

STAGE

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Mickey

By KATHARINE BEST



When Mickey Mouse comes riding out of the West in his coat of many, many colors, he becomes our official Good Will Ambassador to the rest of the world. He is, to date, the most intelligible and potential of international peace-makers. He's been more or less that for some time. He and his less articulate imitators have brought Japanese and Chinese, Abyssinian and Italian, Norse and Nazi together on what is, perhaps their only common ground—laughter. He and his caper-cutters are the manifestation of a personal, unconditioned medium of self-expression that is likely to make strange bedfellows.

It is a feat that was hardly anticipated. For a long while now animated cartoons have been static, sterile, deliberately moronic. Technically, they have grown precociously and have deceived their doting and anxious public with a clever, ingenious invention of

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comic characters and slap-stick antics. They have ignored, completely, the artistic possibilities of a medium that wound the element of time around its little finger and did with it what it liked.

Mickey, with healthy disdain, stayed well ahead of the pack. He was the first-born, and is the heir-apparent to an exceedingly rich estate. He has had abnormally rapid development. The early comics, jerky and generalized, were brought, through the nimble capers of Mickey, to a smooth, individualized style. His attitude became inimitable, his gestures characteristic. It was the first move toward greater eloquence and more intelligent humor. His films, shrewdly, were pointing toward a more artistic future. A future that could include pure imaginative fantasy or knowledge or beauty or allegory or satire or all five. He had escaped the narrow limits of the merely amusing.

Loose in a world of limitless fancy, he is unbeatable. In color, he represents a forceful beauty and a symbol of untouched resources.

The marvelous mouse's continual and universal success is, of course, due to the fact that he goads the intellect quite as much as he warms the cockles of the heart. He is a versatile little beast with all the dimensions of pictorial art at his beck and screech, plus a brand new one. Time now stands still, moves fast, or backs up—whichever Master Mouse's little heart desires.

The ultimate in antic-art comes to us as *The Band Concert*. It achieves, in subtle, rapid, perfectly-timed movements, an irresistible charm and a magic beauty. It is a superb fantasy that touches off every mental reverberation and every happy emotion.

Mickey as a maestro! His far-too-long sleeves, that keep slipping down over his baton, his cock-eyed hat. He leads his orchestra, with comic dignity and rich fantasy, into the Overture from *William Tell*. Paddy Pig blasts lustily on his trumpet, and his entire over-stuffed torso trembles in vibrant sympathy to every note. Clarabelle Cow works up a terrific perspiration in her flute solo, and finishes, exhausted and wilted and completely satiric of every winded flutist you ever saw.

When Donald Duck appears and strikes up, on his persistently recurring flutes, the merry *Turkey in the Straw* (which, incidentally, blends perfectly for a few bars with the

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Overture), the orchestra about faces and accompanies *him*. Again delectable satire and unblemished humor. This spirit of impudent attention causes the band to follow Mickey, from soft, bucolic passages to wild, uncontrolled, roaring music as he swings, instinctively, at a bee that buzzes about his head.

The fundamental dramatic quality of *William Tell* is, of course, of vital importance to this new picture. It permits the overtone of humor never to get out of hand. The comedy may bound all over the place, yet is unconsciously held in dramatic tow by one of the world's most popular operas. It is the basis on which intelligently humorous contrast may be safely built.

We shan't tell you what happens when the *William Tell* storm breaks over Mickey's head. The world might well go mad when he and his band take their opera seriously. It is social satire and imaginative fantasy at its highest, and we take our respectful and unanimous hat off to this little rodent who, in his colossally small way, has instigated an entire new social and mental order.

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