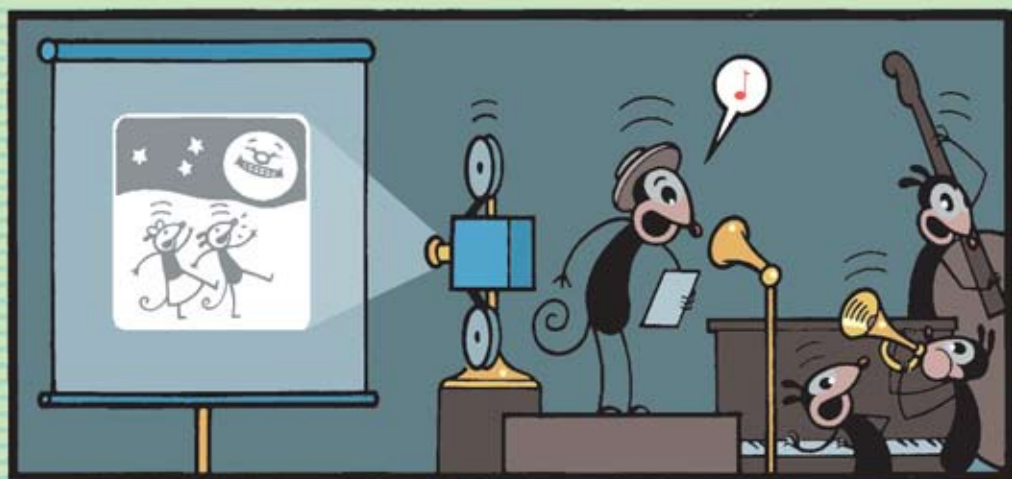


The  
**CARTOON**  
**music**  
Book



**INTERVIEWS WITH Mark Mothersbaugh,  
Alf Clausen, Carl Stalling, and John Zorn**  
**WRITINGS BY Chuck Jones, Neil Strauss,  
Will Friedwald, and Irwin Chusid**  
**DRAWINGS BY Chris Ware and John Kricfalusi  
and much, much more**

**Edited by Daniel Goldmark and Yuval Taylor**  
**Foreword by Leonard Maltin**

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**a** cappella

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***N'aies pas peur bébé agrippe-toi CHRACK!***

***Je suis là CRASH! pour te protéger TCHLACK!***

***Ferme les yeux CRACK! embrasse-moi SMACK!***

***SHEBAM! POW! BLOP! WIZZ!***

**—SERGE GAINSBORG**



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# Foreword

by LEONARD MALTIN

WHEN I WAS a kid and first got hooked on animation, I don't know if I was aware of how much the music meant to my enjoyment of those films. And yet, I don't think I could completely separate the music from the cartoons (having "Merrily We Roll Along" and "The Merry-Go-Round Broke Down" embedded in my brain from infancy). I'm certain that I first developed a love of music from hearing classical themes in the cartoons of the 1930s and '40s I was watching on TV.

I don't think I'll ever hear Liszt's second Hungarian Rhapsody, for instance, without thinking of the building of a skyscraper as Friz Freleng used it in his cartoon *Rhapsody in Rivets* (1941). To me the most exciting development in recent years has been the recognition that has finally come to composers, but when you look at both the enormity of their output and the incredible range of music that they embraced, it is formidable indeed. (Only recently have I learned, in addition, that gifted musicians like Mel Powell and André Previn played on some of those MGM recording dates for Scott Bradley.) You had to be a good musician to play some of that complicated music they wrote.

Music wasn't just punctuation for those cartoons; it was their backbone. Music propelled them, commented on the action, underscored the comedy, enhanced the atmosphere, and accelerated the chases. It was a crucial ingredient to their success and I don't think anyone who's grown up on a steady diet of those cartoons has ever lost his affection for the music that was so much a part of them.

When I wrote my book *Of Mice and Magic: A History of American Animated Cartoons*, there was virtually no research yet conducted on Stalling's or Bradley's work, but I discussed its impact and significance.

One of my favorite pastimes, along with some of my "cartoonaholic" friends, is playing "Name That Tune" with Carl Stalling's scores because they're a compendium of musical fragments from both the popular and classical fields.

