



FANTASIA 2000 is an LVCA dvd donation for January, 2014 to the Hugh Stouppe Memorial Library.

United States 1999 color feature musical animation 74 minutes

Walt Disney Pictures / Richard Purdum Productions /

Walt Disney Feature Animation / Walt Disney Television Animation

Producers: Lisa Cook, Donald Ernst, Patricia Hicks, David Lovegren Rated G

14 of a possible 20 points

\*\*\*1/2 of a possible \*\*\*\*\*

Key: \*indicates outstanding technical achievement

Points

Direction: James Algar\* (“The Sorcerer’s Apprentice” segment), Gaetan and Paul Brizzi\* (“The Firebird Suite” segment), Hendel Butoy (“Pines of Rome” segment and “Piano Concerto No. 2”\* segment), Francis Glebas (“Pomp and Circumstance” segment), Eric Goldberg (“Rhapsody in Blue” and The Carnival of the Animals” segments), Don Hahn (Interstitials, i.e., host segments), Pixote Hunt (“Symphony No. 5”)

1 Editing: Jessica Ambinder-Rojas, Lois Freeman-Fox, Julia Gray, Craig Paulsen, Gregory Plotts

2 Cinematography: Tim Suhrstedt\*

2 Animation: Leads --- Tim Allen\*, Anthony de Rosa\*, Ron Husband\*, Kellie Lewis\*, John Pomeroy\*, Fred Moore\*, Bill Tytla\* (the latter two for “The Sorcerer’s Apprentice” segment)

0 Lighting: Darren Kiner, Billy Craft, James McClure

1 Story / Writing: Eric Goldberg for “Rhapsody in Blue” segment; Eric Goldberg, based on a story idea by Joe Grant, for

- “The Carnival of the Animals”; Don Hahn for the interstitials (host segments); Perce Pearce and Carl Fallberg, based on an original story by Lucian adapted and translated by Johann Goethe for “The Sorcerer’s Apprentice”; Gaetan and Paul Brizzi, based on a concept by Elena Driskill, for “The Firebird Suite”; Irene Mecchi and David Reynolds for host segments; Brenda Chapman for additional story
- 2 Music: Ludwig van Beethoven, Ottorino Respighi, George Gershwin, Dmitri Shostakovich, Camille Saint-Saens, Paul Dukas, Edward Elgar, Igor Stravinsky, Armando Dominguez (“Destino”)
- 2 Art Direction / Production Design: Tom Codrick\*, Charles Philippi\* and Zack Schwartz\* for “The Sorcerer’s Apprentice” segment; Dan Cooper for the “Pomp and Circumstance” segment; Susan Goldberg for the “Rhapsody in Blue” and “The Carnival of the Animals” segments; Dean Gordon\* and Bill Perkins\* for “The Pines of Rome” segment; Michael Humphries\* for the “Piano Concerto No. 2” segment; Pixote Hunt for the “Symphony No. 5” segment; Carl Jones\* for “The Firebird Suite” segment; and Alison Yerxa / Pixote Hunt for the Interstitials
- 2 Sound: Yann Delpuech\* (sound designer), Gregory King\* (supervising sound editor), William Garity\*, J.N.A. Hawkins\* and C.O. Slyfield\* (sound recordists), G. John Garrett\* (sound mixer)
- 1 Cast and Voices Cast: Leopold Stokowski\*, James Levine, Steve Martin, Itzhak Perlman, Kathleen Battle (solo singer, Pomp and Circumstance Segment), Quincy Jones, Bette Midler, James Earl Jones, Penn Jillette\*, Teller\*, Angela Lansbury, Wayne Allwine (voice of Mickey Mouse), Tony Anselmo\* (voice of Donald Duck), Russi Taylor (voice of Daisy Duck), Deems Taylor\*, Benee Leavy and Deborah Vukovitz (violinists), Yefim Bronfman, Gaetan Brizzi, Paul Brizzi, Eric Goldberg, Walt Disney (voice of Mickey Mouse)
- 1 Creativity
- 14 total points

When Walt Disney produced the concert film FANTASIA, he anticipated retooling it on a regular basis, with at least one addition and subtraction of segments occurring for each reissue. Due to World War II exigencies, financial loss incurred by the original FANTASIA, and the high cost of reediting it, that scheme never materialized. Not until Walt's nephew Roy persuaded studio boss Michael Eisner to greenlight a new feature-length concert animation, on the basis of massive profits from an early 1990 re-release of FANTASIA, was the notion of a continuation seriously considered. All but one of seven music segments seen in 1940 were dropped, replaced by seven new productions.

