

THE BEST OF DISNEY'S ANIMATED FEATURES : VOLUME TWO.

# **The Best of Disney's Animated Features**

Volume two

**Christian Renaut**

## THE BEST OF DISNEY'S ANIMATED FEATURES : VOLUME TWO.

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THE BEST OF DISNEY'S ANIMATED FEATURES : VOLUME TWO.

## Foreword

There are many remarkable things about the canon of animated films made by Walt Disney and his astonishingly talented artists, not the least of which is that more than a lifetime after their creation they continue to entertain and enchant young and old around the world, whether they be novice or expert. These are creations for the ages, and it is a jaded heart that is unable to find charm and magic in them.

A further remarkable quality about the collection of films in this volume is how they encompass what could be termed a lost decade in the fifty some years that Walt Disney personally worked on movies. It was a clouded, struggling second act in comparison to the sunny ascent of the 1930s or the avuncular televised Walt Disney of the 1950s and 60s, when each effort seemed to top the previous one. In addition to the usual filmmaking challenges, the 1940s was a time of world war, repeated box office failure, company growing pains, labor strife, a dozen years on the verge of bankruptcy, an elusive movie-going public---- an unending pile of boulder-sized exigencies that blocked the path of artistic creation. In the fullness of time, none of that is directly visible on the screen, but each played an outsized role in the films of this period. At the beginning of the time span is the rewarding *Dumbo*, an experiment in shorter, less expensive fare that was not as dependent on Walt's direct involvement. Its initial reception was hobbled when the release had the misfortune of coming at the same time as US entry into World War II. *Bambi*, the last of the extravagant so-called Golden Age films begun in the 1930s, finally limped into theaters in 1942, and languished. The quirky and innovative *Saludos Amigos* came about because of a US government-backed loan guarantee stemming from a war-related goodwill effort. Along with generating some genuine goodwill between the Americas, it managed to help keep the studio in business. In the middle of the decade came *Make Mine Music*, one of the budget-minded 'package pictures' that tried, unsuccessfully, to reconnect with movie-going tastes after World War II. The drought of the 1940s was broken with *Cinderella*, a come-back picture that finally pulled the Disney Studios back from the brink financial uncertainty. The irony of that film is that its creators felt that they had already told the 'young girl rescued' story in *Snow White*; the audience, however, recognized a Disney that they knew and had waited for, and welcomed more. However, they didn't get it with the next picture, *Alice in Wonderland*. Daring in design and unusual in story structure, it failed to find its audience on its first release. Still, throughout his career Walt took the long view, confident that, even if it took a while, each of his films would ultimately be embraced by an audience. And time has proven him right.

It is a daunting research task to delve into the making of some of these pictures, because, along with the constant money woes, it was a period of sketchy and often inaccurate attribution when it came to recordkeeping. To piece together a more

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complete understanding of how the films were made requires cross-referencing with oral histories by participants, multiple written records, and even a familiarity with the drawing styles of individual artists. Perhaps to the casual viewer, none of this ultimately matters to the enjoyment of the finished film; such details are assimilated into the Disney team effort. However, diving in gets to the fundamentals of *why* these films have stood the test of time. Unraveling the 'how' and 'who' and 'why' of each title is a reminder that every manmade wonder has its creators, and that the work turned out the way it did because of them. Beyond the entertainment, the craft, the artistry, what those individuals have left to us is both a celebration of the best in the human spirit and an inspiration of the possible.

Theodore Thomas, May 2022.

## Introduction

As I wrote in Volume 1, most books dwell on the Disney features of the legitimately so-called "Golden Age". So, trying to find new information about *Snow White*, *Pinocchio* and *Fantasia* was not easy, although I believe I have provided details, interviews or angles that readers may have enjoyed. The same applies to *Dumbo* and *Bambi* for Volume 2. But I wanted to go deeper into the "making of" so that we could have a better understanding of the way they were achieved. Dealing with *Saludos Amigos* and *Make Mine Music* was a different affair. Fortunately, both J.B Kaufman with his definitive book and Ted Thomas with his film made us discover how this film came to be and my chapter owes a lot to their expertise. As to *Make Mine Music*, like most "package pictures", it has been overlooked. Only a few pages are usually dedicated to them. As to *Cinderella* and *Alice in Wonderland*, we can easily see in many books that the films of the 1950's are far less commented on than, say, *Fantasia*. It might be a little less true of *Alice in Wonderland* as some people like Brian Sibley have often offered us a wealth of information about it.