In one cartoon you can hear everything from a fragment of Beethoven to a Tin Pan Alley tune by Harry Warren and Al Dubin from the latest Busby Berkeley musical. Looking back at them today, they comprise a sort of catalog of contemporary Hollywood music as well as a primer on the most effective and dramatic themes from the great masters.

There's a lot of talk about the animation renaissance in recent years but there's no question that music has played as big a role in this resurgence as it did the first time around. The enormous success of Disney's recent features cannot be spoken of without credit to the songs of Alan Menken and Howard Ashman and Menken's underscoring. Nor can you accurately pinpoint the appeal of *Tiny Toons* without zeroing in on its infectious theme and the fact that it is played by a full orchestra—not a synthesizer or a “typical” TV soundtrack band. Bruce Broughton's music for that series gives it a full-bodied gusto that we haven't heard since the heyday of the Warner Bros. cartoons some thirty to fifty years ago.

In sharp contrast, what John Kricfalusi did on *The Ren & Stimpy Show* was to turn a liability into an asset. Instead of feeling impoverished by having to use stock from the past that might have been heard weeks before on a travelogue or a Listerine commercial, he has turned library music into a joke of its own and deliberately played cliché music for effect and found choice examples of cartoon music of the past, such as the work of Raymond Scott, which so heavily populated Carl Stalling's scores. Listening to the soundtrack of *Ren & Stimpy* is a treat for any cartoon buff for just that reason.

Music and cartoons have gone hand-in-hand since Walt Disney made *Steamboat Willie* in 1928. Music wasn't just an accompaniment for that cartoon, it was what helped sell the movie to the public and to the motion picture industry. There was virtually no dialogue in that cartoon. What attracted people in those primitive days of “talkies” was the idea that cartoon characters (and even inanimate objects) moved in synchronization to a musical beat. That was the charm of *Steamboat Willie* and virtually all the cartoons that followed for several years from Disney and from his followers and rivals.

It's rewarding to see music coming back to the forefront of cartoons after all these years.

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All photos in this book are courtesy of Cartoon Research, except where otherwise noted.



# Introduction

by DANIEL GOLDMARK  
and YUVAL TAYLOR

THE POPULARITY OF cartoon music, from Carl Stalling's work for Warner Bros. to Disney soundtracks and *The Simpsons'* song parodies, has never been greater. Not only are cartoons seen more frequently by more people than ever before (thanks to the Cartoon Network, Nickelodeon's cartoons, PBS's children's cartoons, prime time cartoons such as *The Simpsons*, and feature-length animated films from Disney, DreamWorks, and Pixar), but cartoon music is increasingly regarded as an art form in its own right, distinct from other film music, and well worth listening to outside of the context of its images. Even cartoon pop music, which had not had any notable success since the Chipmunks and the Archies, is now scoring major hits with Gorillaz. Bugs Bunny on Broadway has been touring the world for over a decade, playing Carl Stalling scores in sold-out concert halls; perhaps it won't be long before other repertory groups assemble to perform scores and cues by Scott Bradley, Hoyt Curtin, and even such a recent composer as Richard Stone.

What accounts for this surge in popularity? Perhaps the qualities that make cartoon music unique have now come into vogue. Much of the music for Hollywood's live-action films of the 1930s and '40s, led by the examples of such pioneers as Erich Wolfgang Korngold and Max Steiner, tended to rely on a combination of oft-repeated melodic themes (much in the style of Wagner's leitmotifs) and short spells of frenetic, blood-pumping, "dramatic" music for action scenes. Since a cartoon had only a tenth of the time to get its dramatic point across, the music had to adapt; it necessarily needed to be faster in how it punctuated the gags moving by on screen at 24 frames per second. Cartoon music simply had to be more *telling* than music for live-action films.

Take, for example, the term "mickey mousing." Developed in the early 1930s, it describes the exact synchronization of music and image in a film (think of someone skulking down a dark street, pizzicato bass strings mark-

ing his every step). No live-action film composer worth his salt would intentionally “mickey mouse,” for it is difficult to be expressive about the story and literal about the action at the same time. In a cartoon, on the other hand, such close movement between score and screen helps to add a sense of vitality to the painted cels photographed in rapid succession, cels that never had any life in them in the first place. While an accusation of mickey mousing would insult most feature film composers, it is not something to shun in cartoons; on the contrary, it implies the very thing that composers strive for: a score that effectively (and affectively) tells the story of the visuals.

