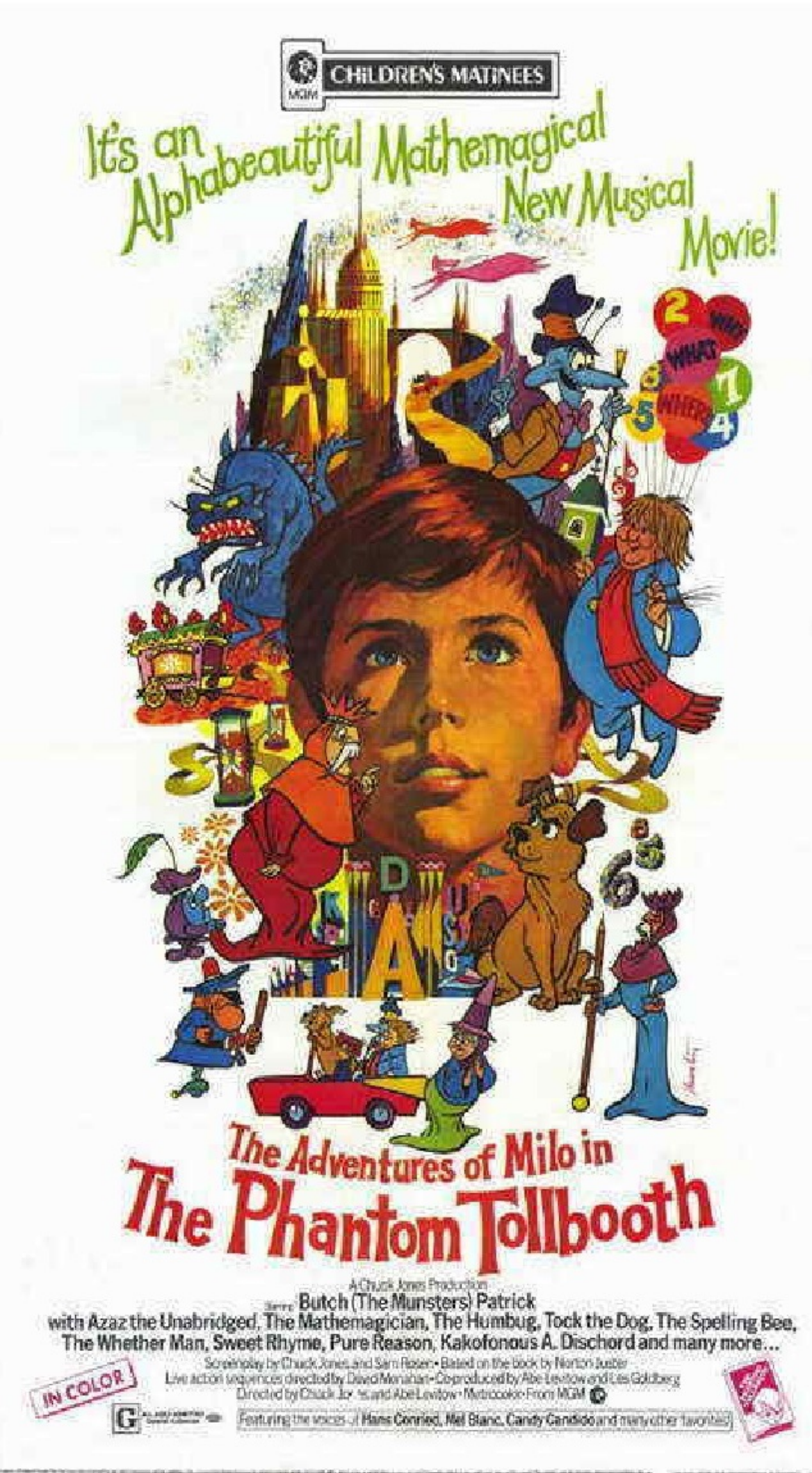


# THE PHANTOM TOLLBOOTH



**THE PHANTOM TOLLBOOTH** A Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Picture. 3/71. In Metrocolor. 90 minutes. Produced by Chuck Jones, Abe Levitow and Les Goldman. Directed by Chuck Jones and Abe Levitow. Live action directed by David Monahan. Screenplay by Chuck Jones and Sam Rosen based on the book by Norman Juster. Director of photography, Lester Shorr. Music by Dean Elliot. Songs by Norman Gimbel, Paul Vance, and Lee Fockriss. Production designer, Maurice Noble. Supervising animators, Ben Washam, Hal Ambro and George Nicholas. Animation, Irvn Spence, Bill Littlejohn, Alan Zaslove, Richard Thompson, Ed Aardal, Tom Ray, Ed Dematta. Phillip Roman, Xenia, Carl Bell and Lloyd Vaughan. Director of animation photography, Jack Stevens. Layout, Tony Rivera, Rosemary O'Connor, Don Morgan, Corny Cole, Oscar Defau and Phyllis Graham. Backgrounds, Philip DeGuard, Irving Weiner and Robert McIntosh. Art direction live action, George W. Davis and Charles Hagedon. Assistant director, Charles Bonniwell Jr. Film editor, Jim Farris.

**Cast:** Butch Patrick. The voices of: Mel Blanc, Daws Butler, Candy Candido, Hans Conried, June Foray, Patti Gilbert, Shep Menken, Cliff Norton, Larry Thor and Les Tremayne.

Even though the animation feature has gained prestige from the professional finesse of Disney studios, Chuck Jones and Abe Levitow have made a pleasantly naive, dazzlingly colorful film that adults should enjoy as much as their children, and maybe even more so.

While there is little of the light, endearing sentimentality and stylish charm of, say, Disney's *SLEEPING BEAUTY* and *BAMBI*, *THE PHANTOM TOLLBOOTH* sees a sophistication in children's story characterization and development unusual in a cartoon feature and a delightful change of pace as well.

The adventures of a young boy in an allegorical-fantasy land of letters, numbers, music, and sound, is faintly tinged with elements of *ALICE IN WONDERLAND* and *THE WIZARD OF OZ*. Unlike its predecessors, the Jones-Levitow film takes a more conscientiously social-message format that works uncommonly well. The obvious symbolism is delivered with a quaintly casual feeling in the use of color and composition and, even when it appears to be sledge-hammered, it is never annoying or pretentious.