Again, the selection stems from the poll I launched in 2010 with Didier Ghez's help. Historians, artists and fans selected their favorite moments and I eventually could come up with a list of memorable sequences, this time from 1941 to 1951, 10 moments matching 10 years. Luckily, I agreed with the results of that poll. However, I would have added the Roustabouts sequence in *Dumbo*, which is so aesthetic, the trio falling in love in *Bambi*, or the cards fantasy in *Alice in Wonderland*, and some others.

Ideally, this book is meant to be read while watching the sequence itself step by step. This way, it is much more relevant and the descriptions make more sense and feel less abstract. Luckily, all these films are now available, although some have been re-edited.

As regards the interviews, any time it was done by someone else, his/her name is mentioned within the text. When no name of any interviewer appears, it means it is one of mine. I want to make it clear that the quotes by the artists I have interviewed are never edited at all, they are word-for-word transcriptions. They may be colloquial or even rude, it is for me, a matter of honesty and respect to write it all down as it was.

As was the case in Volume 1, my text is very often interrupted by quotations from the very people who made those films, from Walt to lesser known people who may have worked almost anonymously. This is on purpose. I strongly believe that what matters is first and foremost to listen to them. They were there and they know better than anyone else. However, memories may falter, egos may be strong and grudges obvious, but it is part of the game.

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Volume 3 will be the last one to deal with the films that Walt Disney supervised, then will start a whole new set of volumes about the post-Walt period. Writing these books is a real delight. I have received support and advice from many people and I feel very fortunate that I can be in touch with renowned historians and artists. I keep discovering things and it is a great privilege to be able to share them with other people who are as passionate as I am. This volume is dedicated to my parents.

Christian Renaut, 2021.



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# **DUMBO (1941)**

THE BEST OF DISNEY'S ANIMATED FEATURES : VOLUME TWO.

## Timothy and Dumbo visit jail / Lullaby Sequence

**(Sequences 14.2 and 15.1) from 37'11 to 40'08.)**

*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) had been the big pioneering risky adventure into unknown territory and was crowned by success. *Pinocchio* (1940) had been planned to be the ultimate artistic achievement, no matter the cost. The indisputable feat was not as successful, commercially. As to *Fantasia* (1940), it was the most daring foray into arts both musical and cinematic. But it was even more of a commercial disappointment. As *Bambi* (1942) was still lingering on, *Dumbo* (1941) would be another kind of challenge once they had opted for a feature format: can you make a good and successful animated feature for \$700,000? This was a new challenge in a way. They had pulled out all the stops for the three previous films, this time they would have to cut down on all expenses and go for simplicity and efficiency.

This forced decision matched Walt's mood then. After having got so immersed in the three films, with great ambitions and a typically passionate need to go further, the boss was exhausted. He was also deeply hurt by the poor results of the last two endeavors, not to mention the lambasting critics about *Fantasia*. He was so crushed he even took leave for a few days. He later admitted: "It was a hectic period because we had bankers on our neck (...) I became all confused, I didn't know who I was. I had a big staff, I hated to lay off anybody (...) I got so damned confused that I didn't know what the heck I was doing."<sup>i</sup> Therefore, in a way, he was slowly but steadily drifting away from animation, and was already less involved. He realized how fragile the Studio was. Money became again a daily worry, and it stifled his schemes. Those years felt too much like a succession of compromises: the lot was used by the army, propaganda films were made in a thrifty way, several features turned into cocktails of cartoons. In addition, more live action was used in the films to reduce costs, and a Good Neighbor Policy tour in South America he was reluctant about was in the pipes. It seemed that nothing could ever be made the way he wanted, that is to say, regardless of the costs. *Bambi* was the exception, but it took forever to make. All these worries took their toll, and the boss acknowledged himself years later in hindsight, that he had become less easy to work with: "I have my storymen there I work very close with them all, they're all reliable, sometimes I think they take too much time, I know sometimes I don't feel so good, sometimes I haven't got an idea so I'm tolerant. I used to be less tolerant in those days because there was more pressure, of that payroll and get the pictures out. I guess I was a pretty tough guy at times but I must have been right a good percentage of the time because a lot of the guys are still with me you know."<sup>ii</sup>

