



MAKING MAGIC: 100 YEARS OF DISNEY

Bambi

Piper

Director: Alan Barillaro
USA 2016
6 mins

Bambi

Supervising Director: David D. Hand
Story Direction: Perce Pearce
©: Walt Disney Productions
A Walt Disney production
Sequence Directors: James Algar, Bill Roberts, Norman Wright, Sam Armstrong, Paul Satterfield, Graham Heid
Story Adaptation: Larry Morey
From the story by: Felix Salten
Story Development: George Stallings, Melvin Shaw, Carl Fallberg, Chuck Couch, Ralph Wright
Photography: Chuck Wheeler *
Supervising Animators: Franklin Thomas, Milton Kahl, Eric Larson, Oliver M. Johnston Jr
Animators: Fraser Davis, Preston Blair, Bill Justice, John Bradbury, Don Lusk, Bernard Garbutt, Retta Scott, Joshua Meador, Kenneth Hultgren, Phil Duncan, Kenneth O'Brien, George Rowley, Louis Schmitt, Art Palmer, Art Elliott
Backgrounds: Marle T. Cox, Tyrus Wong, W. Richard Anthony, Art Riley, Stan Spohn, Robert McIntosh, Ray Huffine, Travis Johnson, Ed Leviitt, Joe Stahley
Art Direction: Thomas A. Codrick, Robert C. Cormack, Al Zinnen, McLaren Stewart, Lloyd Harting, David Hilberman, John Hublely, Dick Kelsey
Colour by: Technicolor
Music by: Frank Churchill, Edward Plumb
Conducted by: Alexander Steinert
Orchestration by: Charles Wolcott, Paul J. Smith
Choral Arrangements by: Charles Henderson
Sound System: RCA Sound System
To Sidney A. Franklin our sincere appreciation
Voice Cast:
Bobby Stewart, Donnie Dunagan,
Hardie Albright, John Sutherland (*Bambi*)*
Peter Behn (*voice of Thumper*)*
Paula Winslowe (*voice of Bambi's mother*)*
USA 1942©
70 mins

* Uncredited

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SIGHT AND SOUND

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

By 1942, Disney was at war. On the day of Pearl Harbor, the studio's sound stage had been commandeered by the US army for vehicle and anti-aircraft gun maintenance, with three million rounds of ammo stored in the parking lot. Mickey and Donald were starring in public information films about chemical warfare, while propaganda shorts included a resprayed *Three Little Pigs* (1933) with a Nazi wolf.

Of *Bambi's* cast, Friend Owl, who swoops through the softly radiant forest at the film's start, appeared on an army-commissioned insignia... wielding a machine gun. Flower the skunk popped up on another, in a gas mask. At *Bambi's* world premiere in London in August 1942, the climactic forest fire must have struck a chord with the Blitzed audience. A film with no on-screen humans was now attached to humanity's greatest conflict, whether Walt and his audience liked it or not.

Bambi: A Life in the Woods was written in 1923 by the Jewish-Austrian novelist and playwright Siegmund Salzmänn, writing as Felix Salten. Disney was introduced to the book in 1935 by MGM director-producer Sidney A. Franklin, who'd purchased the rights but was flummoxed by how to turn the deer drama into live-action. Walt announced the project days after *Snow White's* triumphant premiere, by which time Salzmänn's book had been banned by the Nazis.

It was the headiest time in Disney's history, of unbelievable creative ambition and fecundity. Not content with one feature follow-up to *Snow White*, Walt ploughed ahead with three: *Bambi*, *Pinocchio* and *Fantasia*, while he was also developing *Alice in Wonderland* and *Peter Pan*. But the golden period ended when war broke out in Europe. The foreign markets vanished and *Pinocchio* and *Fantasia*, released in 1940, both flopped. In 1941, a bitter strike soured the studio and coloured Walt's reputation ever after. *Bambi's* core animators were unaffected, but the strike delayed the later stages of an already sluggish production, even before Pearl Harbor.

Bambi made extensive use of the costly multiplane camera, giving depth to scenes such as the glorious opening forest reverie. Meanwhile, artists struggled to give the cartoon animals realistic anatomies (*Snow White's* deer were flour sacks in comparison). The deer's faces, they learned, did not squash and stretch; those principles were better applied to their haunches, 'shoulders' and toe-tips to convey a 'massive swelling and thrusting up in the body,' as Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston put it in their book, *Disney Animation: The Illusion of Life*.