Substituting for the relatively sober music introducer of the first incarnation, critic and educator Deems Taylor, would be an assortment of contemporary star musicians and entertainers. A piece of American classical music would be included, rectifying complete absence of the home team from Disney's musical showpiece. This omission was noted by some critics, causing a patriotically sensitized Uncle Walt to generate a flurry of pop music representations in succeeding 1940s animations , most notably MELODY TIME, MAKE MINE MUSIC, SALUDOS AMIGOS, and THE THREE CABALLEROS. These collections of popular tunes showcased an abundance of American hits, as well as Latin American counterparts.

Several additional music animations appeared in later decades: MELODY; TOOT, WHISTLE, PLUNK AND BOOM; A SYMPOSIUM ON POPULAR SONGS; MARY POPPINS; THE LITTLE MERMAID; BEAUTY AND THE BEAST; THE LION KING; and POCAHONTAS. None of these works, however, were structured as an animated concert feature highlighting a symphony orchestra.

Enlisting involvement of conductor James Levine and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, FANTASIA 2000's production team began to seriously craft a second essay popularizing classical music via accompanying animation. With the approach of a new century and millennium, the time seemed appropriate for refurbishing Walt's prized hybrid of visual and aural arts. By 1999, music compositions were chosen, presenters enlisted, and copyright clearances obtained. Final studio recordings were completed as the massive publicity machine of Walt Disney Feature Animation began to prepare a vast audience for re-emergence of Disney's FANTASIA concept.

FANTASIA 2000 offers mostly new faces, fresh bridges between numbers, and minimal background information about the music, replacing music appreciation mini-lectures with entertaining comic asides and tangents. It's less focused than FANTASIA, wilder in exploration of visual analogies.

Once again, the studio ignores contemporary compositions and musical showpieces from Africa, Asia, Australia, and South America. Not even considerations of political correctness could shoehorn works of women composers or anyone from south of the Mediterranean into this millennial collection. Small world, isn't it?

Given a tunnel vision approach to music sources, FANTASIA 2000 applies a remarkably freewheeling cavalierness to conceptual design, usually choosing story underpinnings with no public precedents for accompaniment. There is one notable exception. Obvious parallels between Paul Grimault's 1947 short animation LE PETIT SOLDAT and the PIANO CONCERTO NO. 2 segment are not mentioned by Disney audio commentators, but both color palette and characterizations suggest familiarity of American animators with the French masterpiece.

Strongest segments of the film are FIREBIRD SUITE – 1919 VERSION, THE SORCERER'S APPRENTICE and PIANO CONCERTO NO. 2, ALLEGRO, OPUS 102.

Death, destruction, rebirth, and growth are powerhouse themes vitalizing the Stravinsky setting, though appearances of sprite and elk in place of a phoenix is more than slightly disconcerting. Stunning imagery carries the day, however. And the emotional appeal of FIREBIRD is enormous.

Mickey's superb pantomime triumphs gloriously in THE SORCERER'S APPRENTICE, successfully teaming Disney iconography with an irresistible tale that has energetically survived centuries of retellings with magnetism fully intact. Paul Dukas' music provides transparent extreme contrasts which even young children can enjoy, a safe auditory oscillation between meditative calmness and rampaging violence.

Dmitri Shostakovich's martial percussion has just enough glimmering hope in its conclusion to qualify it for Disney packaging. Though Bette Midler is hardly the most appropriate presenter imaginable for this work, a limited trio cast with constantly shifting mobility provide sufficient kineticism to thoroughly engage

viewers. A clearly defined antagonist, the Jack-in-the-Box, makes interpretation and identification quite simple. Romantic linkage of vulnerable ballerina and courageous soldier is reinforced with an upbeat conclusion, something Hans Christian Andersen never envisaged for that couple, even though he's credited with the story. Youth must be served, particularly in Fantasyland.

Less winning is THE PINES OF ROME segment featuring an odyssey of whales through ice and clouds, moving in ballet glides and even horizontal axis revolutions, defying both gravity and expectations. As is customary in Disney films, a baby is provided to supply cuteness, all of which clashes mightily against the military spirit in much of the musical accompaniment. Where composer Ottorino Respighi imagined playful Roman children contrasted with ancestors grimly arranged in marching legionary columns, animation designers preferred to depict an environmental activist daydream. Down with the troops. Up with tranquil migratory whales.

Another dud is the flamingo yoyo frolic, based on what originator Joe Grant envisioned as a kind of ballet struggle, with conformist ostriches bullying a maverick. In one of the worst color selection decisions the studio has ever made, less colorful birds were replaced with more graceful pastel relatives who blend camouflagingly into pallid backgrounds. Pink is not a winning choice for developing color contrast. This is the second time Disney has floundered with a lightweight comic relief effort employing featherweight ballet music, repeating the colossal error of dancing hippos and acrobatic alligators in FANTASIA's "DANCE OF THE HOURS" setting. Repellently gross creatures neither enhance nor satirically torpedo bland melodies that have become inextricably linked with Al Sherman's "Hello, Muddah" song, a witty exaggeration of composer Paisiello's mincing daintiness.