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So, the Walt who started work on *Dumbo* was not the same. He had to cope with all these odds, compromise all the time and share his time on scattered projects. That may explain why he left more freedom to the team in charge of the film. He was less present and accepted to make the film shorter and cheaper. This quote during a story meeting on February 27, 1940 shows he relied more on his team: "*Dumbo* is caricature all the way through. I've got the men for it (...) I think it has great possibilities...the personalities are the type of things we can get hold of...that everybody can get hold of".

But does it mean that *Dumbo* was like a second best that was done only for the sake of making money out of a minor achievement? This has often been alleged, including by artists themselves like Frank Thomas: "They had lesser animators outside of Fred (Moore) and Kimball and Tytla. So, you'd be given 7 or 8 animators, nice guys, talented guys, but they didn't know and couldn't grasp it and very few of them ever went on with animation anyway."<sup>iii</sup> Bill Peet was aware of that: "I was one of the 'poor boys'. They put all the rich boys, the top animators making the big salaries, working on *Bambi*. They wanted to make it a gem. Originally *Dumbo* was going to be a short, and then only a half-hour, sort of a special. When Walt saw what we were doing with it, he said it might make a good feature."<sup>iv</sup> But the difference between those two testimonies is that the former worked on *Bambi*, the so-called "gem" and the latter did work on *Dumbo*. And it is not really fair to say that the top guns were almost all on *Bambi*. What about such talents as Bill Tytla, who was off Chernabog's animation, Fred Moore, Art Babbitt, John Lounsbery, Woolie Reitherman and Ward Kimball who all did good chunks of *Dumbo*? In addition, it is true that several other animators who worked on *Dumbo* were known to be more slapstick ones and the trend was to go for more realism as *Bambi* would prove. But those people had done one of the best sequences of *Fantasia* with *Dance of the Hours*. Clearly, the artists who worked on *Dumbo* suffered from being cast on a so-called "B movie", (the same applied later when *The King of the Jungle* future *Lion King*-1994 was considered as the minor project and *Pocahontas* (1995) the ultimate. We know the box office results). Bob Hathcock confirms: "*Dumbo* was one of my dad's (Jerry) favorites and mine too. But, I didn't even know he worked on it. I'm sure he wasn't credited. Since it was considered a 'B' feature, I would think that since it turned out so great that the people who worked on it were very proud."<sup>v</sup>

Another wrong cliché surrounds this film. Probably for political reasons, it has often been alleged that the production of *Dumbo* was hampered by the infamous strike of 1941. This is equally rather untrue as Ward Kimball explained: "We just got it finished as the strike started."<sup>vi</sup> The dates say it all: It is decided *Dumbo* will be a feature in February 1940, after a quick story development, animation starts around August 1940 and production ends in May 1941. Expert Jim Fanning adds: "There was

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apparently some new animation in August but it had to be ready for trade show screenings at the end of September, so most of the film must have been completed (including ink/paint) by end of August.”<sup>vii</sup> As to the strike, it started on May 29, 1941 and bitterly ended on July 28, 1941. So, there was hardly any overlap. What is true though is that during the months preceding the start of the strike, the uproar and divisions among the employees might have taken their toll over the general feeling and perhaps the work on the movie. Actually, other films were more or less hampered in various ways and at various stages, *Bambi* (1942), *The Reluctant Dragon* (1941) or *Fun and Fancy Free* (1947), *The Wind in the Willows* (1949). These dates also mean that apart from the very first conception, *Dumbo* was the first film to ever be planned and produced from A to Z in the new Burbank Studio. The movie had been completed on January 5, 1940, which is before it was decided to make it a feature.

