



IT WAS AFTER the success of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* that Walt Disney decided to give Mickey Mouse a comeback. With the introduction of new characters to oppose Mickey's popularity — Donald Duck, Goofy, et al — Disney felt he had a responsibility to the little mouse. After all, it had been all the hard work over the years with the early Mickey cartoons that had enabled the Disney studio to reach a peak of technical achievement with *Snow White*, in late 1937.

Disney felt that the format of the Silly Symphonies, a series of successful cartoon shorts made between 1928 and 1940, was an apt vehicle for Mickey Mouse. A piece of music that Disney particularly liked was *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* by Paul Dukas, which told the story of a young magician tampering with his master's magic spells and creating all kinds of havoc. Disney felt that this, the ultimate Silly Symphony, needed a superlatively conducted, played and recorded musical score.

By chance, in 1938 at a Hollywood party, Walt Disney met Leopold Stokowski, who was resident conductor

BY RICHARD HOLLISS

FANTASIA

of the world's greatest music!

WALT
DISNEY'S
Fantasia
with
STOKOWSKI
and the Philadelphia Orchestra

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The Program

TOCCATA AND FUGUE IN D MINOR
Johann Sebastian Bach

THE NUTCRACKER SUITE
Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky

THE SORCERER'S APPRENTICE
Paul Dukas

RITE OF SPRING
Igor Stravinsky

THE PASTORAL SYMPHONY
Ludwig Van Beethoven

DANCE OF THE HOURS
André Messager

NIGHT ON BALD MOUNTAIN
Modest Mussorgsky

AVE MARIA
Frans Schubert

THE ORIGINAL AND COMPLETE PRESENTATION

TECHNICOLOR®

Top left: Ben Ali Gator and Hyacinth Hippo from the Dance of the Hours segment of *Fantasia*. Top right: In the Waltz of the Flowers segment, the Autumn Fairy releases the Milkweeds for their seasonal ballet with the falling leaves. Left: The Glorification of the Chosen One from *The Rite of Spring* accompanies the scenes of a savage Tyrannosaurus in a battle with a Stegosaurus. Right: A scene from the segment *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, featuring Mickey Mouse in the title role.



of the Philadelphia Orchestra. Stokowski expressed a wish to work with Disney. Disney knew immediately the conductor was a perfect choice to take charge of the musical end of the project. A delighted Stokowski rehearsed the music and recorded it while the studio went ahead with the animation.

But even with a small amount of pruning, the music would still carry the length of the short over the usual running time. Gradually, after great discussion, a decision was taken to broaden the concept to encompass other orchestral works. A series of "superior" Silly Symphonies. But the idea to present each piece as a separate short was abandoned.

Besides, here was another chance for the animators to tackle some really innovative animation techniques.

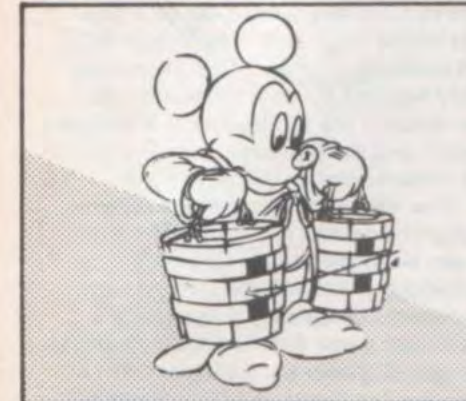
Deems Taylor, who was well-known to radio audiences for his programmes on classical music, joined the studio to act as a kind of liaison between Disney and Stokowski and, aided by the heads of the art and music departments, began to select the pieces of music required for the film. This task took three weeks. Though hundreds of orchestral works were considered, eight separate pieces were finally chosen. It is likely that Stokowski was the governing factor in the choice of music. After all, he was already well associated with two of the pieces. The





first was a special orchestral rendering by Stokowski from the original work, the *Tocatta and Fugue in D Minor* by Johann Sebastian Bach. The second, *Rite of Spring* by Ivor Stravinsky, had been widely performed by Stokowski in America.

All this time ideas grew about the presentation of the pieces and it was finally decided to release the music and animated sections together in one feature-length film. The title "Concert Programme" was adopted for the project, but the title "Fantasia", a musical term



meaning "freer development of a given theme" was preferred and, as nobody could improve on it, the name stuck.

In the spring of 1939, Leopold Stokowski began work at the Philadelphia Academy of Music, recording each orchestral section individually for a new form of sound reproduction — a pseudo-stereo called *Fantasound*. Thirty three microphones and some 42,000 feet of film were used during the recording sessions culminating in three programme tracks and one control track, although only 18,000 feet finished up in the final print. With the new *Fantasound* technique it was possible for technicians to move the sound backwards and forwards between the "stereo" channels, even to the extent of following characters across the screen.