It is too simplistic to describe cartoon music as creating a musical version of the story, however. Composers like Carl Stalling and Scott Bradley did more than musically narrate each episode they scored; they added speed to downward falls, pain to the anvils on the head, amorous impact to the love stricken, and swing to every last dance sequence that came across their respective desks. Since cartoon characters can, by definition, do things that we can't (or shouldn't) do, the music exaggerates and celebrates that difference. Cartoon music does more than simply add life to cartoons—it makes cartoons *bigger* than life.

Yet cartoon music has not been kind to its composers, most of whom still languish in obscurity. Film historians have always considered music near the bottom of the hierarchy of cinematic import, particularly because film scores are traditionally created in the final stages of the post-production process, long after the film has been shot and edited for continuity. To make matters worse, animation was seen simply as a throw-away form of amusement, filmic fodder to entertain audiences in the opening hour before the feature began (along with newsreels, coming attractions, live-action short subjects, serials, and other “disposable” material). Add to this the fact that one of cartoon music's implicit roles is to add to the overall comedy of a cartoon—it's meant to be “funny music”—making it even more difficult to take “seriously.” Thus cartoon music has received practically no critical or scholarly attention through the years.

This book on cartoon music's past and present aims to take a small step toward correcting the negligence that cartoon music has thus far suffered by collecting interviews with and writings by the principal composers, along with contributions from music critics and cartoonists. Some of these items have been published previously, although none are readily available in book form in the United States; others have been commissioned specifically for this volume.

Carl Stalling, who was responsible for scoring the groundbreaking Walt Disney cartoons of the late 1920s and more than twenty years' worth of Warner Bros. cartoons, receives more attention in this collection than any other composer, and with good reason, for he was the person most responsible for changing people's notions of how much could be accomplished in a seven-minute cartoon score. But he wasn't the only cartoon composer in town, and the others each had his own individual style. This book includes two pieces by Scott Bradley, written while he was the composer for the MGM cartoons, in which he explains his affinity for writing in a more modernist style and his aversion to the use of popular songs. The second of Will Friedwald's three contributions looks at the musical stylings of Winston Sharples, who, like Stalling, worked for more than one studio during his life (Van Beuren, Paramount, Harvey, and Famous), and likewise had a lasting effect on the sound of cartoon music as we know it today. Sadly, we could not cover every composer who ever wrote for Hollywood cartoons: missing are Joe De Nat and Eddie Kilfeather (Columbia); Art Turkisher (Iwerks); James Dietrich, Darrell Calker, and Clarence Wheeler (Lantz); Eugene Poddany (MGM); Philip Scheib (Terrytoons); Eugene Rodemich (Van Beuren); Frank Marsales (Lantz and Warner Bros.); and Bernard Brown (Warner Bros.), to name just a few.

*The Cartoon Music Book*, therefore, does not purport to be the first and last source for all animated music—but it's a start. In addition to addressing the different approaches of major composers, many of these essays focus on the music of specific cartoons, how different studios approached musical genres such as jazz and classical music, how cartoon music has interacted with pop music over the years, and what cartoon music in general has accomplished and should accomplish. Thus, one of the fortunate by-products of this project is the genesis of new criticism and discourse on the subject, much in areas never properly addressed in the past. David Wondrich's close reading of minstrelsy in *The Band Concert* and Joseph Lanza's discussion of stock library cues in *The Ren & Stimpy Show* deal with productions a half-century apart, yet there's an implicit connection between them: both provide insight into how cartoons have played with and illuminated the high and low distinctions of their particular eras. The interviews printed here are meant to illuminate the details of the cartoon composer's daily life—especially his ability to create so much music under typically impossible deadlines—in addition to giving some insight into composers' own attitudes toward the creative process. Additionally, those interviews conducted with contemporary composers show how the

## *Introduction*

compositional process has changed since the days of theatrical cartoons, while reaffirming the impact of Stalling's and Bradley's legacy on the figures of today's animation world. Last, while we had to limit the perspective of this collection to cartoons produced in the United States, we could not ignore completely the influence of international animation industries on Hollywood; Milo Miles's essay thus addresses the culture of the Japanese anime soundtrack and anime's growing presence in the United States.