If the budget was to be tight, so was the film. And it even should have been very short, only about ten minutes, like a sort of extended cartoon. The reason is that the story it was based on was itself rather contained. Actually, both the type of book and the story were born in uncanny ways, being neither fairy tale nor book per se. It is Herman “Kay” Kamen, who since 1932 had been in charge of licensing for Disney, brought a very strange-looking device called a roll-a-book. Michael Barrier has very thoroughly investigated this and most of the information to come is based on his valuable research. Kamen then showed it to John Clarke Rose, who, since 1936 had been involved in Story Research for the Studio. So, he proposed the little story of a baby elephant to Otto Englander and then to Walt, who was immediately interested. Rose recalled for Michael Barrier the way it looked: “Kay had, I think, first been approached in New York by these people who were going to merchandise this new toy, a cardboard book-shaped business with this little wheel that wound up what was virtually like toilet paper, with the story unfolding in a frame-dimensional opening (...) That Roll-A-Book product had a little handle for presenting an unwinding story through a cut-out window shaped like a movie screen—and the sample story was the basic plot-line of *Dumbo*, written by a schoolteacher in Buffalo [sic], as I recall.”<sup>viii</sup> In no time, the story sparked interest: two months after it was on the market, the story was purchased by Disney. Two weeks later, on June 27 1939, was the first meeting with Walt about the story with Joe Grant. In the meantime, Otto Englander and Webb Smith had worked a little on it, but also Joe Rinaldi, Aurelius Battaglia, George Stallings and to a lesser extent Carl Fallberg and Joe Szabo.

Bill Peet remembered: “*Dumbo* was written by a husband and a wife who intended to make a storybook out of it. I don’t know their names. They sold it to Disney for \$500 as I recall. They were in the process of getting a divorce and wanted to split their assets and settle things as soon as possible. That is the way I heard it.”<sup>ix</sup> The sum was actually \$1000. The names of the authors were Helen Aberson and

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Harold Pearl. The woman, who was from Russian descent living in Syracuse was adamant that she was the only one who wrote the story. But that was her version after their divorce. They had been married a year, just enough time to produce this story, and then got divorced as Peet remembered. Another Syracuse artist, Helen Durney did the drawings which were exhibited at the Syracuse Museum of Fine Arts in the summer of 1939. She even wrote a letter to Walt Disney expressing her delight at seeing his Studio deal with that story, and Walt wrote back: "As you predicted he has proved to be a swell little character to work with, and we're having a lot of fun making the picture. I only hope that the finished product will live up to your high expectations."<sup>x</sup>

The Silly Symphony *Elmer Elephant* (1936) had paved the way to that film in a certain way. The simple scenario mainly crafted by Bianca Majolie and Earl Hurd already had some of the ingredients: an outcast is mocked by the other kids because of his trunk (and not his ears), but he proves himself worthy after a prowess and is then acclaimed. Dick Huemer and Joe Grant worked on the scenario of *Dumbo* and proposed a 102 page treatment to Walt in early 1940. They had done a tremendous work on *Fantasia* and enjoyed working together as is confirmed by Joe Grant's daughter Jenny: "He greatly admired Dick Huemer and cherished their relationship. They were a very productive writing team."<sup>xi</sup> When they realized that their reworked version was much longer and strayed further and further away from the Pearls' creation, Disney lawyers tried to renegotiate a lower percentage of royalties to no avail. In order to whet Walt's appetite, and talk him into making *Dumbo* a feature, the duo smartly came up with a method that Dick Huemer explained: "There were little devices in the writing. Like I drew a teardrop on the page which said, 'Read no further unless you are of strong character and can take it because what we're going to tell you, you won't believe-see you tomorrow!'"<sup>xii</sup> So, instead of giving the boss a whole script, they delivered chapter after chapter.

