

CARTOON MUSIC: *A study of the various uses of music*

This film essay will attempt, through a variety of examples provided on videocassette, to illustrate the various roles which music plays within the animated cartoon. These roles will include music which participates in the background only, music which takes on a life of its own by providing accents within the action of the cartoon characters and finally music which provides the reason for the cartoon's being as the actions are based on the music. In addition a discussion on the meaning and explanation of what cartoon music is will also be included. 11 pages long.

CARTOON MUSIC

The history of animated cartoons has constantly been influenced by music. This essay will attempt, through a variety of examples provided on videocassette, to illustrate the various roles which music plays within the animated cartoon. These roles will include music which participates in the background only, music which takes on a life of its own by providing accents within the action of the cartoon characters and finally music which provides the reason for the cartoon's being as the actions are based on the music.

The essay will discuss all of the clips, with varying levels of importance, as they appear on the videocassette as the basis for the discussion and structure of the paper. The goal of the essay is not to give an in-depth analysis to each clip but rather to illustrate, by providing examples from each clip, how each relates to the central theme of music and its influences on animated cartoons. Please note that some clips have been included on principle or as homage to a particular character or cartoon, but have still been mentioned very briefly.

Music played a variety of roles but first one must understand what cartoon music is or if there is such a thing as cartoon music. Cartoon musical sounds different because the lead instrument is different from what we are accustomed to. The style of the musical bands, orchestras, trios, duets, and classical orchestras, etc... were often decided by the band member's lead instrument. Swing music in the best means available to explain the importance of the lead instrument. Swing music varied extensively on the band member's instrument where, Benny Goodman's band was led by a clarinet, Glenn Miller led his band with the trombone, whereas Louis Armstrong led his band with a trumpet.

Cartoon music is also led by a particular instrument or rather musician, which is seldom found in other styles of music, the percussionist. Cartoon music is often just referred to as cartoon music because its ensemble of sounds or combination of sounds, don't sound familiar to what we usually listen to other than in cartoons. The lead in cartoon music is the percussionist with his array of instruments, which appear to be comedic special effects, or cartoon music. The percussionist is never used to front a band because music already has a steady rhythm provided by the drummer therefore the percussionists has never been thought of as a lead in a band. Can you name a band or orchestra, which features the percussionists, not drummer, as lead? The orchestras, which played the music for animated cartoons were often as grand as the orchestras, which were used in Hollywood musicals. Often large orchestrations are written requiring strings, large amounts of violins, and one could stop and realize the footsteps are often created with the bass sounds of the tuba. Therefore the

unfamiliarity of the percussionist can mislead people to label a style of music called cartoon music when in fact they are not really special effects but a musician which is seldom given the lead in a band or orchestra.

Hawaiian Birds is the first of many clips, which features music that provides a mood within the narrative of the story. The animated cartoon does not use music to directly match actions with exception to the sequence where the Big City Orioles, arrive singing and dancing to the music. The Hawaiian like music provides the audio for the romantic setting of the newly married couple. As mentioned above the arrival of the jazzy birds from the north marks a change in the role of music because the music provides the basis for the actions, that is, singing and dancing. The music style of jazz was seen as dehumanizing and evil in the teens, which provides us with an irony as jazz music is the element which comes between the couple as they are preparing to settle down. In essence music was playing a double role in this sequence, one of dramatic effect pertaining to the narrative and another providing the basis on which movements were based at a more aesthetic level. From this moment on the music simply retains the role of providing a dramatic effect within the narrative of this cartoon. For example the stormy weather sequence which illustrates a struggle against nature is accompanied by music of the same dramatic style. In essence this little story nicely illustrates the role of music as providing a mood without providing the basis for the actions of the plot.

A Little Bird Told Me provides a very different role for music as all of the actions are set and tuned to the music regardless of whether the actions are performed by humans or objects. First a bird opens this cartoon by singing and dancing to a song which represents the central theme in the cartoon. We then enter an imaginary world filled with cars that sit back when they finish their day, the same way humans do. In another instance we can notice elevators which ascend and descend, perfectly timed to the dramatic rise in the music. Visually however, the best moment occurs when the various birds type letters almost as though they are performing, a choreography. In fact one of the birds is performing a ballet as she types a letter with her feet. Therefore this cartoon provides an illustration of actions which are timed to the music within the narrative of the story.

