

1939

HARMAN-ISING

A Couple of Failures in Kansas Only Made Them Fight Harder for Success in Cartoons

By **MARNEY McCASKILL**

ALL heroes have their beginnings, Caesar had Rome, Napoleon had France, Washington had the Delaware and Hugh Harman and Rudolf Ising had Kansas City.

In 1922, Ising was on his way to fame and fortune by way of \$1,000 he had invested in an animated cartoon business with another young and ambitious cartoonist, Walt Disney. It must have been folding money, because, although Ising and Disney had the very best of intentions, the company folded, owing Hugh Harman, its oldest and most trusted employee, two weeks back salary.

The sting of defeat subsided with the smoke of battle; Harman joined Ising, and both wholly oblivious to the trick name combination (Harman-Ising) turned their efforts to the organization of a new cartoon producing company. One cartoon, "Sinbad The Sailor," was produced, which was notable at that date (1924) in that it set a precedent in its art work for the fine design and drawing, which subsequently were to distinguish the better cartoons.

This was the beginning; it was also the end. The celluloid dreams of Harman-Ising were shattered by financial storms. It seems the provincial moneybags of Kansas City didn't appreciate the finer things of life.

Kansas City's loss was Hollywood's gain, as 1928 saw our heroes set out for the Coast for Round Two of their fight to put Harman-Ising in a top spot as a fantasy factory. They had a new idea. The cinema world had just seen the advent of sound. Why not make cartoons talk? They did; they produced the first talking cartoon ever made, "Bosko, the Talking Kid," completed in 1929. With Leon Schlesinger supplying an important bank roll, Harman-Ising Productions, Ltd., really began to roll, turning out five series of "Looney Tunes" and "Merrie Melodies," distributed by Warner Bros.

Harman-Ising marches on. They wanted to make bigger and better pictures. In fact, they were not quite satisfied with that. They wanted to make the best. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer wanted the best and were willing to furnish all the poker chips. This gave H-I new dignity and added zeal, so they blossomed forth with a new corporate structure and name, Harman-Ising Pictures, Inc. Such color fantasies as "Chinese Nightingale," "Calico Dragon," "Lost Chick," "Little Cheeser," "Bottles" and "Old Mill Pond" catapulted the boys to fame.

In 1938, Harman-Ising discontinued independent production. The partners joined M-G-M as staff producers. Their present productions include "The Bear Who Couldn't Sleep," "Little Goldfish," "Art Gallery" and "Goldilocks And The Three Bears."

"In the last decade the animated cartoon has developed from its early grotesque form to its present lofty state and this development is really a miracle in art and an achievement in entertainment," said Harman, in an interview. "The significance of the cartoon can be realized only when we consider its world wide appeal and power of influence.

When it is a fact that a feature length cartoon has earned more money and has been seen by more people of all nationalities than any other picture ever produced, I think I may predict without indulging in fantasy that the cartoon feature will be the most important future phase of motion picture production."