

'Bebe's kids' aren't the only ones who dig 'toons

Even animated characters can be PC

By JOANNE J. CHOI

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It seems that a college student's taste for animation is of one of those childhood things you just can't leave behind.

It could have started with "Bullwinkle" and progressed to "Scooby Scooby Doo." Likely, it was the regimen of Disney fare from "Bambi" to "Snow White" that first formed and whetted our tastes for animation. Now animation has become almost reality, still delivering a social message while crossing race lines and incorporating modern-day issues.

And this year marks an all-time peak for animation as a medium of entertainment with the first Oscar nomination of an animated film, Walt Disney Pictures' "Beauty and the Beast." Along with a highly successful series such as "The Simpsons," animation has become standard fare on prime time with shows such as "Fish Police" and "Capital Critters" joining the fray.

Disney, a name synonymous with animation, no longer holds a monopoly on the film market since the release of competitive features like Universal's "American Tail" and "Fievel Goes West." This year also marks a new chapter of animation with the scheduled release of Paramount's "Bebe's Kids" and "Cool World."

While animation and cartoons are still considered child's play by the public, the success of films like "Little Mermaid" and "Beauty and the Beast," which surpassed

\$120 million at the box office, shows that animation is not an exclusively children's market.

"Animation is judged in terms of its execution versus Disney," said Thomas L. Wilhite, Hyperion Entertainment president and founder. Hyperion, which also specializes in animation, is currently working on Paramount's first animated film since "Gulliver's Travels" and "Happyty Goes to Town" with the Hudlin Bros. film, "Bebe's Kids."

In contrast to the traditional in-house style of Disney, Paramount's films are individualistic efforts of the animators. For Paramount, the result of this dual renaissance in animation and film making is a promising "Bebe's Kids," based on the signature stand-up act of comedic genius Robin Harris. In what may be the first film to feature an all African-American animated cast without the taboos of black face, "Bebe's Kids" is a touching story the Hudlins hope will entertain generations who have grown up on animation.

Political correctness, gender and racial sensitivity of the '90s seem also to have emerged in animation's greatest titan, Disney Studios. With "Aladdin," its 31st full-feature animated release, Disney has broken its long standing tradition of a primarily Caucasian main cast, which delegates ethnic characters to secondary roles such as the Calypso crab, Sebastian in "The Little Mermaid." "Aladdin" is animated with an all-Arabian cast and based upon the most famous of fairy tales in "The Arabian



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Paramount will try to prove that animation isn't restricted to stories on mermaids and Bambi.

Nights." Tony-award winning actress Lea Salonga, who sings the voice of Princess Jasmine in the film and happens to be an Asian-American, admits, "I'm not sure if having a diversity is a trend or a fluke."

"Aladdin's" producer/director/writer Ron Clements believes that his film represents "a conscientiousness and sensitivity in the studio."

"Bebe's Kids" and the adult-level "Cool World" feature less than pure themes. But despite the obvious differences between Paramount and Disney, both studios share successful approaches to animation.

Disney Chairman Jeffrey Katzenberg believes in an animated film's ability to relay a strong moral message. For "Beauty and the Beast," the message was "Don't judge a book by its cover." In "Aladdin," Katzenberg believes that the message is "a very strong theme... to believe in yourself, and others will too. And, that your true self is your best

and strongest self."

Similarly, Reginald Hudlin, who wrote the script for "Bebe's Kids," incorporated a definite moral message underneath all the verbal bantering of the film. "It's about the post-nuclear family, which is not a real family, but they decide to be family and take care of each other."

The significance of music in both films also serves as a means of contrasting the Disney and Paramount animation styles. According to Roy Disney, "Music is one of the deepest traditions we have in animation." Disney films tend to feature classical music, while "Bebe's Kids" features the hip-hop music of current groups such as Another Bad Creation and the vocal talents of rap artist Ton-Lox.

Ultimately, the differences between Paramount and Disney will be decided at the box office. But for college students, it may be just a matter of preference.

McGillis is back on the big screen with role in 'The Babe'

After having a child, 'Top Gun' actress refocuses her career

By AARON DOBBS

Daily Bruin, U. of California, Los Angeles

Film audiences haven't seen Kelly McGillis for a while. The actress who found stardom in the blockbusters "Top Gun" and "Witness" hasn't appeared in a major film since 1988's "The Accused" and 1989's "Winter People."

But don't worry about her.

The last thing McGillis has is a dead career.

Currently, she's either rehearsing or performing in two separate plays at the Shakespeare Theatre in Washington D.C.

She's also in the current film, "The Babe," about the life of Babe Ruth starring John Goodman.

Even though she has been working a lot in the theater the last few years, there's another more important reason for the recent lack of her persona on the big screen.

"I've had a baby," McGillis said. "I'm a mom now. I don't want to work as much as I

used to. I kind of have somebody else who needs me now, and I'd much rather spend time with her, quite honestly."

Although she's currently doing more theater, McGillis said she doesn't really have a preference between stage and screen, but she does enjoy the demands of working in front of a live audience.

"I just wanted to start more (theater)," she said. "My background was in theater before I started making movies, and I really like doing theater—doing the classics. I like the challenges it possesses for (an actor)."

In "The Babe," McGillis plays Claire Hodgesson, a former Ziegfeld Folly and Ruth's second wife.

According to the film, Hodgesson became Ruth's emotional strength as his career headed toward an end and no one in baseball wanted anything to do with him.

"I think that Claire is somebody who came into Babe's life and did give him a sense of strength and put his life back together in

many ways," she said. "You know, when he was way out of control, she came in and put some limits on him. I think that she did that as a friend and as a lover and as a mother."

The script is also what brought McGillis back to the film to do "The Babe." She said she felt "The Babe" was a worthwhile movie to do because Ruth is an American folk hero.

"What also interested me a great deal was the metaphor in the film of fame and famousness and how fickle all of that is," McGillis said. "And also about love and about commitment.

I thought it was a metaphor for many things in life, and especially about fame itself and what fame can do to people..."

McGillis can relate to that. She too, in her years as an actress, has experienced the price of celebrity success.

Like many other celebrities, she has had some bad experiences with the press.

She describes the publicity on celebrities



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as "a lot of hype — it's all a lot of bullshit," and says she doesn't read any of her own publicity or stories written about her.

"I think that the power of the press is a very positive thing, but it can also be very negative," she said. "And I think it's wonderful if it can get people into your movies if they're good movies and if you have something that you want to say to people. But at the same time the way that it invades on your personal life is a very negative thing... People say things that just aren't true, but it makes good press."

"I just have a whole thing about journalists and people interviewing me," McGillis continues, "because (an interviewer has) no fucking clue as to what it is that I care about in life, (what) I've been through in my life, and there's no way that I would let (him) know that either. There's no way that I would tell (an interviewer), who is a total stranger, my innermost secrets, but yet that's what everybody wants to know about you when you're famous."

As far as the future goes, McGillis said she'd like to play a character who is totally out of control.

"There's no point for me, anymore, to work on things that don't interest me," she says. "I think I've been lucky — I don't feel like I have a certain type that I have to fight