



MAKING MAGIC: 100 YEARS OF DISNEY

Fantasia

Too Whistle Plunk and Boom

Directors: C. August Nichols, Ward Kimball
©: Walt Disney Productions
Production Company: Walt Disney Productions
Story by: Dick Humer
Colour Styling: Eyvind Earle
Character Styling: Tom Oreb
Animation: Ward Kimball, Julius Svendsen, Marc Davis, Henry Tanous, Art Stevens, Xavier Afencio
Art Director: A. Kendall O'Connor
Assistant Art Director: Victor Haboush
Music: Joseph Dubin
Songs: Sonny Burke, Jack Elliott
Voice cast:
Bill Thompson (*Professor Owl*)
USA 1952©, 10 mins

Fantasia

Production Supervision: Ben Sharpsteen
©: Walt Disney Productions
Producer: Walt Disney
Story Direction: Joe Grant, Dick Huemer
Camera Operator: Chuck Wheeler *
Colour by: Technicolor
Musical Direction: Edward H. Plumb
Musical Film Editor: Stephen Csillag
Recording: William E. Garity, C.O. Slyfield, J.N.A. Hawkins
Sound System: RCA Sound Recording
With:
Leopold Stokowski (*conductor*)
The Philadelphia Orchestra
Deems Taylor (*narrative introductions*)

Tocatta and Fugue in D Minor

– Johann Sebastian Bach
Direction: Samuel Armstrong
Story Development: Lee Blair, Elmer Plummer, Phil Dike
Art Direction: Robert Cormack
Background Paintings: Joe Stahley, John Hench, Nino Carbe
Animation: Cy Young, Art Palmer, Daniel MacManus, George Rowley, Edwin Aardal, Joshua Meador, Cornett Wood

The Nutcracker Suite

– Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
Direction: Samuel Armstrong
Story Development: Sylvia Moberly-Holland, Norman Wright, Albert Heath, Bianca Majolie, Graham Heid
Character Designs: John Walbridge, Elmer Plummer, Ethel Kulsar
Art Direction: Robert Cormack, Al Zinnen, Curtiss D. Perkins, Arthur Byram, Bruce Bushman
Background Paintings: John Hench, Ethel Kulsar, Nino Carbe
Animation: Art Babbitt, Les Clark, Don Lusk, Cy Young, Robert Stokes

The Sorcerer's Apprentice – Paul Dukas

Direction: James Algar
Story Development: Perce Pearce, Carl Fallberg
Art Direction: Tom Codrick, Charles Philippi, Zack Schwartz
Background Paintings: Claude Coats, Stan Spohn, Albert Dempster, Eric Hansen
Animation Supervision: Fred Moore, Vladimir Tytla
Animation: Les Clark, Riley Thompson, Marvin Woodward, Preston Blair, Edward Love, Ugo D'Orsi, George Rowley, Cornett Wood

Fantasia opens with Deems Taylor, better known to 1940 audiences as a radio broadcaster than a composer, walking on stage amid a tuning-up orchestra. As *Fantasia's* host, he explains that this animated feature won't tell a single story; rather, it will be a series of classical music pieces set to animation. (*Fantasia's* working title was *The Concert Feature*.) What we'll see, Taylor says, 'are the designs and pictures and stories that music inspired in the minds and imaginations of a group of artists. In other words, they are not going to be the interpretations of trained musicians... which I think is all to the good.'

The film, however, is blatantly seeking musical legitimacy. Its conductor is Leopold Stokowski, a tawny-haired maestro star and proven screen property who'd appeared in the 1937 musical comedy *One Hundred Men and a Girl*, featuring Deanna Durbin. We mostly just see the great man's illumined back as he leads us into *Fantasia's* animation. The first sequence is a semi-abstract piece, set to Stokowski's symphonic rendering of Bach's 'Tocatta and Fugue'. The on-screen ripples and contrails are linear simplifications of the work of Oskar Fischinger, a German avant-garde animator.

