



Arnie the Dinosaur reviews the Academy Award winning animation of George Pal in *The Puppetoon Movie*.

CINEMA

Review: *The Puppetoon Movie*, Czech Animation Unique double bill at Festival

by Lois Wadsworth

The *Puppetoon Movie* featuring the work of George Pal and recent Czech animation by Jiri Barta

The Puppetoon Movie is the compilation of nine full length shorts and segments from ten other featurettes Hungarian-born animator George Pal created between 1937-1947. Forced by necessity to develop his own animation techniques in pre-war Europe, George Pal, who went on to produce live-action films like *The War of the Worlds*, *Houdini*, *The Naked Jungle*, *The Time Machine*, *The Wonderful World of the Brothers Grimm* and *The Seven Faces of Doctor Lao*, began his filmmaking career by making commercials.

"In Hungary and most European countries at that time, you had commercials in the movies. They were looking for different ways to film commercials. And we knew of animated films. We had the American cartoons, *Felix the Cat*, *Oswald the Rabbit*, and I tried to copy them as much as I could for commercial purposes. I had to find out how you draw animated cartoons, because there were no books on it, nothing. Fortunately I met a Hungarian, George Feld, who

had come back from Hollywood, and he was an editor. And he told me how cartoons were made."

Not only did Pal have to learn the process of film animation from the ground up, but he had to contend with an unstable political climate as well. He wanted to work in Germany but couldn't stay because of the Nazis. His next stop was Prague, where he designed his own animation camera. With his wife he made films out of a hotel room in Paris; they moved eventually to Holland, where he coined the term "Puppetoons" for his creations. Pal's European-made commercial films from that period include *The Philips Broadcast 1938*, *Philip's Cavalcade*, *The Sleeping Beauty*, and *South Sea Sweethearts*.

By 1941 George Pal was making movies in Hollywood where he set up a studio to create his "color cartoons in three dimensions." Using hand-carved wooden puppets with a series of heads for a complete range of facial expressions, flexible arms, and a series of legs for walking, Pal and his associates made over 40 musical shorts (each about six to eight minutes long). *Tulips Shall Grow* (which shows the Nazi invasion of Holland),

John Henry and the Inky Poo, and *Tubby the Tuba* were Academy Award nominees. The other Paramount films included in *The Puppetoon Movie* are *Together in the Weather* and *Jasper in a Jam*, 1946, which features the jazz of bandleader Charlie Barnett and singer Peggy Lee.

Czechoslovakian animator Jiri Barta's hour long film fantasy, *The Pied Piper*, and two shorter pieces, *Ballad of the Greenwood* and *The Extinct of World Gloves* gives us a taste for the kind of work going on at Trnka Studios.

In *The Pied Piper*, exquisite hand-carved wooden puppets are superimposed on architecturally fabulous sets. Barta's storytelling is stylish and modern. There is no need for translation; the "spoken" words are gibberish, a universal language never more creatively employed. The themes are darker than American cutesy-pie cartoons—greed, ambition, violence all have their role in *The Pied Piper*—as they do in life. The Grimm brothers recognized that many of the stories they collected included such dark undercurrents, but American animators like Walt Disney and whoever decided American kiddies shouldn't be exposed to such ideas, established an idea-less American cartoon industry that has led over time to such insipidities as the *Care Bears*. Barta's pictures are hip tales, not morality plays.

The early genius of George Pal and the current works of Jiri Barta make a double bill not to be missed.



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