The film's beginning is a charming, live-action depiction of childhood melancholy that quickly segues into animation when a toll gate flies into the boy's (Butch Patrick) room, and he enters a mysterious world via a miniature automobile. In his imaginary excursions, he gradually learns about the joy of being alive, and the fun in learning about it. It's a gratifying notion, and its markers fulfill it with frequent bursts of creative imagination and gracefully sugar-coated symbols.

There is an uneven texture to the film though that apparently is the result of two, diverse directorial personalities. Chuck Jones has all the wit, timing, and feeling of the animated film that Abe Levitow strains so frantically for. Jones uses with ease the technique that made his *Bugs Bunny*, *Roadrunner*, and my favorite, *Foghorn Leghorn*, such ingeniously handled, classic displays of character and outrageous comedy situations. But Levitow displays little of Jones' taste, creativity, and style, and the film falls down whenever his heavy hand becomes apparent. Mainly composing in long shots, Levitow moves the action constantly from left to right or up and down, and the result is visual monotony.

It is Jones film and, even though Levitow's work weakens the structure of the entire film, there are enough of his splendid touches to more than compensate for the faults and to make it a first-rate piece of animation.

*THE PHANTOM TOLLBOOTH* is not as consistent in visual beauty and wit as *YELLOW SUBMARINE*, but it is decidedly better than the nice, but bland, *THE ARISTOCATS*. The music is not as clever or memorable as in the Disney film, but it is pleasant enough to be passively enjoyable. The MGM release has been badly handled by the studio and has been shown mainly in limited screenings, which is a shame for a film as good as this one.

Dale Winogura



**THE PHANTOM TOLLBOOTH:** The two-faced Hypocrit, foiled by numbers and words in Chuck Jones' educational animated feature.