Then come dances from Tchaikovsky's 'Nutcracker Suite': flower fairies, sultry goldfish and Art Babbitt's famous nodding mushrooms (on-screen for barely a minute). After that, with apologies to Stokowski, comes *Fantasia's* true icon: Mickey Mouse as Dukas' 'Sorcerer's Apprentice', overwhelmed by his army of water-bearing broomsticks. Stravinsky's 'Rite of Spring' takes place on an early Earth of volcanoes, evolution and dinosaurs. Then there's a cherub-strewn version of Beethoven's 'Pastoral Symphony', more on which below; and a burlesque of Ponchielli's 'Dance of the Hours', with ballerina ostriches, hippos, elephants and alligators. Damned souls caper in hellfire for a colossal Devil, to the screaming strings of Mussorgsky's 'Night on Bald Mountain'. Dawn segues into a secularised 'Ave Maria' (Schubert) where the Madonna – after much indecision on Walt's part – doesn't show.

Fantasia's critical reputation is mostly the centaurettes' fault, those half-horse, half-female fancies, disporting themselves round Mount Olympus in the Pastoral segment. In 1995, Britain's Channel 4 screened a muckraking documentary called *Secret Lives: Walt Disney*. With admirable precision, it homed in on the centaurettes. '(*Fantasia's*) banal, often tacky imagery came as a disappointment to many,' explained the narration. 'The heads of Disneyfied American teenagers are grafted onto the bodies of centaurs... On seeing this, (Walt) Disney was impressed. He said, "Gee, this'll make Beethoven."'

Actually, the Beethoven comment came from a story meeting prior to the animation, and no 'Gee' was transcribed. (Neal Gabler quotes the line in his Disney biography.) But such smears were part of a fight Walt had picked himself, setting the ordinary American (that is, himself) against the stuffed shirts of the music establishment.

'We figured that if ordinary folk like ourselves could find entertainment in the visualisations of so-called classical music, so would the average audience...' Walt said after *Fantasia's* release. 'I imagine that the 1200 young people in my organisation who helped make *Fantasia* are a pretty fair cross-section of

Rite of Spring – Igor Stravinsky*Direction:* Bill Roberts, Paul Satterfield*Story Development and Research:* William Martin,

Leo Thiele, Robert Sterner, John Fraser McLeish

Art Direction: McLaren Stewart, Dick Kelsey,

John Hubley

Background Paintings: Ed Starr, Brice Mack,

Edward Levitt

Animation Supervision: Wolfgang Reitherman,

Joshua Meador

Animation: Philip Duncan, John McManus,

Paul Busch, Art Palmer, Don Tobin,

Edwin Aardal, Paul B. Kossoff

Special Camera Effects: Gail Papineau,

Leonard Pickley

The Pastoral Symphony – Ludwig van Beethoven*Direction:* Hamilton Luske, Jim Handley,

Ford Beebe

Story Development: Otto Englander, Webb Smith,

Erdman Penner, Joseph Sabo, Bill Peet,

George Stallings

Character Designs: James Bodrero, John P. Miller,

Lorna S. Soderstrom

Art Direction: Hugh Hennesy, Kenneth Anderson,

J. Gordon Legg, Herbert Ryman, Yale Gracey,

Lance Nolley

Background Paintings: Claude Coats, Ray Huffine,

W. Richard Anthony, Arthur Riley, Gerald Nevius,

Roy Forkum

Animation Supervision: Fred Moore, Ward Kimball,

Ward Kimball, Eric Larson, Art Babbitt,

Oliver M. Johnston Jr, Don Towsley

Animation: Bery Wolf, Jack Campbell,

Jack Bradbury, James Moore, Milt Neil, Bill Justice,

John Elliotte, Walt Kelly, Don Lusk, Lynn Karp,

Murray McClellan, Robert W. Youngquist,

Harry Hamsel

Dance of the Hours – Amilcare Ponchielli*Direction:* T. Hee, Norman Ferguson*Character Designs:* Martin Provensen,

