

Entertainment

Ethel Simmons editor/644-1100



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Moviemaker's art is animated films

By Kevin Lawrence
special writer

ONCE UPON A TIME, but not so very long ago, and in a land not so very far away, one of today's leading animators led a group of disgruntled cartoonists hibernating out the hallowed doors of the wonderful world of Disney Studios.

The executives running Walt Disney's movie-land empire wished this talented group would just disappear into Never-Never Land.

"They don't like competition. But competition was what the industry needed because animation was quickly becoming a dying and non-profitable art," said Don Bluth, interviewed at the Ritz-Carlton in Dearborn, where he was staying. Bluth was in town recently to promote the opening of his new animated, full-length feature film, "All Dogs Go to Heaven," now showing at Detroit area theaters.

"After Walt died, the later Disney films changed the result of Disney Studios becoming very corporate," he said.

"THEY LOST SIGHT of Walt's vision. And in the never-ending search for more profit, the first thing to go was production values. They said, 'But not too much. Cut back on detail and color.'"

"But that's what makes animation come alive. Disney animation eventually became shallow, and pale, like someone threw water into the soup because Walt wasn't there watching the over the pot."

Bluth's latest, "All Dogs Go to Heaven," is a family film for all ages. "The public has come to see animation over the years as something exclusively for kids, for the nursery. And that's simply not true. I feel an animated story can entertain

'I feel an animated story can entertain both children and adults, at the same time, but on different levels.'

— Don Bluth

both children and adults, at the same time, but on different levels," he said.

Can an animated feature really entertain adults and kids at the same time?

"Sure," said Bluth. "That's the challenge. It's like writing a book for a 4-year-old and a 35-year-old. Your film has to have enough intellectual depth in it that a 3-year-old will see one thing and an adult another."

"If an event or concept is beyond the understanding of the child, invariably they'll find their own meaning in it and they'll be happy with it. And as the child grows, and sees the film again and again, which experience has shown us will happen, he or she will discover new meanings."

"VINTAGE DISNEY is like that — very sophisticated, made for children and adults, and dealt with some very serious issues. 'Pinocchio' coming of age, and 'Bambi' for example, losing your mother."

And in keeping with vintage Disney, Bluth believes you can't cut out or danger out of the story because "if you do, you present an utterly

distorted view of life . . . and children, in particular, will suffer."

Bluth began his cartooning career at Disney Studios in 1955 when he worked with Jack Lounsbery, one of the "nine old men." Bluth explained that "nine old men" formed a group of veteran animators who were involved in all the original Disney productions, starting with "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" (the world's first full-length animated feature, in 1938).

Just out of high school in 1955, Bluth was an assistant animator on "Sleeping Beauty," for 18 months. He left Disney to become a missionary for the Mormon Church in Argentina. Later, when he returned to the United States, Bluth formed a theater group with his brother in Culver City, Calif. He was back animating in 1968, working on morning cartoons at Filmation Studios before rejoining Disney in 1971.

In his first stint with Disney Studios, working with Lounsbery, Bluth became familiar with the classical animation techniques he believes

Please turn to Page 8



Although no longer associated with Disney Studios, Don Bluth brings characters to life in the classic Disney tradition. For Bluth's "All

Dogs Go to Heaven" the animator has created (clockwise from right) Anne-Marie, Ichy, King Gator, Carface and Charlie B. Barkin.

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