So pleased was Disney with this new process, that he requested that *Fantasia* should be released in special theatres equipped with *Fantasound* equipment. The conversion took four days to complete and the speaker units had to be operated manually. Originally Disney had wanted the premiere theatres to be fitted out with special lighting and control centres, so the curtains could be opened and closed between each piece. The theatre personnel were to be hired and trained by Disney himself.

Unfortunately, the cost of installation, (approx 30,000 dollars per *Fantasound* unit) coupled with the growing shortage of electronic components due to defence needs, forced Disney to cancel his "special theatre" presentations.

RKO, the distributors, thought the film's two-hour running time too long for most cinema audiences on general release,

and requested that it be cut. Unable to face the prospect of editing a film he had poured so much creative talent into, Disney told RKO executives to find someone else to do it. As a result, the distributors excised the Deems Taylor/orchestral interludes, reducing the running time of the film from 120 to 81 minutes. The only complete print therefore appeared at the premiere on November 13th 1940.

As *Fantasia* had been conceived as a blend of music and visual images, it was decided that the opening credits would consist solely of a title card. The rest of the movie would be animated interpretations of the music interspersed with Deems Taylor's commentaries. During the Deems Taylor portions the orchestra could be seen in silhouette in the background. In the opening scene of *Fantasia*, Deems Taylor steps forward and welcomes the audience to the programme. He then introduces the opening segment, Bach's *Tocatta and Fugue in D Minor*.

Leopold Stokowski ascends the podium in silhouette with his back to the audience. He raises his arms and as the three major chords of Bach's famous work shatter the silence, colours emanate from off screen below him. For the entire length of the *Tocatta*, we are witness to reflections and colours depicting the different instruments of the orchestra. But at the commencement of the *Fugue*, the scene changes to full animation and the screen is filled with bows playing on floating strings, coloured shapes whirling in space and thousands of luminous stars cascading through patterns of light. As the *Fugue* draws to a close, we move up

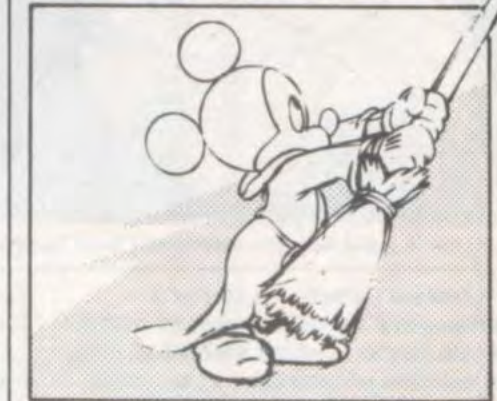


through the clouds to what at first appears to be the top of a giant organ. Then a bright orange sun rises on the horizon glowing brightly as clouds hurtle up both sides of the screen. Superimposed beneath this image the conductor re-appears, bringing to a climax Bach's greatest organ work.

Oscar Fischinger of the German Avant-garde school of animation travelled to the Disney studios personally to supervise filming of the *Tocatta and Fugue* and the whole section was directed by Samuel Armstrong, whose other credits include

Dumbo and *Bambi*. The only criticism that can possibly be levelled at this sequence is a failure to comprehend Disney's version of abstract design and maybe — more importantly — Stokowski's personal interpretation and re-scoring of the music.

As the orchestra tunes up for the next piece of music, Deems Taylor sets the scene. Introducing the *Nutcracker Suite* by Piotr Illich Tchaikovsky, Taylor points out that the Disney version will be very different to the original story. The audience having already been impressed



by the relation of music and experimental animation in the *Tocatta*, find themselves surprised by the complete change of style, the absolute realism of the paintings and images created to accompany the six sections of the *Suite*.

In the opening piece, *Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy*, the Dewdrop fairies awake and as they dip in and out of the streams and pools they cover the early morning forest with glistening drops of dew. This is followed by Hop Low and his Mushrooms who perform *The Chinese Dance*, and this whole section, brilliantly animated by Art Babbit is a delight.

We return to the stream for the *Dance of the Reed Flutes*, featuring the Blossom ballet and for the *Arabian Dance*, we go below the surface and witness through a forest of underwater flora, a water ballet performed by colourful fish with very long veil-like tails. A bubble rises to the screen, bursting into the *Russian Dance*. And as the scene freezes we find ourselves back in the forest glade. Autumn has come and for the *Waltz of the Flowers*, the Disney artists show us the arrival of the Autumn frost fairies and the intricate patterns of the falling snowflake fairies.