There are countless other cartoons and composers that have yet to receive their due. If anything, we hope that these essays and interviews might inspire new work in this area. It's about time that the silliest of all musical genres be taken seriously.



# **Main Title**



# CHRIS WARE



© Chris Ware



# Tunes for Toons: A Cartoon Music Primer

by NEIL STRAUSS

“IF YOU CAN write for animation,” said Hoyt Curtin, composer for classic Hanna-Barbera cartoons from *The Flintstones* to *Scooby-Doo*, “you can write for anything.” Cartoon music is among the most engaging and experimental forms of twentieth-century music, exploring the more outrageous extremes of instrumentation, rhythm, and nonmusical sound. It is a genre in which rapid tempo changes, unusual instrumental effects, experimental percussion, post-modern quotation, shock chords, and musical genre-shifting are de rigeur. From the warped takes on Liszt and Rossini that occur when a fly lands on a conductor’s nose to the free-jazz solos that certain animated animals play on the heads of other animated animals, the laughs lie in perverting the sounds we’ve come to expect from concerts and canines. Just try watching a classic *Tom and Jerry* or *Bugs Bunny* cartoon with the sound off, and see how flat the jokes fall.

The history of this music has rarely been told, for the sole reason that it wasn’t until recently that cartoon music was even considered a viable genre unto itself. Cartoon music, for the purposes of this primer, is score—orchestral or instrumental accompaniment—as opposed to the circle-of-life songs of Disney films, the pop hits that fill some big-budget film features, and the tongue-in-cheek parodies that populate *The Simpsons*. Born in the 1920s, cartoon music experienced its golden years in the 1940s and ’50s, before television studios increased the workload, lowered the budget, and, with the advent of synthesizers, eviscerated the art.

Interestingly, many of the more modern avant-garde musicians who have been drawn to cartoon music, like John Zorn and Sun Ra, have their roots in improvisation. This makes sense, because many of the early composers for cartoons started out as improvisers themselves, playing organ and other instruments to accompany silent movies.

Perhaps one of the most important chance meetings in cartoon music history occurred in the early 1920s at the Isis Theatre in Kansas City, where Carl Stalling, then a film accompanist and conductor, first encountered Walt Disney, who was just beginning his involvement in film. After Disney left for Hollywood and began producing cartoons, the two renewed their bond (originally created over their shared excitement about combining music and film) and Stalling was soon given the first two silent Mickey Mouse shorts to score. The job was a perfect fit for the wildly talented Stalling, and he was quickly hired as the studio's first music director.

In the meantime, Max Fleischer at Fleischer Studios was experimenting on a more in-depth level with adding music to cartoons. The studio's "Song Car-Tune," *Oh Mabel* (1924), introduced the infamous bouncing ball, which landed on the appropriate lyric to a popular song in time to the music (which was played by the theater accompanist) for audiences to sing along to. The "car-tune" received such an enthusiastic response at its first screening that the theater manager rewound the short and showed it again. A few shorts later, Max Fleischer was introduced to Lee de Forest, who had developed Phonofilm, a method of recording sound on the edge of motion picture film. (Incidentally, the instructional film on the use of Phonofilm was animated. Thus cartoons played an integral part in the advent of sound in film). Fleischer fell in love with the idea and produced the first theatrical film of any kind with a synchronized soundtrack, *My Old Kentucky Home*, in 1926. Subsequently, he added sound to his earlier bouncing-ball films, many of which featured Koko the Clown. These were the first theatrical releases of sound films, predating even Warner Bros.' first live-action motion picture with a music track, *Don Juan* (which preceded 1927's more famous *Jazz Singer* by more than a year).

Even Paul Terry's Terrytoons studio beat Disney to sound with its first Aesop's Fables series film, *Dinner Time* (1928). Terrytoons claimed to be the first studio to prescore its cartoons. Working with brilliant Terrytoons composer Philip A. Scheib, the studio's animators drew frames to fit his scores, which were recorded in one take.