While the picture men studied fawns in a purpose-built studio zoo – and a deer carcass in a noisome art class – costs rose and nerves frayed. Walt made swingeing cuts to the film, reducing the animators to tears, but the last-ditch economies weren't enough. *Bambi* was yet another costly flop, and Disney entered its 'mashed potato and gravy' years of cheap package films.

To say that *Bambi* is about frolicking woodland animals is like saying *The Lord of the Rings* is about little men with hairy feet. Everyone knows the cute scenes: baby Bambi stuck on a fallen tree-trunk (one of the test animations

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Bambi

Sun 13 Aug 15:50; Wed 16 Aug 14:20;
Sat 26 Aug 12:20; Mon 28 Aug 16:20

20,000 Leagues Under the Sea

Sun 13 Aug 18:10; Tue 22 Aug 14:20;
Wed 23 Aug 20:20

Finding Nemo

Sun 13 Aug 18:30; Sun 27 Aug 13:30

Pinocchio

Mon 14 Aug 14:20; Sun 20 Aug 19:00

The Rescuers

Mon 14 Aug 18:30; Sat 19 Aug 15:50

Luca Mon 14 Aug 20:30; Sun 27 Aug 13:15

The Jungle Book

Wed 16 Aug 20:45; Wed 30 Aug 14:20

Bedknobs and Broomsticks

Thu 17 Aug 14:20; Sun 27 Aug 18:20

Sister Act Fri 18 Aug 18:20

Freaky Friday Fri 18 Aug 20:30; Thu 24 Aug 20:50

Ratatouille Sat 19 Aug 12:00; Tue 29 Aug 20:30

Soul

Sat 19 Aug 13:00; Thu 24 Aug 14:20

101 Dalmatians

Sat 19 Aug 15:30; Tue 29 Aug 14:20

Beaches Sat 19 Aug 17:30

The Love Bug

Sun 20 Aug 13:30

The Parent Trap Sun 20 Aug 15:10

Mary Poppins

Mon 21 Aug 14:20; Mon 28 Aug 13:00

Zootropolis (aka Zootopia) Fri 25 Aug 18:00

Dick Tracy

Fri 25 Aug 20:40; Tue 29 Aug 18:10 (+ intro by
Ben Roberts, BFI CEO)

Tarzan Sat 26 Aug 12:00

Turning Red Sat 26 Aug 15:30

The Lion King

Sat 26 Aug 20:30; Thu 31 Aug 14:20

The Little Mermaid

Sun 27 Aug 16:00; Mon 28 Aug 16:40

Up Mon 28 Aug 12:30

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that convinced Walt to make the film) or the rabbit Thumper's seduction by a girl bunny, his libido displaced to a helplessly peddling paw. The children, led by Thumper, are all stumbles, laughter and chatter. The adults move cautiously and speak sparsely, sometimes with devastating weight: 'Man ... was in the forest'; 'Your mother can't be with you any more.'

The focus is squarely on the beautifully drawn animals, their surroundings pushed back into pearly mist and negative space. The backgrounds were inspired by Tyrus Wong, whose sketches encouraged his fellow artists to soften and blur the branches and grasses of Bambi's world. Impressionism blends with expressionism in bursts of colour. The forest fire is a shivering yellow painting, towering over the trees; the screen brightens to red-orange as the deer herd flees man; Bambi's fight with a rival stag is all struggling silhouettes, rimmed by livid golds and icy blues.

Scene flows to scene with absolute simplicity; the dance of Fall leaves as seasons pass links the film's world briefly to *Fantasia*. The terrible human villain is never seen, and the death of Bambi's mother – one of cinema's all-time traumas – is restricted to a gunshot, the bleakest of snowscapes and a heartbreaking tear. That Walt cuts from this to the silliest of spring-themed symphonies (with twittering bluebirds modelled on a 1933 short, *Birds in the Spring*) shows his trust and mastery of a medium that turns on a dime in a way unthinkable in live-action. The majestic final hero shot, of a stag standing proud and his father retreating, is Disney masculinity at its most iconic.

We laugh and we grieve, but mostly we marvel, at a faun's blinking introduction to a little April shower, to the miracles of snow and ice, to the magnificent herd representing the mystery of adulthood, bounding over Bambi's head with the clash of cymbals. Disney's point, admirably unspoken but transparent to a child, is that the fun and fear, the silliness and heartbreak, are all of a piece. This is a *real* grown-up cartoon.

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