For the *Nutcracker Suite*, special cells (transparent sheets of celluloid on which an animation drawing is inked and painted) with a rough texture were used. When coloured paints were applied to the surface, it gave the impression of pastel shadings. This effect was achieved because Disney had been impressed with the pastel storyboard sketches. (For the *Nutcracker*, director Samuel Armstrong had the storyboard sketches drawn on black backgrounds.) The finished sequence incorporated the use of the



Above: A scene from the Beethoven's Sixth Symphony (Pastoral) sequence, featuring Bacchus.

Multiplane Camera — a sort of 3 dimensional animation rostrum created by Ub Iwerks — which enabled all kinds of complex photography to be added.

The third piece of music is *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* by Paul Dukas, the music that gave birth to the whole project. The sequence was directed by

silhouette of Mickey climbs the podium steps to shake hands with Stokowski. Disney was obviously proud to have his cartoon star appearing in person with the great conductor.

The fourth piece of music is Igor Stravinsky's controversial *Rite of Spring*. It is with this that Stokowski takes the

The story goes that Disney Enterprises wrote to Stravinsky requesting permission to use the *Rite of Spring* and offering 5000 dollars for the privilege. However, photographs available at the time suggesting Stravinsky helping with the re-scoring of the *Rite of Spring* were purely for publicity.

James Algar and Mickey Mouse was cast in the role of an apprentice who borrows his master's magic hat and conjures up a broom to fetch water to fill the Magician's indoor well. The little broom sets to work whilst Mickey relaxes, dreaming he is soaring up through the clouds creating magical waves and thunderstorms and commanding the stars and planets to dance for him.

Unfortunately, he awakens to find the broom has overfilled the well and the water is lapping around his feet. In his panic, he is unable to remember the spell to stop the broom, whose frenzied efforts to complete its task leave Mickey with only one course of action. He grabs an axe and chops it into hundreds of pieces. Believing he has freed himself of the curse, he wearily closes the door to the courtyard. Without warning each splinter bursts into a full size broom. Water flows from every window. Mickey swirls round and round on the Sorcerer's book of magic spells, trying to find a solution to the problem. Just as all seems lost, the Sorcerer appears at the top of the stairs. With a majestic sweep of his hands, he commands the chaos to cease. With a whack in the rear from the broom, the Sorcerer sends Mickey outside to begin his original task all over again.

At the conclusion of the music, a

most liberties. The end of the second movement is missing and the conclusion of the *Adoration of the Earth* is substituted. The story goes that Disney Enterprises wrote to Stravinsky requesting permission to use the *Rite of Spring* and offering 5000 dollars for the privilege. However, photographs available at the time suggesting Stravinsky helping Disney with the re-scoring of the *Rite of Spring* were purely for publicity, as an illness had prevented Stravinsky visiting the Disney studios until after the music was completed. Certain animators still maintain however, that the composer came to Hollywood, met Stokowski and Disney and was pleased with what they had done to his music.

The section opens with the creation of the Earth. We move up through millions of years in a matter of minutes, witnessing the single cells developing into the first fish. The following sequence is very well done, with the landscapes washed in browns, muted greens and yellows providing a very atmospheric background to the scenes of pterodactyls gliding from mountain-tops, Elasmosaurs moving through the primeval seas and finally the battle of two giant saurians, the ferocious flesh-eater Tyrannosaurus and plant-eater Stegosaurus, highlighted by a fierce thunderstorm. As the

prehistoric animals perish due to climatic changes, the world moves through yet another turbulent series of earthquakes, until all is peaceful again at the conclusion of the music.

Extensive research was undertaken to discover how the dinosaurs lived and moved, and even though scientific progress has uncovered some glaring faults in the *Rite of Spring* sequence, it still comes across as very informative and highly entertaining. (Prior to this film, the only other dinosaurs seen on the screen by a wide majority of cinemagoers were in films like Willis O'Brien's *The Lost World* 1925 and *King Kong* 1933.) The special animation effects were brilliantly handled by Joshua Meador who later created the Id monster in *Forbidden Planet*, and the sequence was directed by Bill Roberts and Paul Scatterfield.

After this brief intermission, Deems Taylor introduces the next piece of music, the highly-criticised *Sixth Symphony (Pastoral)* by Ludwig Van Beethoven. Originally, it was not the Beethoven piece that had been chosen for the idea of a country frolic, but story directors Joe Grant and Dick Heumer could not fit all the planned visuals to the music. So the *Pastoral* was chosen instead, though Stokowski was against the idea from the start.

The scene opens with sunrise over the valley and mountaintop. The main feature of the first movement being the family of flying horses and the closing shot, beautifully rendered in animation, with the Pegasus family landing on a great lake. Soaring above them, reflected in the water, are hundreds of other flying horses. At the commencement of the second movement, the scene changes with the arrival of the Centaurs to greet the Centaurettes. Although finally seen wearing flower garlands, the little Centaurettes

Below: The Demon appears in the *Night on Bald Mountain* sequence.



originally had bare breasts. After strong complaints from the Hays Office Disney agreed to cover the exposed portions.