The advent of sound solved a problem that plagued composer Paul Hindemith, a *Felix the Cat* fanatic who composed a score for *Felix at the Circus*, which he attempted to premiere at the Baden-Baden festival. Much to his chagrin, the machine selected to synchronize his pianola roll with the film projector malfunctioned and the composition was subsequently lost.

Determined to keep up with the competition, Walt Disney traveled to New York to work on his first actual sound cartoon, *Steamboat Willie*. At Cinephone studios in 1928, the well-known New York film accompanist Carl Edouarde conducted the score. Sound effects, music, and dialogue all had to be recorded on one track, without mistakes. Any missed cue or unwanted sound meant starting over from the beginning. To keep the beat, the orchestra played to visual cues inked onto the cartoon's print. The synchronization process was so long and laborious that Disney was forced to sell his car in order to pay the musicians overtime.

With Stalling at his side, however, Disney eventually streamlined and updated the sound process, creating innovative Silly Symphonies, which were pre-scored animated shorts choreographed to well-known classical works. His first was *The Skeleton Dance* (1929). The close synchronization between music and on-screen movement popularized by this and earlier shorts came to be known as “mickey mousing.” Disney’s quirky transpositions of classical works would later reach their height with *Fantasia* (1940), which thrilled Disney to no end by making, in his words, “strange bedfellows” of Bach, Beethoven, and Mickey Mouse.

At Disney, Stalling also invented a tick system for synchronizing music to visuals. It was a forerunner to the click track, now the standard process in both live-action and animated features. One of the first click tracks, a reel of unexposed film with holes punched out to make clicks and pops when the film was run on the sound head, was devised by Disney sound effects man Jim Macdonald and used in *The Skeleton Dance*.

To avoid copyright infringements, musical directors at these studios culled their non-original music from either songs in the public domain or songs from their studio’s musicals. The cartoon studio at Warner Bros. was actually created as a vehicle for promoting its musicals’ songs, with management originally requiring every cartoon produced there to use a popular song from a Warner Bros. feature. Two ex-Disney animators, Hugh Harman and Rudolf Ising (along with producer Leon Schlesinger), convinced Warner Bros. to start a cartoon studio and began directing Looney Tunes in 1930, with Merrie Melodies following a year later. (Even their directorial credit was a musical pun—“Harman-Ising” or *harmonizing*). Frank Marsales was the original musical director for these, followed by Norman Spencer, Bernard Brown, and then, in 1936, Carl Stalling, fresh from Disney and Ub Iwerks cartoon studios. Stalling

remained at Warner Bros. for twenty-two years, scoring over 600 cartoons at the rate of one every eight days.

His working process was fascinating, showing the careful attention to music with which each cartoon was drawn. Before animation, he met with a cartoon's director in order to set the time signatures to which the short was to be drawn. Instead of counting in beats per measure or beats per minute, cartoon animators counted in frames per beat. After animation, Stalling received either the animator's exposure sheets or bar sheets, which broke the animation, dialogue, and sound effects into musical bars for Stalling to score from. For his compositions, Stalling employed musical puns by using popular songs whose titles fit on-screen gags, sometimes for no more than four seconds. This came naturally to Stalling who, as John Zorn puts it, "had an Ivesian sense of quotation."

Often, themes from Warner Bros. live-action films would be played for under four seconds before mutating into an original Stalling piece. The average cue (the unedited period between the commencement and end of a single musical take) was at most two minutes, and at the lower end of the spectrum, two seconds. Most of Stalling's scores were a weighty 500 measures comprised of ten sections, all performed by the Warner Bros. fifty-piece orchestra, who were challenged and taxed far more than they were when they performed undemanding scores for some of Warner Bros. feature live-action films. The opening sequence for most Merrie Melodies was a Warner Bros.-owned tune called "Merrily We Roll Along," with an electric guitar providing the initial sound effect as the Warner Bros. logo catapults forward on the screen. (For the Looney Tunes, a jaunty minor hit, "The Merry-Go-Round Broke Down," by the Tin Pan Alley team of Friend and Franklin was used.)

