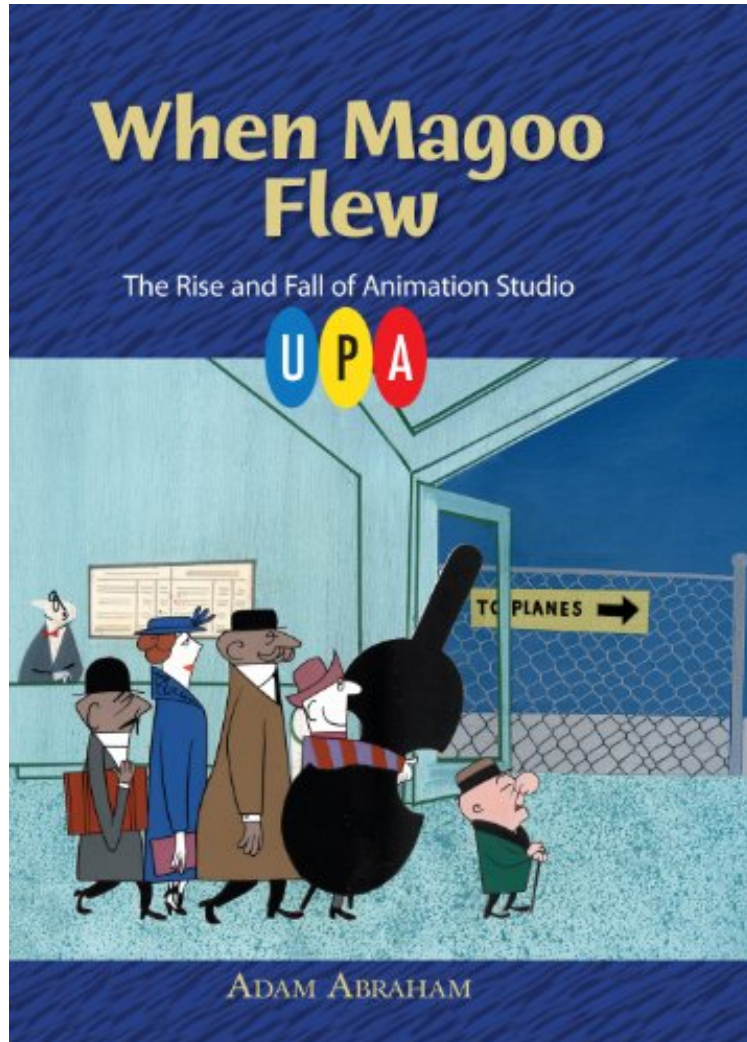


(Get free) When Magoo Flew: The Rise and Fall of Animation Studio UPA

## 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:

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful. Mr. Magoo - 1950's style By JoLynnBorn from the fallout of the Disney artists' strike of 1941, This is the history of the animation studio that eventually became known as United Productions of America (UPA). Like its best known character, Mr. Magoo, UPA often walked to the beat of a different drummer. Beginning with animated military training videos in WWII, then commercial training videos, cartoon shorts for Columbia Pictures, and eventually television cartoon shows and the big screen feature 'Gay Purree', this is a detailed portrait of the trials and tribulations of the UPA studio. The company faced many challenges, not the least of which were the dark days of the HUAC investigations of the 50's, budget woes, and creative differences. But through it

all, UPA put their product first, and the public was rewarded with some of the most innovative and avant-garde animation of the past century. Many of the techniques that UPA pioneered are discussed in the book. With cameos by such a varied cast as James Thurber, Aldous Huxley, Ludwig Bemelmans (of Madeleine fame), Jim Backus, Judy Garland, Robert Goulet, Eddie Albert and the aptly named T. Hee (!), this is an outstanding and detailed account of the glory that was once 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 have 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 quite 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.

The story of the renegade artists who brought modern art to the world of animation