Even greater misjudgment is evidenced in joining Edward Elgar's brightly victorious POMP AND CIRCUMSTANCE marches to a vaudeville version of the Noah's Ark tale. Typically belligerent Donald Duck and lovelorn Daisy share quarters with the world's largest menagerie. Somehow they never encounter each other aboard, causing each to presume the flood has swept a missing sweetheart away forever. Would it were so. But no. A nauseatingly sentimental reunion over what looks rather like a valentine-shaped resin bag, concludes this

melancholy adventure. The entire segment hinges totteringly on two animal parades, one entering Noah's architectural wonder, the second gratefully exiting it.

Segments devoted to Beethoven's Fifth Symphony and Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue are neither absolute failures nor complete triumphs. Both have been brilliantly realized previously in abstract animations. They fare less well here.

Art Director Pixote Hunt makes a correct decision to match German romanticism with visual abstraction in his Beethoven outing. Unfortunately, what results is insipid and uninvolving, a pale shadow of the earlier artistry of Len Lye, Oskar Fischinger, and John Whitney animating similar classics.

Miscalculations of ambience and aesthetics also sink the Gershwin segment. For some arcane reason, the temptation to depict human characters performing v unbelievable acrobatic stunts continues to entice filmmakers seeking visual counterpoints for a New York City Depression-era soundscape. Employing a caricature style adapted from magazine artist Al Hirschfeld seems like a winning idea. But UPA-influenced vignettes appear artificial and irrelevant as they sketch the misadventures of a motley assortment of urban stereotypes. The music is bracingly original, designed to spotlight orchestral soloists playing virtuoso jazz. Characterizations on screen, however, are overfamiliar clichés, lacking both novelty and credibility. Thankfully, these bizarrely whimsical individuals remain mutely anonymous, suggestive not of Chaplin and his peers, but rather calling to mind a laryngitis-plagued company of silent screen extras auditioning for roles in current adventure serials. That's quite a different story from what the music passages are outlining.

One consistent merit of the film can be found in awesome special visual effects supervised by Dave Bossert, Steve Goldberg, Eric Hanson, Bruce Heller, Craig Hoffman, Richard Hollander, Uel Hormann, Shyh-Chyuan Huang, Ted Kierscye, Darren Kiner, Christine Lau, Mauro Maressa, Thomas Meyer, Tina Price, Ruth Ramos, Robert Rosenblum, Sergi Sagas, David Santiago, Susan Thayer, Mary Jane Turner, and Nathan Warner. Their achievements are most lavishly displayed in the PINES OF ROME and FIREBIRD sections of the film.

Animation is of superior caliber throughout, a Disney trademark.

Sound recording of both speech and music is clear, resonant, and suitably inflected for varying comic and dramatic emphases.

Music arrangements are felicitous, with the exception of an overly brief symphonic excerpt from Beethoven, who merits more than just a couple minutes of exposure.

Since no dialogue is present, except in a handful of interstitial bridges between music performances, scripting is of little significance, taking a back seat to storyboarding. More thought would have been helpful in developing the concepts driving POMP AND CIRCUMSTANCE, THE CARNIVAL OF THE ANIMALS and RHAPSODY IN BLUE. Each of those episodes suffer from inadequate character development, forcing the music to either travel a separate path from distracting visuals or else link with an uninspired main street lacking distinctiveness, one so familiar it elicits no wonder whatsoever in beholders. Which is disastrous for a motion picture keyed to extracting gasps and disbelieving stares from members of the audience.

Editing of music sequences is proficient and frequently inspired. Less so is the confused pacing of some interstitials, which mix contradictory moods with obtrusive animated inserts.

Inconsistencies in lighting detract significantly from viewer enjoyment. Brightness, color contrast and diffusiveness are all problematic.

Plenty of variety is present in the camera angles and shot selections preplanned by cinematographer Tim Suhrstedt. There is nothing static about his photography for this film.

Though FANTASIA 2000 is much more of a mixed bag than its ancestor, special features of the release considerably offset deficiencies in the feature itself. These bonuses include two enlightening audio commentaries, an eighteen-page interactive booklet with data about each piece of music supplemented by creative application of artistic principles, and two short educational animations: MELODY and TOOT, WHISTLE, PLUNK AND BOOM, the latter awarded an Academy Award as Best Animated Short. All three films are appropriate viewing for ages five and up.