Stalling's work called to mind composers who had a cartoon sensibility and composed with visual images in mind—from Claude Debussy to jazz stylists like Zez Confrey, Red Norvell, Spike Jones, John Kirby, and, especially, Raymond Scott. Stalling relied so heavily on the 1930s music of Scott, particularly the fast and wacky "Powerhouse" theme that accompanied so many conveyor-belt and chase scenes, that Scott is often considered a cartoon composer himself, although he never intended his highly visual and idiosyncratic swing-based pieces to be used as such. In a decade of big bands, of Benny Goodman and "One O'Clock Jump," when the world was not just on the verge of war but Glenn Miller, Scott wasn't afraid to break every existing rule to make pop music. He put together a small swing band that didn't really

swing, kept all his music in his head instead of on charts, worked at tempos more mechanical than human, flirted with the avant-garde, and, above all, maintained a deep, profound sense of humor, especially toward so-called serious music. His songs came from the idiosyncratic mind of an idiosyncratic man, with highly suggestive titles like “Dinner Music for a Pack of Hungry Cannibals” and “Confusion Among a Fleet of Taxicabs Upon Meeting with a Fare.” “It was so different,” explained original Raymond Scott Quintette saxophonist Dave Harris. “That’s why it took off so. People, they didn’t know what the hell to make of the Quintette. When you told people you were with the Quintette, they’d look at you like ‘where the hell did you come from?’ They thought we came from another world.”

Milt Franklyn replaced Stalling when he retired in 1958, having already worked as Stalling’s arranger for years. He was followed by William Lava in the early 1960s. Though Lava’s scores were not as polished as Stalling’s, he did add other musical influences, such as world music, to the cartoons. Serving as musical copyist and occasional orchestrator during and after the Stalling years was Eugene Poddany, who later directed the music for a number of Ted Geisel (or Dr. Seuss) classics, which were directed by Chuck Jones. Treg Brown was in charge of the sound effects for the cartoons under all of these composers. Sound effects people like Brown became, in many ways, an adjunct to the cartoon composition process, though there were often battles for whether on-screen action would be accompanied by a musical or sound-effect cue. Like Stalling, Brown was an innovator, often using a sound that was entirely incongruous with the on-screen image, forcing the eye and the ear to send comically contradictory information to the brain.

Besides Stalling, the other giant of cartoon music was Scott Bradley, the self-taught composer at MGM’s cartoon studios. With the sound turned off, the jokes in an orchestrated sequence of *Tom and Jerry* fall flat; Bradley’s harsh dissonances and move-for-move orchestration bring them to life. With a greater passion for modernism than his predecessors, Bradley’s musical sources ranged from wild jazz to twelve-tone rows and musical clusters. “I hope Dr. Schoenberg will forgive me for using his system to produce funny music,” he once said, “but even the boys in the orchestra laughed when we were recording it.”

In MGM’s academy award winning *Cat Concerto* (1947), cartoon cat Tom’s piano fingerings exactly follow Bradley’s notation of a Liszt Rhapsody arranged for, and recorded by, two pianists. Even Tom’s finger and wrist move-

ments are modeled after those of the late pianist Vladimir de Pachman—though the feline virtuoso somehow performs music scored for four human hands. “I wish that our contemporary masters would take interest in cartoon work,” Bradley said. “For men like Copland, Bernstein, Britten, Walton, Kodaly, Shostakovich, or Prokofiev, it would be a very fruitful experience.”

In a post–John Cage world, in which all sound can be considered music, the sonic possibilities are even greater. In UPA’s *Gerald McBoing Boing* series, scored by Gail Kubik and based on the innovative Dr. Seuss children’s story, Gerald cannot talk; he can only utter sound effects. The score calls for a narrator, a chamber orchestra, and an imaginative array of percussion instruments. In *Gerald McBoing Boing’s Symphony* (1953), Gerald fills in for an entire symphony orchestra in their absence.

At Walter Lantz Studios, home of Woody Woodpecker and Andy Panda, Darrell Calker was doing all the innovation. He was well known in jazz circles and often brought in the likes of Nat King Cole and Meade Lux Lewis to play for Lantz’s “Swing Symphonies.” Other noteworthy musical directors of the era included Winston Sharples, an innovator responsible for the themes and scores of *Felix the Cat*, *Little Lulu*, *Casper the Friendly Ghost*, and more at Van Buren, Famous, and Paramount Studios; Sammy Timberg and Sammy Lerner at Fleischer studios; Gene Rodemich at Van Beuren Studios; Joe De Nat at Columbia/Screen Gems; and Oliver Wallace, Frank Churchill, Leigh Harline, and others at Disney.