A softcover book called *Dumbo the Flying Elephant* was published without any mention of the Disney source in 1941. Needless to say some changes had been brought to the little original story. However, there were still some characters who remained for a long time before being dropped: "Red" a robin later replaced by a mouse and, an owl who was called Dr Hoot, a psychiatrist.

Two words seem to characterize the making of this film: Speed and fun. We saw that everything was done in a very limited time. And all the artists who worked on it enjoyed themselves like Bill Peet: "The year and a half I spent on *Dumbo* was a happy time"<sup>xiii</sup> or Ken O'Connor: "*Dumbo* was a straightforward story. Few mistakes were made. In 38 years, I liked two pictures I worked on: *Dance of the Hours* and *Dumbo*, specifically what I had to work on, when he was drunk, the Pink Elephants on

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Parade.”<sup>xiv</sup> The fun may be explained by two facts. First, Walt Disney was less present than he had been on *Snow White* or *Fantasia* relieving some pressure as confirmed by Joe Grant’s daughter Jenny: “He said that they had a good story to adapt. He did feel that Huemer and he had a freer hand in the writing of *Dumbo* than they had with other projects.”<sup>xv</sup> By the way, at the very beginning they were writing the script, Walt was off somewhere as Joe Grant recalled for Robin Allan: “He was up in Arrowhead, licking his wounds on the opening of *Pinocchio* at Music City.”<sup>xvi</sup> The pressure was on the *Bambi* team. *Dumbo* should have been a short, then a featurette, then a feature, and it is well-known that the moment features started being made at the Studio, the shorts were considered as minor projects. *Dumbo* began as one and Bill Peet added: “*Bambi* was a wedding cake. *Dumbo* was one layer with a little bit of icing. Ours was more successful because it had common appeal, even though the animation was crude in some places.”<sup>xvii</sup>

Apparently, writing the story was a breeze, and Bill Peet, who had bitterly seen many of his suggestions left aside on *Pinocchio* emerged as a key storyman on that film as recalled Ward Kimball: “When I look back on *Dumbo*, it was a well defined story, nothing had to be cut out. It’s one of the very rare features where that ever happened. Walt was excited, we all knew it was going to be a great picture. Bill Peet, who was in in-between, began giving ideas or gags about the circus, so he was moved from animation to story, the rest is history.”<sup>xviii</sup> Until then, Bill Peet had been lost in the crowd of assistants, but Ward Kimball said more to Mark Langer about how he came to the light: “Because in those days, they’d send out a synopsis of all the stories, and when Bill got the outline of the coming *Dumbo* project, he took off like a roman candle (...) Walt finally said: ‘Who is this guy? Let’s get him in the story Department!’ And that’s how Bill Peet started.”<sup>xix</sup>

Given his talent everyone would soon discover, no doubt Peet was a force to be reckoned with, as Ken O’Connor confirmed: “We had a very good man who did a lot of model work of his characters and set up arts, and that was Bill Peet, he did very good stuff on *Dumbo* wandering through the grounds and all that, that was a good help.”<sup>xx</sup> It is obvious that the scenario is almost perfect, as the rather demanding Frank Thomas admitted: “*Dumbo* was really interesting in that it has probably the best structured cartoon story, nobody ever mentions that, when I’m asked what’s the best story I say *Snow-White* but actually it was *Dumbo* because of the structure of how things played out, but in the way it was animated and conceived it is not held on”.<sup>xxi</sup>

The fun also came from the realm that *Dumbo* was happening in. Many artists were circus buffs, and Peet was no exception as recalled his son Will Jr.: “My father loved the animals most of all. I vaguely remember the circus as a kid; especially the side show ‘freaks’. Back in the 1980’s, Circus Vargas set up their show in the Sears