The same can be said of the Golden State, except that this animated cartoon adds an element of participation. The actions of this entire film are tuned to the music in this historical lesson on how California rose to its prominent status. The addition, in terms of music, is the active role, which the audience is given when asked to sing along with a bouncing ball/orange. This cartoon essentially uses sarcasm to bring its point across to the audience while using music to highlight this sarcasm. Sarcasm is used so that everything that is said is represented literally in the images. For example, houses springing up, someone who skies and changes his clothes in mid air, and Cape Horn with the land transforming itself into two massive horns. Music therefore dramatizes the visuals by adding sound to what we can already see and illustrates how music can actively engage the audience to sing along with the images. For the most part music only participates in a dramatic way thus adding the mood of the images. The only instance where the cartoon is timed to the music occurs when the orange is jumping onto each word to cue the audience.

The next segment was added just to illustrate some of the marketing devices, which theatres used to sell more candy and popcorn. The Ringster also uses music and acrobatic performers to convince the audience to get their treats. Music does add drama to this clip as already discussed for Hawaiian Birds. Ironically theatres today

are now starting to use the same formula by adding more and more publicity prior to the start of the film to sell a variety of different things.

I wanted to add a Betty Boop cartoon in this essay and I found one called Betty Boop's Rise to Fame, which provides homage to Broadway and vaudeville singers and performers. It directly uses music, as her performances are central to the theme of cartoon. We see references to May West and Cab Calloway as the Man from Music Mountain sequence provides a dance sequence where the old man is imitating Cab Calloway. We also see Betty Boop imitating Fanny Brice and Maurice Chevalier. This cartoon is important to this essay because it makes a fitting tribute to the music makers themselves by providing imitation to the people, which are responsible for building the music industry to what it is today. Finally Betty Boop is fitting for this tribute because she was defiant of all the norms which closely resembles the jazz music of the day. Her black face routine also illustrates the racism inherent in the industry at the time, making reference to Al Jolson who is the father of entertainment in the 20th century. Other than this animation's historical significance, it provides another example of music as it was brought to the foreground being the main attraction in this animated cartoon. It illustrates the power that animated cartoons can have to teach history to the new generation that will probably never get to know Al Jolson, Fanny Brice, and Maurice Chevalier.

The next three clips namely, The Bandmaster, The Overture to William Tell, and The Poets Peasant, all provide a behind the look scene at musical orchestras. All three of these scenes feature music making combined with absurdity and sarcasm. In addition music is revealed as a reality as opposed to being part of the background or action. Being philosophic a little bit music exists for itself as opposed to in itself thus baring a life of its own. The clips offer moments that are literally choreographed because most of the animated moments are done to the music. Movements that are done to music are choreographed or coordinated and therefore fall into the domain of dance. For example in The Bandmaster the elephants are literally doing a ballet number similarly to the mouse which jumps up and down substituting fingers on the flute. Furthermore in The Bandmaster we can also notice musicians, who comically fight amongst themselves on the music, looking very much like the three stooges. Once movements are done to the music, the movements become choreography whether improvised or planned. Therefore when choreography is created then the music becomes an integral part of the animated cartoon which constitutes a good example of a combination of action, dance and the use of music.

The Overture to William Tell offers much of the same as The Bandmaster but combines a set music orchestra mixed with scenes from outside life. We see how the music carries onto the outside world, which provides a reverse of music's role when most of the time music is added to the action. In this example music doesn't just add itself but rather imposes itself to a parallel world on the outside. In one instance a pre-longed violin note traces the duration of the sound outside the hall. In its journey the violin exchanges a wig, robs a man of his ice cream cone, and then helps a bird by trapping a cat in his cage. The violin sound demonstrates to us how easily and naturally music blends into our everyday lives. Although the movements in the cartoon were pre-planned the music illustrates a rhythm to life in general. Therefore by adding the sound to movements the surface appears to be separate which illustrates a rhythm that is innate.

