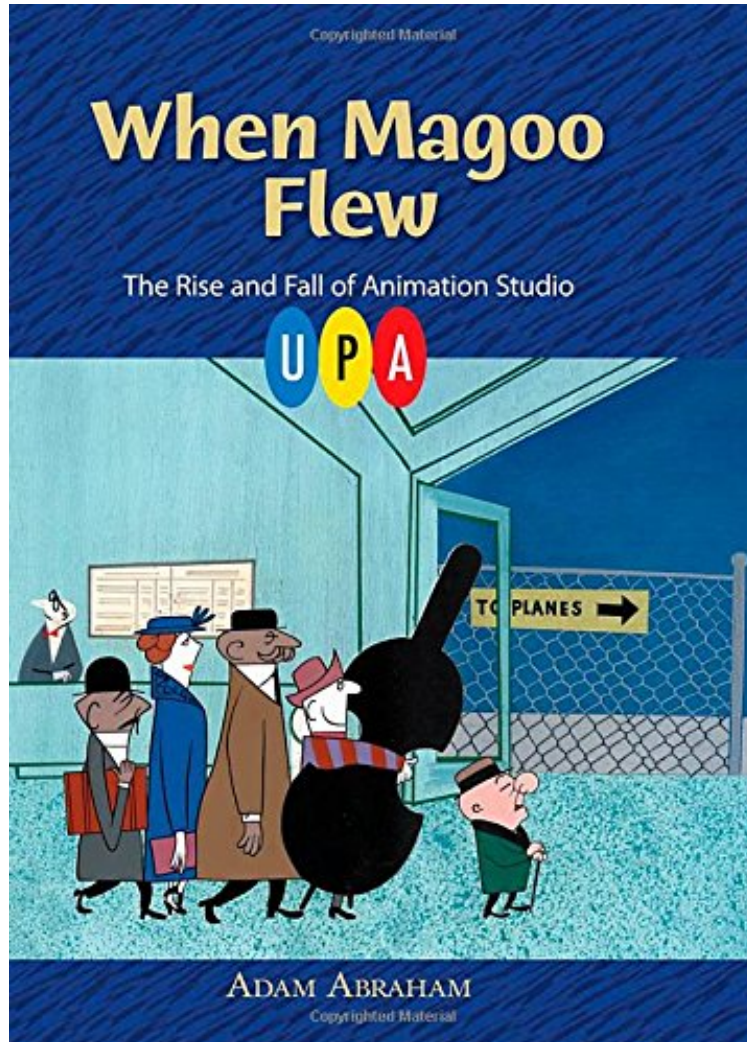


[Free pdf] When Magoo Flew: The Rise and Fall of Animation Studio UPA

When Magoo Flew: The Rise and Fall of Animation Studio UPA

Adam Abraham

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Adam Abraham : When Magoo Flew: The Rise and Fall of Animation Studio UPA before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised When Magoo Flew: The Rise and Fall of Animation Studio UPA:

19 of 20 people found the following review helpful. "Oh, Magoo, you've done it again." A hopeful sign of things to come. By Thad Komorowski. Adam Abraham's *When Magoo Flew: The Rise and Fall of Animation Studio UPA* takes on the unenviable task of chronicling United Productions of America, the most raved about but least known about studio of the Golden Age of animation. In general, he succeeds at making this a key text, the go-to-book for anyone seeking information on the studio. Like Mike Barrier, Abraham actually uses solid end notes, so you're able to see where the information came from. You'd be surprised how rare this is in animation books; some document or long-