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parking lot. They erected a big top just like the old days. It was a rainy night and the tent leaked. My dad loved it! We sat in the front row close to the animals as they paraded around the tent. My dad loved watching the elephants move and hearing their feet shuffle by.”<sup>xxii</sup> Several of Bill Peet’s illustrated albums would later feature circus animals like Ella and Eleonor the elephants, Randy Dandy’s lions, Pamela the camel, and Chester “the worldly pig”. Bill Peet’s passion for the circus transpires from his autobiography: “One of my favourite subjects for painting was the big top circus, and whenever a circus came to town I was up at dawn and trotting off to the outskirts of the city to be there when the circus train pulled in. For me the greatest show on earth was the unloading, as six-horse teams hauled the huge circus wagons off the flat cars, the elephants emerged from their cattle cars, and roustabouts swarmed onto the field with tent poles and rolls of canvas.”<sup>xxiii</sup> Peet didn’t hide that he was nostalgic of those days gone by and confessed it in a lecture years later: “It goes back in times of my heroes I guess when there were still steamboats and the farms and the circuses and the American scene was quite different, the modernization of the world gets ingrained, in regard to the work I do, and my books and my stories are dealing with a time gone by or they go all the way back in the Medieval. I’ve been cheated out of the American scene, it is gone and I was an American scene painter as a young man, and I painted circuses and farms, nature and the railroad.”<sup>xxiv</sup>

Another inspirational artist contributed a lot to the film as a whole, but his active role in the forthcoming strike would mar his reputation at the Studio: Aurelius Battaglia. According to Joe Grant, he was very instrumental in the look of the film, and he also had a liking for the circus world, as would later show his Little Golden Books title *Pets for Peter* (1950). But as a matter of fact, all artists really enjoyed suggesting gags and situations often sketched on the spot, whether it was Retta Scott, Johnny Wallbridge, Jim Bodrero or Martin Provensen. The last two had already proved how good their designs could be with the *Dance of the Hours* in *Fantasia*.

Many often went to the circus which was still enjoying its heyday then, although it would soon decline with the advent of TV after World War Two. Walt Disney loved to introduce collaborators with a cliché-tag that would stick to them. Herb Ryman, a real globe-trotter, recalled for Katherine and Richard Greene: “He introduced me to people sometimes as ‘This is my friend Herb Ryman. He travelled with the circus.’ One day I asked him, ‘Walt, can’t you think of any other way to introduce me than to say that I travelled with the circus?’”<sup>xxv</sup> That may be why some documents seem to indicate that Ryman did so in order to sketch the circus for *Dumbo*. But this was not the case as he said to Jay Horan: “This did not occur until after I had worked on *Dumbo*. I wish that when I worked on *Dumbo* that I’d had the experience of having lived with the Ringling Brothers Circus (...) I think I would have done better work on *Dumbo* if I’d had this experience.”<sup>xxvi</sup> Some others had even been



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circus employees such as Larry Lansburgh, a former horse rider or Ivy Carol, a former high-wire acrobat. But the most famous is probably the man who did Goofy's voice for years, Pinto Colvig. He was a clown for two years for A.E Barnes circus and John Canemaker reported how he expressed his passion: "The appeal was too strong, I heard the call of the sawdust and answered."<sup>xxvii</sup> He became a lover of elephants, even collecting their dung!

Needless to say their expertise would be welcome. This passion shows in such sequences as the wonderfully stylized Roustabouts, or the parade in the streets that follows. They had already toyed with the circus world like in 1926 with *Alice's Circus Daze*, *Mickey's Circus* (1936) and after *Dumbo*. They again set stories in this universe like in the early part of *Bongo* in *Fun and Fancy Free* (1947), or *The Wonder Dog* (1950) and of course *Toby Tyler, or, Ten Weeks with a Circus* (1960). There would even be a circus in the first version of Disneyland with a street parade and a special weekly celebration day was Circus Day in The Mickey Mouse Club TV shows.