The death knell of the golden age of cartoon music came in the late 1950s, when UPA, MGM, and other studios halted cartoon production and a musician’s strike forced studios to use library music from past cartoons, starting a bad habit that plagues today’s cartoons. In addition, the large-volume demands of television in the late 1950s forced other studios to put out cheap and hurried work.

When Hanna-Barbera opened its studio after the demise of MGM, the founders called Hoyt Curtin, an aspiring film composer whom they had met while working on a beer commercial, to do some musical spots over the phone. Impressed by Curtin’s gift for coming up with hummable melodies in minutes, the pair hired him as the studio’s chief composer, and soon he was busy recording three times a week. Due to time and budget constraints, and also due to directors’ attempts at modernization, Curtin sometimes had to use all synthesizer cues, “which don’t swing,” as he said. He scored everything from the big-band-style theme songs of *The Jetsons* and *The Flintstones* to more

sedate cartoons like *The Smurfs*. His scores for the *Superfriends* shows created the type of hero music that has become standard fare for the robot and action cartoons that began to dominate Saturday mornings in the late 1980s and '90s; while, in *Jonny Quest*, he turned almost sadistic, writing it in "a killer key," as he says, with the hardest fingering positions he could. "Just murder," is how he describes the experience of playing it. According to Curtin, "Every current Saturday morning cartoon has stolen from me musically."

Another musician who didn't conform to television's low standards was Vince Guaraldi, who composed the memorable piano themes to the *Charlie Brown* specials in the 1970s. Similarly, the iconic music from *The Pink Panther*, with its Henry Mancini themes (written for the Blake Edwards movies) and cues composed at times by William Lava, Doug Goodwind, and Walter Greene, gave new life to a waning art form.

Looking at the state of Saturday morning cartoons today, it often seems that the classical style of animated film composing is dead. Studios hire composers to write a theme song and a few hours of synthesized library music, and then bring in a music editor to fit the library music into cartoon sequences. Most composers are willing to accept these commissions for no salary because, says Peter Wetzler, one of the composers for the short-lived space age cartoon, *The Adventures of the Galaxy Rangers*, "for one nationally syndicated half-hour show, in just one season, a composer can receive one million dollars in royalties."

There are always exceptions, however. Mark Mothersbaugh, the former Devo founder who has scored and written themes for *Clifford*, *the Big Red Dog*, *Rugrats*, and more, studied the scores to Rocky and Bullwinkle cartoons and was amazed to discover how talented a composer Fred Steiner was, inserting as many as 165 separate musical cues into a single cartoon. Mothersbaugh explained his conversion from public performing to cartoon scoring: "After being in this band where we're working on twelve little songs for months and months, to all of a sudden where the first thing that came out of you was going to be on TV was kind of exciting. So I got the bug."

Another modern innovator is Glen Daum, who studied under Gyorgy Ligeti at Stanford. When Daum was commissioned to compose for Ralph Bakshi's TV series *Mighty Mouse: The New Adventures*, he was determined to turn in quality work inspired by past masters. "It's not an electronic score and I'm not trying to fake an orchestra with synthesizers," says Daum of his *Mighty Mouse* and *Chip 'n' Dale's Rescue Rangers* scores. "Unfortunately, I'm one of the few people doing that in present-day animation." His work for

Mighty Mouse is evocative of older, jazz-based cartoons, but something more is added. Daum uses tempos that “go all over the place,” hilariously paced and compressed musical cues, and sounds from any and all musical genres, including jazz, Muzak, classical, blues, television show themes, and others. The bits, like the images in the cartoon, are often meant to be satirical. For the show’s theme, he had his orchestra learn the original *Mighty Mouse* theme and then told them to play it “like they were in high school.” The percussionist falls off beat, the saxophone player can’t keep the reed in his mouth, and at the end the music trails off like a wind-up music box running down.

