starting point for experimenters who are then free to choose how they want to program the Propeller: in Spin, C, BASIC, Blockly, even Forth. None of these tools come with any cost, and there is a lot of great support for all of these languages by people who use them in real projects. Parallax has long been known for and continues to provide exceptional support for educators – they are real leaders in this area.

I sincerely have no idea what Mr. Bergeron means by “*seemingly wild schemes in the name of experimentation.*” I make most of my living designing with and programming the Propeller, and neither I nor my clients have time for “wild schemes.” My work in entertainment is often under the weight of a ridiculous schedule – the Propeller helps me meet sometimes crazy deadlines.

To be sure, the Propeller certainly wasn't the first multi-core embedded processor, but it did make put multi-core programming into the hands of a lot of people, and at a very reasonable price.

Bergeron: *Often, they're simply bored with the standard architectures and long for the excitement of multiple cogs running virtually in parallel.*

This statement leaves me wondering if Mr. Bergeron has ever had a conversation with anyone who actually uses the Propeller. A two-minute discussion would make him aware that Propeller cogs *actually run in parallel*. Not virtually. Actually. Again, I use the Propeller in my professional life because it allows me to get things done. Is it perfect for everything? No – but then, nothing is. For the work that I do and have done, from Hollywood props and camera platform controls, to commercial laser-tag, to networked HVAC controls, to industrial road sign controls, and specialty projects for one of America's most popular theme parks, the Propeller works for me and for my clients.

What I found the most troubling about this editorial was the suggestion by Mr. Bergeron for microcontroller enthusiasts to make up stories about those who use different processors:

Bergeron: *I welcome your take on what a person's preferred board says about them, even if you don't have “hard evidence”* (emphasis mine).

Really? The state of our public and political discourse has become toxic, and suggestions to make up stories about people we may not know are not at all helpful.

I encourage you to take another path: instead of making up a story, ask others why they choose their favorite processor or language. “Why?” is an excellent conversation starter and helps us learn. Isn't that why we read this great magazine? To learn? I do. I rarely use PICs or the Arduino, but I always read those articles because I find them educational. I sincerely believe I'm a better Propeller programmer because I've been able to adapt tricks and techniques used by programmers that favor other devices. Let's not make up stories; let's start with “Why?” so that we can learn something new, and maybe even forge new friendships.

Until next time, keep Spinning and winning with the Propeller! And, please, do keep yourself open to learn from those who are not doing things the way you do.