James Bodrero, Duke Russell, Earl Hurd

Art Direction: Kendall O'Connor, Harold Doughty,

Ernest Nordli

Background Paintings: Albert Dempster,

Charles Conner

Animation Supervisor: Norman Ferguson*Animation:* John Lounsbery, Howard Swift, Preston

Blair, Hugh Fraser, Harvey Toombs, Norman Tate,

Hicks Lokey, Art Elliott,

Grant Simmons, Ray Patterson,

Franklin Grundeen

Night on Bald Mountain – Modest Moussorgsky*Ave Maria* – Franz Schubert*Direction:* Wilfred Jackson*Story Development:* Campbell Grant,

Arthur Heinemann, Phil Dike

Art Direction: Kay Nielsen, Terrell Stapp,

Charles Payzant, Thor Putnam

Background Paintings: Merle Cox, Ray Lockrem,

Robert Storms, W. Richard Anthony

Animation Supervision: Vladimir Tytla*Animation:* John McManus, William N. Shull,

Robert W. Carlson Jr, Lester Novros, Don Patterson

Special Animation Effects: Joshua Meador,

Miles E. Pike, John F. Reed, Daniel MacManus

Special Camera Effects: Gail Papineau,

Leonard Pickley

Special Lyrics for 'Ave Maria': Rachel Field*Choral Director:* Charles Henderson*Soloist:* Julietta Novis

USA 1940©

124 mins

* Uncredited

With thanks to The Walt Disney Company

average American culture. They're from the average American home with the average American advantages and upbringing. Every day I see them prove they know the difference between the real stuff and the phoney.'

The populism both provoked and pre-empted a blunt response from Igor Stravinsky, the only living composer represented in *Fantasia*. He declared, 'The mass add nothing to art.' Well, *Fantasia* may not be art, though the label fits it surely closer than 'kitsch,' which reviewers wave at the film like a talisman. For what is clear is that, within the hand-drawn form, *Fantasia's* scope and spectacle are matchless.

In 'Rite of Spring', for example, we wander through space to a molten Earth where volcanoes blast like ships' funnels. From macrocosm to underbrush: the 'Nutcracker' is a waterborne ballroom of whirling blossoms, cascades of dancing thistle-men. Gibbous legions swarm round Bald Mountain; one reviewer described them as mad sperm. Dance of the Hours' bestial ballet ends in zigzag insanity, with the 'gators riding ostriches and twirling hippos on their scales.

Walt publicly thanked Stokowski and Taylor for 'holding my head up when the water got too deep.' But doesn't Mickey command water with the stolen Sorcerer's hat? No, he only dreams he does, when it threatens to drown him (later, it drowns the whole Earth). After his omnipotent master saves the day, everyman Mickey gives his cheesiest grin in the film's most Disney moment. But the Sorcerer cocks his brow like Walt. Is Walt him, Mickey, or both? The question exercised critics, who noted that *Fantasia* was made when Walt was at the height of his hubris, and rushing into calamity.

The scowling Sorcerer, who conjures great butterflies into being and parts the waters like Moses, is a power-sibling to Stokowski on his podium, Zeus throwing down his thunderbolts and even Chernabog, the devil of Bald Mountain, toying with the damned in his giant hands. But there are gentler magicians, more in line with the Disney we know, like the Nutcracker flower-fairy who yawns, lounges and lights up a spiderweb. Then there are the heroes without magic: the perky little mushroom, captivatingly out of step with his peers; the bold foal-Pegasus, chasing a rainbow to its underwater roots; and the animal ballerinas who spoof a spoof through the sheer beauty of their dance-steps. Chuck Jones mocked *Fantasia's* hubris in his Wagnerian cartoon *What's Opera Doc?*, but 'Dance of the Hours' had beaten him at his parodic game.

Andrew Osmond, *100 Animated Feature Films* (BFI/Palgrave Macmillan, 2010)