dead person is typically quoted without citation or context. Abraham's thorough use of solid research and colorful anecdotes with extensive citations makes his book worth purchasing for this alone. Some of the usual problems with animation texts do arise in Abraham's book. Displaced chronology is inevitable in an animation history, so leeway should be allotted, especially when Abraham has gone to such great lengths in his research. But he could have still been clearer in many cases. He spends a great deal of time talking about Bobe Cannon as a director before his most excellent "Red Scare" chapter, but he discusses films made both before and after John Hubley's firing [related to his HUAC-offending activities]. While writing about the studio's early 1950s triumphs, he does not discuss *Unicorn in the Garden* and I was left puzzled by its absence. Abraham discusses the film later, in a chapter about *Mr. Magoo: 1001 Arabian Nights*, while chronicling the studio's various feature film projects (*Unicorn* was intended to be part of a James Thurber feature). Sometimes the displaced chronology works very poorly. The most distinct example is Abraham choosing to discuss Chuck Jones's *The Dover Boys* after John Hubley's time at Screen Gems, so we get a sentence that reads "The Dover Boys resembles *The Rocky Road to Ruin*". That exact wording, of course, shouldn't exist in any language, regardless of context. What I also noticed is a strong commitment to academia in Abraham's book, and a relying on the UPA personnel's feelings and opinions in order to avoid taking and stating a position himself. Some of those positions are strong (pro-UPA, as to be expected), many others (the negative) are weak. This of course allows him to avoid telling you that a large part of the UPA output after Hubley left never met those high standards again. (A most notable exception is his reprinting the priceless and devastating results of a focus testing of *The Gerald McBoing Boing Show* in its entirety.) It's also especially evident in earlier grating passages, with the prevailing viewpoint that Disney and Warner artists (particularly the wonderful Frank Tashlin) were aware of the role modern art and graphics could play in animation, but they were either too stupid or indifferent to follow through. Studio brickbats are covered well, the "Red Scare" chapter chronicling the attempted purging of UPA and the departure of John Hubley being the best example. It's also one of the few places Abraham takes a strong position himself - that the McCarthy era was one of the most terrifying and shameful periods in American history - because it's the only reasonable position that can be taken. Other moments of conflict aren't done the justice Barrier did them in *Hollywood Cartoons* with shorter word space. Producer Steve Bosustow hated *Unicorn in the Garden* and that's exactly why Bill Hurtz (the film's director) left UPA the second Shamus Culhane (who is introduced in the text unceremoniously) asked him to. We never sense that in Abraham's book, because he never tells us in plain terms and the chronology is all over the place. Hurtz leaves UPA in chapter eight but he's still there in chapter nine. There was also a real missed opportunity in not using Bill Scott as a figure thoroughly, for his recollections are revealing of the elevation of design and the minimizing of everything else in the animation process during this era. UPA housed Bullwinkle J. Moose, about as strong an antithesis of the UPA style I can think of, as one of its main writers. Such a section writes itself, but Scott is pushed to the sidelines. That emphasis on design over animation and the establishment of UPA are, without a doubt, a product of modernism permeating through American culture. If such a dissection has a place, it's in a history of UPA, and I wish Abraham attempted adding that dimension to his book. For as important as he wants us to believe UPA and its artists are, they're still confined to the animation ghetto in this book, rather than how they fit into the larger picture of art and film in the mid-twentieth century. Regardless, Abraham ultimately did an excellent job possible of making the UPA story readable. About the only truly boring part was a chapter on advertising. The text did nothing to make UPA's commercials seem any more noteworthy than anyone else's [Were they proven more effective than the competition's, I wonder?] and only reminded me that commercials are not films in any way, shape or form. The chapter serves its purpose of putting the information out there (and it's quite necessary, given how much work in advertising UPA did), but it did nothing to pique my curiosity. *When Magoo Flew* is light but not lightweight. Abraham doesn't go out of his way to use words that no one would ever actually use in real life. I learned a lot I didn't know, and many of my favorite artists became real people in a way they never have been before. Some animator identifications were intriguing, either coming from studio drafts or the unerring Mike Kazaleh. The book serves as a decent, if not perfect, model for any enterprising writers who want to write about other neglected animation studios. People may whine about how it's too late for proper histories of those places to be written, given how most of animation's forefathers and early worker bees are all dead, but Abraham proves this obstacle can be overcome. He also, however, reaffirmed my own skepticism towards the UPA studio, style and films rather than give me new appreciation for them, but for that I can't fault it. Reading it was too educational an experience. And hey, his chapter on *Mr. Magoo* has gotten me excited about seeing those cartoons again on the forthcoming DVD release. It's an important book, and if you have any interest in American animation history, you should buy this, and the just released *Jolly Frolics* collection, without any reservations.