For some, the direction under Ben Sharpsteen was not an asset. It is well known that he was a faithful Walt's "Yes man", but with little imagination and a fear of disappointing the boss which restrained him. He was not appreciated round the studio as Frank Thomas expressed: "Ben Sharpsteen bless his soul, was not a very creative man, he didn't have much good taste or judgment, he tried his best to do what he thought Walt wanted but he never tried to do anything on his own so he said 'Walt says this thing drags, pick it up', so he'd come back at night because he didn't want to argue with the guys and then he'd change all the exposure sheets. So people then said 'what happened here?' so he said, 'Walt said it could be shorter, and he liked it better that way, so sorry but I had to do it. That kind of a leader on *Dumbo* was not the best, Dave Hand would've been much better. Dave Hand was strong 'We're gonna do it this way and this way'".<sup>xxviii</sup> Typically, Ben Sharpsteen was one of the rare people who complained that *Dumbo* had been a difficult production due to tensions between directors and storymen. Jack Kinney, who directed other sequences from the film, could also compare both approaches as he explained to Milt Gray and Michael Barrier: "Ben was a hard-nosed guy, but a very fair guy. He would stick up for his guys, but he was a very opinionated guy, too. He tried to make the guys learn how to draw. (...) Ben knew how to play Walt, where Dave [Hand] would try to fight Walt, on occasion. Ben had a real good [sense] of where things needed cutting. He would take a sequence and say, 'This doesn't move, and throw out two hundred feet'. Most of the time, he was very right."<sup>xxix</sup>

Actually, few people liked Sharpsteen who was rather strict and not very humorous. That said, with Walt Disney's slight withdrawal, it is true that he had much to carry on his shoulders. Besides, Wilfred Jackson confessed to Milt Gray and Michael

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Barrier that Sharpsteen had initiated on *Dumbo* a big change regarding the layout or story sketches: "The layout men's sketches staged the thing fine, they worked out the camera angles real well, but in order to save the layout men's time, and give the animators a better start on their scene, Ben came up with the idea of making Photostats of the storyboard, enlarged or reduced so that they would be the right size, and the right place in relation to the peg holes, to serve as character layout sketches. This really improved what we did, because it gave the best of everything to the animators. The layout men would then work with the still camera department to get Photostats enlarged or reduced the right amount, and then they would re-peg these Photostats, and this was what the animators would get."<sup>xxx</sup>

Anyhow, it doesn't seem to have spoilt a film, which, if rather unsung as compared to others, remains a real successful achievement. One of the most unforgettable sequences is undoubtedly "Timothy and Dumbo visit jail" and the "Lullaby sequence" directed by Bill Roberts and John Elliotte (1902-1986). The latter from Tennessee was an animator who enjoyed a very short-lived time as a director since *Dumbo* would be the only one he ever co-directed. Actually the duo did 5 sequences, 4 in a row starting with the "Save my child" clown number, and the ending "Big town, Dumbo triumphs." The bulk of sequences were in the hands of Wilfred Jackson and Norm Ferguson. Jack Kinney and Sam Armstrong also contributed a few. Elliotte had done bits and pieces in *Pinocchio* and *Fantasia* and would leave the Studio by the end of the 1940's. He then worked as a writer for many TV series elsewhere. Quite surprisingly, Eric Larson confessed to Michael Barrier that he had been proposed the direction of that sequence by Ben Sharpsteen: "Ben asked me if I would supervise that, and just sandwich it in some place. He said, 'there won't be any credit, unless you want credit as an animator' I said 'I don't want any credit, let's just do it.'<sup>xxxi</sup> Finally he would have nothing to do with it but would be again proposed the same post on *Bambi* by Dave Hand. He eventually accepted that role on *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) only. As to layout, the first part is by Al Zinnen, and the second one by Ken O'Connor.

We have combined a part of "Timothy and Dumbo visit jail" that seemed consistent with the famous "Baby Mine sequence", and by the way the two sequences were directed by the same team. In this sequence, the storymen let their hearts speak, but they knew they were walking a thin line between too much sentimentality and too much restraint. It seems they have been more than up to the task and anyone who has watched the movie keeps that moment in mind, however short it is. The song itself may sound a bit outdated now, but the sequence has surely passed the test of time. However, Disney and music expert David Johnson disagrees and thinks the song is not that old-fashioned: "In my mind that particular moment is the supremely moving moment of any cartoon and the music, more than anything else is the main reason.

