

Cartoons as classical masterpieces

By Ed Symkus/ Staff Writer
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For the eighth year running, Classical 102.5 WCRB is gearing up to present their Classical Cartoon Festival - once again presented in the best of all classical places, Symphony Hall - on Saturday, April 1. As its name suggests, there are cartoons galore, all of which will be shown up on the giant screen in back of the same stage that hosts the Boston Symphony Orchestra and the Boston Pops.

Three dozen Warner Bros. Animated shorts, featuring Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, Speedy Gonzalez, Foghorn Leghorn, et al, are on the schedule, along with a few Tom & Jerry cartoons. But these seven- or eight-minute movies aren't there just for the sake of showing some wild and crazy comedy. They all have something else in common: classical music. Major highlights will be screenings of "Rabbit of Seville" (1950) and "What's Opera, Doc?" (1957).

"This all started when my local sales manager was sitting with his children, watching television one day," says Terri Gamble, vice president of sales and marketing for Charles River broadcasting, the parent company of WCRB. "He said to himself, 'This is classical music behind these cartoons!'"

"It was pretty much that simple," she adds. "He came in and said, 'You know, I was watching television ...' and we thought there was a good idea in there. We contacted Joe Spaulding at the Wang Center, he loved the idea, and that's where it started."

But right from the start, there were other components to complement the cartoons.

"In the first couple of years, we kind of poked around and tried to get people to come in," says Gamble. "It was mostly entertainment and fun things for kids, like face paintings. We had it at the Wang for the first two years."

But then the event started to grow. WCRB approached the Boston Symphony with it, and soon, because the focus of the festival was in line with what the Symphony was trying to promote to young audiences, the whole operation moved into Symphony Hall. And now musicians are taking part in sharing their expertise on and their joy in playing instruments.

"And it's grown enormously," says Gamble. "Now it's moved into featuring really quality performers - both young and old. We've got kids performing for kids now, some of the Boston Symphony members have volunteered time, and there are backstage tours of Symphony Hall. Though all the face painting and other fun things still exist, it really has been a focus on entertaining, and having the children interact with the music, understand the music, enjoy the music in a fun environment."

There's also the incredibly popular instrument petting zoo, which seems to attract as many people - young and old - as the cartoons.

"New England Conservatory has been our partner in this for a long time," says Gamble. "They bring instruments of all kinds; they bale some hay and display the instruments there. And the children can actually participate, can touch many of them. When they can plunk something, they're allowed to do that. But mostly it's the folks from New England Conservatory playing the instruments right in front of them, close up, 'here's how it sounds, here's how you do this.' And it's the busiest room in the house. Parents love it because kids never get exposed to this stuff anymore, unless they're specifically taken to a [music] school. And the children are fascinated by it."

And then there are those major group performances, which are spread throughout the day in the main hall, sort of in between the cartoon segments (as well as in smaller rooms). This year's live musical offerings come from members of New England Conservatory, the Greater Boston Youth Symphony Orchestra, the Boston Children's Chorus and many more.

"It's quite an incredible day," says Gamble. "People come with very different expectations - thinking it's going to be sort of a kids fair, but it's not. There are people of all ages there. There are grandparents, young adults, kids of all ages. It's busy but it's not chaotic because there are so many places for people to go. Every floor of Symphony Hall has something going on."

"It's a unique experience for kids," she adds, "a fun atmosphere."

Then she lowers her voice to just above a whisper, and adds, "It's very educational, but they don't know that they're learning."

The WCRB Classic Cartoon Festival takes place on April 1 at Symphony hall in Boston from 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Tickets are \$8; children ages 2 and under are free. Net proceeds benefit the Brain Injury Association of Massachusetts. Call 888-266-1200 or visit the Web site at www.wcrb.com.

Research proves the benefits of music

- Prenatal exposure to classical music leads to post-natal acceleration of musical and speech development. (Donald Shelter, University of Rochester, 1989)
- Music aids in memory development and retrieval as early as three months of age. (**St. John's University** and Iona College, 1997)
- Preschoolers who studied piano performed 34 per cent better in spatial and temporal reasoning ability than preschoolers who spent the same amount of time learning to use computers. (Rauscher, Shaw, as reported in Neurological Research, February 1997)
- Preschoolers who took singing and keyboard lessons scored 80 per cent higher on object-assembly tests than students at the same preschool who did not have the music lessons. (Rauscher & Shaw, as reported in Symphony Sep.-Oct. 1996)
- Thirty-minutes of daily music instruction for one year was credited for increased perceptual-motor skills and creative thinking tests on first grade students. (K.L. Wolff, Doctoral Dissertation, University of Michigan, 1979)
- Students in two Rhode Island elementary schools given a sequential, skill-building music program showed a marked improvement in math skills. (Gardiner, Fox, Jeffry, and Knowles, as reported in Nature, May 23, 1996)
- Listening to Baroque music while studying can enhance one's ability to memorize spellings, poetry, and foreign words. (The Mozart Effect,(r) Don Campbell, 1997)

Source: The Children's Group, Inc. (www.childrensgroup.com)