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Watch 'Em Move

A Short Biography
of *Krazy Kat* and
Some of His Goofy
Friends

By Frances Kish



It's one foot of film. Sixteen separate drawings are required for it, each one entirely different

HAVEN'T you sat, fascinated, for the seven or eight minutes of an animated cartoon, wondering what makes the drawings move? And when talkies came along, weren't you surprised when they sang and played musical instruments, and out from the screen came the squeaky voice of *Krazy Kat* or the piping song of *Mickey Mouse*?

Most cartoons are planned out before ever pencil is put to paper. Let's sit in on a couple of conferences at the Winkler Pictures studios, where work is about to begin on a new adventure in the life of *Krazy Kat*.

The entire studio staff is present. Somebody has what he thinks is a clever idea. Changes and additions are suggested. Discussion is fast and furious. And a complete story is worked out.

Later, there is a "gag" conference. Perhaps there's a sequence in a subterranean room, down a long flight of stairs. "Well, stairs when picked up and juggled back and forth between the hands make a perfectly grand accordion," suggests someone. And thus a gag is born.

The musicians determine the type of music for each gag—whether the mood calls for "Hearts and Flowers," jazz, a march or a swaying waltz. Tempo is measured accurately with a metronome, and exact length timed with a split-second watch.

The major animator begins the work. The thin white paper he uses for his drawings has holes punched at the top, like pages for a loose-leaf note-book. These holes fit over pegs, holding the paper firmly in position. Drawing is done on slanted glass boards, under which is an electric light bulb that shines through glass and paper and makes tracing easy.

The figures are about three inches high. Progressive drawings, each on a separate sheet, move the action slightly forward, backward, up, down or around.

Each drawing is traced with India ink on a piece of celluloid punched like the paper. Celluloid is used for the final drawings because of its lustre and transparency.

The drawings are photographed, one at a time, with a regular

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Krazy Kat

motion picture camera equipped with "stop motion." The camera is suspended over a table, with special lamps to center the light on the celluloids. Sixteen "frames"—sixteen separate exposures—make one foot of film.

Out at the studio where *Terry-Toons* are made I learned some of the troubles of a musical director of sound cartoons. Old, familiar tunes are frequently found to be all tied up with the red tape of the copyright law. Foreign rights are especially difficult to obtain. Fees paid for the use of musical compositions, often just a few bars at a time, run into enormous sums.

There are the most amusing "sound props." At the proper moment in the recording, a resined string is pulled from a small, drum-like contraption, and the resulting sound is like the bark of a lusty dog. A big, bucket-like affair, on the same principle, produces a lion's roar.



WHEN the rooster crows, it's because someone blew into a thing that looks like a small watering can. A big wooden affair, notched like a modern skyscraper, makes a train whistle. There are ratchets that sound like the beat of tomtoms, wind whistles, etc.

One of the executives of the *Terry-Toon* Company is an expert "meower" and his services are much in demand on the days when recording is done!

There's a tremendous amount of labor and care involved in making animated sound cartoons. Thousands of drawings are made for one film—generally from five to seven or eight thousand separate drawings. And that means the same number of tracings, and the same number of photographic exposures, to say nothing of the intricate musical and sound score.

But don't get the idea that cartoon studios are stodgy places where laughter is a mere commercial commodity to be turned out by the foot. I found them so jolly and fascinating that I wanted to stay and join the gang. But I changed my mind when I learned that it takes about two years to develop a good animator, no matter how much talent and artistic training he has at the beginning.



So I decided to stick to reporting, where all one has to do is ask hard-working artists a lot of questions and then write down the answers.