“You can be corny or contemporary; you can do anything,” Daum says. “At one point, I had four different sections of the orchestra all playing different stuff at the same time. It was like Elliott Carter had scored the episode.”

In the 1980s, a generation raised on Saturday morning cartoons came of age. From the frenetic rock of bands like Faith No More to the game theory pieces and speedball improvisations of avant-garde composer-musicians like John Zorn, cartoon music became a significant influence. “My concept of good music,” Zorn says, “was based on what I used to listen to when I was a kid. I never really heard jazz until I was around twenty-one. Cartoon music was very important and the concept of the way the music changed really got stuck in my head.”

It was only natural, then, that in the next decade, the work of cartoon pioneers finally began to be taken seriously. Producers Hal Willner and Greg Ford uncovered lost Warner Bros. recording sessions during a trip to California, put out a CD of classic Carl Stalling cues in 1990, and soon the Warner Bros. Symphony Orchestra was on tour, scoring Looney Tunes live. Milan records released a Scott Bradley compilation; Rhino Records put together a box set of Hanna-Barbera and Hoyt Curtin music; and Raymond Scott was rediscovered, with more than half a dozen CDs of his music released, along with tribute albums from musicians including the Beau Hunks and Don Byron. Today, nearly every pioneer of cartoon music has passed away—including Stalling, Scott, Curtin, Sharples, Kubik, and Guaraldi—yet their cartoons live on, bending the ears, expanding the minds, and sonically saving a generation raised on bland teenybopper pop.

*Elements of this article originally appeared in Ear Magazine and the Village Voice. Sources include the author’s interviews with Hoyt Curtin, Dave Harris,*

*Raymond Scott, Chuck Jones, Glen Daum, John Zorn, Sun Ra, Hal Willner, Mark Mothersbaugh, and others; various magazine, journal, and unpublished articles, including the interview with Carl Stalling on pages 37–60 of this volume, the speech given by Scott Bradley on pages 115–120, “A Technical and Historical Overview of Soundtrack Production Procedure in American Animated Film” by Arthur Kegerreis, “Notes on Cartoon Music” by Ingolf Dahl from Film Music Notes, “Cartoon Post-Production in Video” by Bill Koepnick from Mix magazine, “Symphonies for the Sillies” by Ross Care from Funnyworld, and “A Sound Idea: Music for Animated Films” by Jon Newsom from the Quarterly Journal of the Library of Congress; and several books, including Film Music: A Neglected Art by Roy M. Prendergast, Of Mice and Magic: A History of American Animated Cartoons by Leonard Maltin, and Experimental Animation: Origins of a New Art by Robert Russett and Cecile Starr.*



PART I



# **An Episodic History of Cartoon Music**



# Animated Cartoons and Slap-Stick Comedy

by EDITH LANG and GEORGE WEST

In the days before sound and image were physically joined on a piece of film, movie houses and theatres had either a pianist, an organist, or a group of musicians available to play music before, during, and after the shows. Film accompanists could acquire dozens of manuals on how to play for pictures, as well as reams of music well-suited to the task. Little specific information exists on how cartoons—such as the Aesop's Fables series, or *Felix the Cat*—might have been accompanied, as features received most of the attention of accompanying manuals.

One book that does mention cartoons—in the larger category of “comedies”—is Edith Lang's and George West's *Musical Accompaniment of Moving Pictures*, first published in 1920. While we cannot take the instructions below as representative of *all* accompanying practices—especially since there is evidence that cartoons might have just as easily been shown without any music whatsoever—Lang's and West's admonitions give us some idea of the duties facing an aspiring accompanist, as well as some perspective on how short comedies of any sort were valued in the larger performance medium.

MANY A PLAYER, WHO is otherwise admirably fitted to give a musical interpretation of moving pictures, falls down on the animated cartoons and burlesque films. This is due to an absence of the all-important sense of humor, or “comedy touch,” which is needed in every-day life as much as in this particular branch of the movie entertainment. Sense of humor is a gift of the gods, but they will not withhold it from any one who seriously tries to acquire it. The player should learn to recognize, and be able personally to enjoy, the fun of the comic situations depicted on the screen. Nothing is more calamitous than to see “Mutt and Jeff” disport themselves in their inimitable antics