The other noticeable moment with music occurs when several animals are used to play the same instrument at different tones. We see several pigs playing a base

fiddle as they were set up at different levels according to their height and notes that they were playing. It illustrates music but is also self-explanatory in demonstrating the structure of music. The five pigs playing the bass fiddle present a visual illustration of how the various notes would be placed on a sheet of music. In essence The Overture to William Tell provides another example like The Bandmaster but makes use of different devices to communicate the effectiveness of music and animation. The Overture to William Tell is richer in its meaning because it makes an effort to reveal the structure of music.

The Poet's Peasant, provides a combination of the above as the orchestra is set out in the open air in the middle of a small town illustrating examples of what a percussionist can do. Despite the fact that animals are using other animals to perform certain sounds and often a pumpkin and pot are used as a device to create a base sound, they illustrate how percussionists can use just about anything to create sounds. That anything essentially becomes a percussionist's instrument. The Poets Peasant provides a sarcastic and silly example of how cartoon music is created. This being said, the cartoon uses a tornado to add a visual illustration of the music is rising intensity. The tornado lifts every musician and makes them land in such a way that they are able to complete their final sounds.

In concluding with this trilogy of animated cartoons, which use orchestras as a device to give music yet another role, we can summarise by saying that these cartoons provide a visual representation of the music we are hearing. The orchestra incorporates itself to become the theme in cartoons of that genre. In essence we get a glimpse of the back stage musical production of animated cartoons, as despite the silliness, we come to realise the large orchestrations which were needed to create this new genre of music fronted by the percussionist.

The Fresh Vegetable Mystery uses music mostly for dramatic effect while occasionally the movements might be done to the music. The appeal in this cartoon is achieved by the combined use of music and the narrative, which gives life to vegetables. The music provides the background touch, which sets the mood to the character, which is attached to the various vegetables. For example the hysterical carrot which screams for help once the baby carrots have been kidnapped, by whom turns out to be four mice under a blanket. The music sounds like something you would hear in General Hospital. Another good characterisation is provided by the entrance of the potato who glides along like Mr. happy go lucky, as the music is much more loose and jazzy, besides all the other potato police officers are all stationed at the café. Finally the interrogation of the suspicious vegetables makes us think twice every time we'll cook food. The music then shifts to a horror theme because the suspects are treated brutally but nonetheless one can't help but to laugh as this absurd situation and yet looks realistic. Therefore this cartoon helps to illustrate how important music can be in providing a mood which helps highlight the various characters.

The Home Front serves as a digression because this cartoon uses music artificially within the animated cartoon by way of the record player. Then we are presented with live music played by a live swing orchestra, which depicts life at home. It is as though with both circumstances that we are listening to music within music or with photography as the original saying says "a picture within a picture". It is artificial because we are looking into the world of the animated cartoon, through the point of view of the soldier, while he imagines hearing this music. Therefore this cartoon is appealing in the way it uses music because we see music originating from two different sources; one live and one pre-recorded, and yet they are both artificial in

the context which they are presented and viewed.

Tom & Gerry's Dinner Wagon, uses the music to dictate the action. The vocal group sequence is perhaps the best moment in this cartoon particularly when they ask for soup, the soup arrives, and then the soup starts singing. We are even provided with a little dance sequence when the eggs provide a brief tap dance sequence before being cooked. Eventually the entire dinner wagon is performing music as all the customers, band together and form a jazz band. Ironically the ending when the train totally destroys itself when it slams against the wagon underlines the energy found within the dinner wagon, energy powerful enough to derail a train. This animated cartoon provides a good visual ensemble as to what role music plays in this particular instance.

The next section of this paper is a fitting tribute to one of the greatest cartoon characters of them all Bugs Bunny. All five of the cartoons, No Park Hare, What's Up Doc, One Froggy Evening, What's Opera Doc, and Rabbit Rampage, provide a summarisation and more examples of what has been said thus far.