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. A VERY NICE ADDITIOIN TO MY ANIMATION LIBRARY
By classic cartoon lover
I haved enjoyed(loved)*Mr. Magoo* since first seeing one of his cartoons back in the late 1950's in a theater. Until the last 20 years or so I had not seen any of the other UPA theatrical shorts(except *Gerald McBoing Boing* which I enjoyed quite a bit). When many of the other shorts began to appear on the Columbia VHS tapes,I watched them and wondered why I didn't seem to enjoy them very much. Part of the problem was they were so much unlike the Warner/MGM/Fleischer(etc.)cartoons that I had grown up watching mainly on television. After reading this very informative and thoroughly researched book and

realising what these artists were all about and what they were trying to accomplish, I am now watching all the Jolly Frolics cartoons on the just released TCM DVD boxed set and I must say I am enjoying them quiet a bit. My problem before reading this book was apparently I wasn't appreciating the cartoons for what they are as much as I was unhappy about what they were not. I highly recommend this book as I believe it fills in a nice part of the "golden age" of animation that most of us have only read bits pieces of over the years. A nice addition to any animation library.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Great Account of UPA's historyBy Robert A. DeLuciaDefinitely a must for any armchair animation historian like myself. Great to learn more about the people and the reasons they came to and left UPA including blacklisting during the House on Un-American Activities witch-hunting. I have always read about UPA in Disney history books and their use of limited animation, beating Disney at the Oscars, Ward Kimball using their style for Toot, Whistle, Plunk Boom and winning an Oscar, Magoo and Gerald McBoing Boing, but did not know anything about the players involved and why it didn't seem to make it into the 1960's.This book does an excellent job doucmenting the UPA history and the players involved (although I thought I would have a better understanding of Steve Bosostow than I received). I learned a great deal about the other artists like Bobe Cannon, John Hubley, Pete Burness, Jules Engel, Herb Klynn, Bill Hurtz, Bill Melendez, and many more. I had no idea David Hilberman who helped found UPA after the Disney strike, was not around for 1950's hey-days. Learning more about ex-Disney artists Art Babbitt and T. Hee's role in UPA's history was a bonus to me. The pictures that are included in the book help drive the story home and provide you a great visual reference about what is written. My only qualm was that it lost some the chronology of the studio in the later chapters (starting with the Red Menace), so people who left UPA in previous chapters, were in later chapters. It's a minor ding though on a very well researched and documented book that many animation fans have been waiting for. The Chapter Notes, Bibliography, Filmography and Index will make this a great reference book for future historians and writers also. Consider getting the UPA Jolly Frolics DVD collection as a companion to this great book so you can really see what Adam Abraham was discussing.

What do Franklin Roosevelt, Dr. Seuss, the U.S. Navy, and Mr. Magoo have in common? They are all part of the surprising story of the pioneering cartoon studio UPA (United Productions of America). Throughout the 1950s, a group of artists ran a business that broke all the rules, pushing animated films beyond the fluffy fantasy of the Walt Disney Studio and the crash-bang anarchy of Warner Bros. Instead, UPAs films were innovative and graphically boldthe cartoon equivalent to modern art. When Magoo Flew is the first book-length study to chronicle the complete story of this unique American enterprise. The book features cameo appearances by Aldous Huxley, James Thurber, Orson Welles, Judy Garland, Robert Goulet, Jim Backus, Eddie Albert, and Woody Allen, as well as a select filmography of the best of UPA.

Adam (Abraham) writes well, and certainly did his homework; I learned a lot and pass along my highest recommendation. Leonard Maltin, Movie Crazy