

2/23/76

Dear John:

Nice article you wrote for the latest "Millimeter" issue, pertaining to Dick Williams and Raggedy Ann.

However, in the item titled "Reflections on Teaching Animation" --- wherein Jules Engel is quoted ad nauseum --- some comments are called for.

First - to give Jules credit --- he's a top-notch colorist - and a hell of an artist in the academic vein ~~sense~~. He has a sharp mind and a quick sense of humor. For all the years I've known him - he has devoted his energies to high flown abstraction and non-objectives and has honed the ethereal rhetoric that goes with it.

Jules is not a musician nor a choreographer. He has never animated a single foot of film in his life - yet he's in charge of animation activities at the California Institute of the Arts.

He speaks of "my Format Films", which is owned by Herb Klynn. He speaks of producing "Icarus" --- which is based on a well known tale -- and yet why does everyone attribute the design and painting to Paul Julian?

(over)

Jules is quoted as saying to his students  
"Your feet may be on the ground and your heads in the clouds - but ~~my~~ my feet are in the clouds!"

Since he's so much closer to God than I am - especially when the clouds are of the ~~Explos~~<sup>Explos</sup> type - ~~so~~ maybe I shouldn't be writing all this.

He evidently has little regard for craftsman ship. Give 'em a stopwatch and they're on their way. That's like passing out violins to every kid on the block and waiting for concert violinists to pop up --- when they don't even know what hand holds the fiddle. To put it mildly --- it's a concensus of opinion in animation circles, that Jules is an unmitigated crap artist.

Now to a bit of history. In 1942 Elmer Plummer, who designed the mushrooms for the Chinese Dance in Fantasia ---- claimed in my Labor Board trial against Disney ---- that he had animated that sequence. When my attorney asked him if he had ever animated anything before --- he said "no --- but this was so easy.

Now Jules Engl claims to have done the choreography for the "Chinese Dance" and the Russian Trepak.

If Jules did the choreography - and Plummer animated it --- I was being paid for being charming.  
(over)

(3)

Why do little people grasp at most anything for a bit of recognition they haven't earned? Why hasn't anyone rushed forward to claim a major role in my innumerable failures?

Since I don't want to make liars out of the many reviewers who've seen fit to give me a measure of credit for the success of my efforts in Fantasia - I'll try to straighten out the history of events.

Let's take the Russian Trepak first. Whether Jules Engel did the choreography or not I'll never know - He may have made innumerable sketches for that sequence - but let's face it. The dance is traditional and has been done for centuries. Live action was shot of the dance -- so that I could study the structure of the actions. I never saw any of Jules' many sketches nor did I ever discuss any facet of the action with him. All instructions for staging came from the director.

Now, for the Chinese Mushroom Dance:

When I picked up my assignment -- (about 20 people were present -- but not Jules Engel) -- Walt Disney and the director agreed that the music and the storyboard were in conflict --- nothing was working. My meagre knowledge of music, enabled me to point out the obvious statements, answers and repeats in the music - and suddenly everything became clear. In fact, Walt demanded more statements - but we couldn't contact the composer.

(over)

If Jules made umpteen sketches for the choreography they were disregarded.

I worked with a music score pinned to my desk so that I could relate the action, to not only the melodic line --- but also those ~~rather~~ nasty little notes underneath. The dance was invented on my desk, by me --- and that will be verified by my assistants of that time. In fact one bit of business was inspired by one of the 3 Stooges --- something I dredged out of my crude memory. The only choreographic suggestion I ever got --- came from Walt Disney himself. I had animated the little mushroom taking his bow on the last note of music --- Walt suggested he take the bow after. Both ways would have worked --- depending on one's translation of the little guy's character.

So that people in the animation field are set straight --- and so that my children don't think me a liar I'd appreciate your quoting that part of this letter beginning with "Now to bit of History". The rest leading up to that point is "entre nous".

Again thanks a hell of a lot  
Art Babbitt