The first of these cartoons, No Park Hare, uses music as mood only, however the music is so well composed that it appears to be matching the movements. This cartoon wins the best composer's award in this collection of cartoons because the opening sounds are just background but match the action, without being timed to the action. In reality they don't really match the music but rather make sounds when the actions are not. This perfect synchronisation of music and actions as they oppose each other creates a syncopation of actions and music. For example, the cars are zooming along on the highway with this background music, which is very hard to distinguish in terms of instruments, but it works! The music seems to harmonise as oppose to timing itself to the action and this is made more evident when the drilling starts and Bugs Bunny gets up to close the water tap. The music in fact fills in the spaces when the sound effects of the drilling are silent. What we hear when Bug Bunny walks over to the sink to turn the tap off is a combination of flutes and wind instruments while heavy drilling sounds play in the background. In addition to actions and music being syncopated the opposing elements are opposite in flavour, that is the music is soft, while the drilling is heavy and deep yet the opposition of these sounds creates a harmony which works. This was similar to Glen Miller's arrangements, which put six saxophones with one clarinet. A similar but different example of this harmonisation occurred when the highway builder is dropped into the load of cement and then dries up solid as he tries to walk away. The music gets condensed and very tight which does not time his movement but rather reflects it. In these above examples we can see how an ordinary cartoon can be progressive and advanced in the way it utilises its music. !

What's Up Doc presents two different topics in relation to music. First and foremost it celebrates Vaudeville entertainers like Bing Crosby, Eddie Cantor, and Al Jolson. Secondly it presents music as the central narrative theme as the entire piece is based on a musical entertainer's life. The film makes a metaphor on the popular entertainers of the past with the present day heroes, animated cartoon characters like Bugs Bunny. Elmer Phud makes an important statement saying that, "those entertainers will never amount to anything" when in reality they are the entertainers which influenced the 20th century's entertainment scene. The simple fact that their inclusion in this animated skit illustrates the cartoon world's willingness to provide a homage to the entertainers which formed the entertainment business.

The other aspect, which relates more closely to this essay, is the music's use and how it intertwines with the narrative. The narrative is essentially about music as Bugs Bunny offers different moments from his musical career. However this animated cartoon illustrates that biographies on musical entertainers are a good vehicle for the use of music. The music is used as a highlight as clips from his career fade in and out reflecting the passage of time. What's Up Doc, was included in this essay, to give another example of the use of music, but more on principle to make a homage to the past vaudeville stars.

One Froggy Evening adds an element of a singing frog to the performance of live music. Ironically the frog only sings for the man who found him and will not sing for an audience which is opposite to the idea of the performance of music. The frog is metaphoric for the theme of this essay which aims at revealing the composition and uses of cartoon music. The music seems hidden as to how it is composed and therefore is represented by the frog. This animated cartoon while providing a metaphor does play a similar role as What's Up Doc because it features a host of ragtime melodies of the same era as Eddie Cantor, Bing Crosby, and Al Jolson.

The music has two roles within this cartoon, it serves as musical moments when the frog dances and sings and it provides music as a mood when the frog won't sing. The frog uses the music and incorporates it into his actions in an upbeat fashion. When the frog is not singing or refuses to sing, the same music is played but in a very sad and mellow manner. Therefore the versatility of the music is demonstrated, as it is played within the same cartoon in two very different moods. One Froggy Evening illustrates with more depth how music can be represented in very different fashion within the same musical.

What's Opera Doc offers music that is both used as mood and as interpreter of actions but included an operatic score. It features a ballet suite, music that rises in intensity when the rabbit is chased by the sorcery of an angry Phud and music that is sweet for a wedding and moving for ballet dance. Once again this cartoon was included on principle to highlight opera music.

Rabbit Rampage was a piece that was added for its genius and comical theme, as the animator is self reflective in this work about his work. The music does have a role for providing a mood; primarily Bugs Bunny fits at the animator. It turns out that the animator is really Elmer Phud whose seeking revenge on Bugs Bunny for all the years of loses to Bugs Bunny.