The final movements of the symphony are accompanied by a mass dance of all the characters in honour of the God of Wine, Bacchus, who arrives on the back of a small unicorn. (A small section of his arrival to his throne is cut from re-release prints.) As the celebration continues, Zeus appears out of the clouds and hurls thunderbolts at the gathering, producing some excellent storm effects, including the god of wind blowing in the time to the music. Eventually though, Zeus becomes tired. He tells Vulcan to cease creating the lightning bolts on his giant forge and then, pulling the clouds around him like blankets, fades away.

As the animals and mythical creatures come out of their shelters, we see the Goddess of the Rainbow, Apollo the sungod, and in a beautifully-animated finale, the god of night cover the land.

The next piece of music is *The Dance of the Hours* from the ballet *La Giaconda* by Amil Ponchielli. Directed by T. Hee and Norman Ferguson, both animation supervisors, it could be considered a perfect vehicle for a *Silly Symphony*. Creating a famous ballet scene and presenting the characters as animals works very well and is certainly humorous. The curator of the Dance Archives at the Museum of Modern Art applied to Walt Disney Productions for a print of the *Dance of the Hours* sequence for reference.

The special effects technicians create a fabulous finale with the *Night on Bald Mountain* by Modeste Moussorgsky, the last section in the programme. Under the direction of Wilfred Jackson, Joshua Meador and special effects cameramen Gail Papineau and Leonard Pickley present some startling scenes of demons



Above: In the *Dance of the Hours* sequence, Madame Upanova is menaced by Ben Ali Gator.

and ghosts assembling on Bald Mountain at the invitation from the evil god Tchernabog. The scenario literally explodes with images of terror.

Stokowski again takes one or two liberties with *Night on Bald Mountain* in prolonging the opening and blending the end of the piece with the beginning of

programme in *Fantasia* as extra pieces were prepared. One piece of music, Debussy's *Claire de Lune* was already in the early stages on animation, but other projects, the intervention of war and studio politics prevented these ideas from becoming a reality.

Fantasia was not a success financially.

The use of the Multiplane camera for the trees sequence in the finale of the film is exceptionally well-executed, creating an unbelievable sense of depth and a multitude of planes. *Fantasia* ends as the curtains close. There are no end credits or titles.

Franz Schubert's *Ave Maria*. A six-minute finale to the entire film, depicting hooded pilgrims moving through a vast forest each holding a lighted torch. The forest gradually takes on the form of a cathedral, emphasising the power of good over evil, the sacred over the profane. Charles Henderson's choir sings the chorus to *Ave Maria*, with new lyrics written especially for the film by American novelist and poet Rachel Field. In one long zoom through the trees, soloist Julietta Novis sings the final verse and the camera moves up through the parting trees, to a beautifully animated landscape as the sunrises. The use of the Multiplane camera for the trees sequence is exceptionally well executed, creating an unbelievable sense of depth and a multitude of planes. *Fantasia* ends as the curtains close, there are no end titles.

Newspaper comments at the time of the film's original release were most flattering. Bosley Crowther in *The Times* deemed it "simply terrific". *Look Magazine* called it "a masterpiece" and proclaimed "Disney revolutionises movies again". Even Howard Barnes in the *Tribune*, although slightly skeptical at what the film was trying to do, called it "a courageous and distinguished production".

Disney hoped to re-arrange the

Pinocchio had been released nine months before and it too had suffered at the box-office. Believed by many to be the most technically superior of the early animated features, it was a blow to Disney that *Fantasia* would suffer the same fate as *Pinocchio*. *Fantasia* was re-issued in 1944, 1946, 1953, 1956 (in a weird superscope print that chopped off the top and bottom of the animated sections, to give them a wide-screen appearance) 1963, and 1969. In the early seventies, *Fantasia* received great praise indeed and acquired a big Hippy following, much to the disapproval of the Disney studios. The highly successful re-issue in London recently placed the film halfway up the list of ten best movies in the West End. A fitting tribute to a masterpiece of animation.

Fantasia (1940)

Story Direction by Joe Grant and Dick Heumer, Individual Sections Directed by Samuel Armstrong, James Algar, Bill Roberts & Paul Scatterfield, T. Hee & Norman Ferguson and Wilfred Jackson, Animated by Oscar Fischinger and Joshua Meador, Musical Director Edward H. Plumb, Music by Leopold Stokowski and The Philadelphia Orchestra, Production Supervisor Ben Sharpsteen, Narrative Introductions by Deems Taylor, Produced by Walt Disney.

Time: 116 mins

Cert: U