Baton Bunny is a finally because it sums up what has been said thus far. Everything looks perfectly normal in the opening except when the rabbit ears pop up, which sets up the comical sarcasm that will follow. The first of these is the man, which coughs and is thrown out which reflects real life in that silence is observed in these concerts. Bugs Bunny is just acting out what we would feel like doing to some of these people who keep chatting or making noise and that makes it funny. We see a typical series of metaphors with references to the "glasses" jokes and playing pool. Although this theme is music, as clearly all the actions are done to music, once he first drops his hands, Bugs Bunny exaggerates the real in that often conductors do make the oddest of movements. Then Bugs falls into a trance when the waltz theme plays which does reflect how people react when they hear these melodies. In this situation the music provides both a theme and the basis for the actions. Therefore we do see comedy, sarcasm, real life illustrations, music providing the basis for the action, music as providing the theme for the cartoon, and actions that are simply done to

the music.

Finally the masterpiece of dance in animation features Gene Kelly in two clips from *Anchors Aweigh* and *Invitation to the Dance*. In essence these cartoon sequences were conceived by one of the gurus of dance Gene Kelly. The big difference from the other sequences is that these were done with the work of an actual dancer as opposed to people who animate actions to the music. The first clip includes Kelly in a dream sequence where he travels to a distant land where singing and dancing is forbidden, which essentially makes the animated sequence self reflective on music and dance. It's a good clip because it teaches children at very early ages that everybody can dance. The music is the basis for this cartoon because it not only dictates most of the movements but it also provides the mood as well as the narrative of the story. The whole debate in the narrative is centered on music and dancing.

Finally the masterpiece in film of music and dance is better than anything Walt Disney has put together because this sequence seriously showcases song & dance as a serious art. *An Invitation to the Dance* was solely conceived by Gene Kelly and tied up the animation studios at MGM for an entire year. This is a must addition to your animation class.

This animation combines real life and cartoon characters as well as a wide range of music and characterisation by both the live and cartoon characters. The dragon's dance formations in the beginning are brilliant and very well done. We could almost say that the dancing was brilliant or the animation was? Furthermore the dragon sequence alone demonstrates the various changes in mood, which occur during this short part, spanning from threatening to loose, to almost artistic when the dancing becomes evident.

Then the second part begins with mood as the music changes drastically from sweet, when he picks up the diamond to imprisonment when the two guards arrive. All the talking is choreographed by music after which he gets thrown to the floor. A love story then ensues when he flirts with the women and as soon as you think Kelly's done for music and dance take centre stage. Then the music shifts from Egyptian in style to mellow jazz as they perform a soft-shoe.

A dream sequence then erupts with Kelly's choreography making for the most brilliant use of dance, music and animation on film. He's even adventurous enough to make a slow motion sequence. The mood is sweet and the music is orchestral as opposed to Egyptian or jazzy. Then Kelly dances on knives with a style of music, which combines a smart-aleck theme with danger, attached to it. Then the not so bright guards get suckered into another challenge, as is the case with real life tap dancers. The clip indicates the guards' hidden passion for dance and therefore every chance they get; they act upon this desire. The same thing is true of tap dancers because it is very hard to refuse a challenge and a chance to dance in real life. Then at a certain point in the sequence the guard's stretch out their arms not to arrest him but to dance some more as they, elegantly resume dancing. The stretch and squeeze formulas are used to make the guys bigger and then to transform them into midgets, for the sake of the aesthetics of the dance number to make everybody aesthetically the same. Again Kelly tries to escape by drawing his own door but the men trap him forcing Kelly to keep dancing.

The sequence climaxes with mood as Kelly gets an idea, as the music simultaneously

rise in intensity and then the drum role sounds appear as background to his new idea to get rid of the guards. They then excite Kelly, women and boy ironically representing a family in the fifties. Thus clip and its description essentially talks for itself in illustrating why Invitation to the Dance provides the best animated song and dance sequences putting song and dance in the fore ground as a serious art.

In conclusion, this essay has attempted to illustrate through a variety of examples the different ways in which music is used in animated cartoons. In doing so three roles were isolated music as providing a mood, actions which are done to the music, and music as providing the basis for the animated cartoon. In isolating the types of roles music plays in addition to explaining what cartoon music is, this essay has been successful in shedding new light in the uses and meaning of music within the animated cartoon.

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