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Here the great animation is supported by the emotional anchor supplied by the music - not the other way around (...) Churchill was his (Walt's) greatest composer - indeed the greatest of all cartoon composers."<sup>xxxii</sup> Once again, it is a moment with any hardly dialogues, but with music, and this passage is legitimately considered as a milestone of poignant animation.

Frank Churchill was actually on all fronts, since he was also working on *Bambi*. Here, he only composed half of the songs ("Look out for Mr Stork", "Casey Junior", "Song of the Roustabouts", "Spread your wings" and this one). Looking at this list, we realize how versatile he could be, from penning upbeat songs for the little train to a most poignant song as "Baby Mine". And in all cases, he showed an incredible sense of melody.

### **Tim is scrubbing Dumbo's ears**

As in any good scenario, this film alternates moments of action (the clowns' fireman show), laughs (clowns celebrate) and emotion. Time is now for the latter and what many keep in mind from the movie. Taken together, they played on the contrasts between the euphoria of a triumphant circus number starring a clown-Dumbo and the latter's despair. To set the mood, the storymen decided to cleverly weave a tapestry of situations. Now, both Dumbo and his mom are outcast. The mother because she went berserk when kids laughed at her son's ears, and the latter because he caused a whole disaster and ruined the circus. He had clumsily stepped on his ear and bumped into the pyramid of arrogant pachyderms. They are both punished, she was sent to jail, and chained, whereas he is now cast as a clown. For the film, the status of clown seems like a terrible shame as put forward by the evil-minded gossiping lady-elephants. The original story said: "That's the worst shame that can befall an elephant". In that same first version, they put him in the donkey car. Therefore, the reunion was not only about a mother and her child, but also between two outcasts.

As the clowns' laughs and shouts are still heard in the distance, we can see a depressed Dumbo being washed by his little friend, the mouse Timothy. John Lounsbery is animating both. He was usually the animator in charge of scenes portraying both. In Dumbo's posture, everything converges towards his being forlorn: his eyes are half-closed, and all the lines of action are going down: his head is bent over, the ears are down, he is not even standing but sitting. The colorful collar from the clown number is also playing this contrast of moods. It is the last reminder of the terrible tragedy he has caused. The scrubbing idea was there from the earliest sketches. The soap's foam is animated by Art Palmer. Both animators continue on the next shot which is closer to enable the viewer to see Tim's expressions better as he is the only one speaking. Again, there's a big contrast between a quiet Dumbo's grim face and Tim's frantic speech. Tim is doing his best to soothe Dumbo's sorrow and comfort

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him: "you're a big hit!" But tears are rolling down, Dumbo can't care less. It looks like fame is not enough to be happy.

Then it's up to the main animator of the mouse to take over: the one and only Fred Moore. As noted before, Timothy was originally a robin called Red who served as an adviser, exactly what Tim the mouse now is. Having a mouse in the middle of elephants permitted some burlesque scenes where the big mammals were ridiculously scared. A whole sequence explaining the origins of such a scare had been planned but later dropped. Of course the two made a very odd couple that Dick Huemer was delighted with: "(...) Timothy, the last guy you'd expect to help, the traditional enemy of little elephants (which is biologically untrue, of course) turns out to be the great benefactor."<sup>xxxiii</sup> It has often been said that Timothy was a relative in some way of Abner from the Awarded *Country Cousin* (1936) which made Art Babbitt's reputation. Undoubtedly, Tim's design is very close. In the very first sketches of the mouse accompanying Dumbo, he looks a lot like Mickey. It is pretty simple, the costume being that of a circus ringleader, complete with red and gold top hat. The hat was in some sketches particularly huge, but was then trimmed down. They had once fancied dressing him as a sailor, all with a striped shirt and a jacket. His top hat was also worn-out just the way Jiminy's had been in the first shots of *Pinocchio*. Jack Miller was instrumental in designing him, and no doubt Fred Moore brought his touch. Moore once explained how he started on the mouse: "The greatest problem with Timothy was not to make him too cute. We had to get a tough guy with a big heart...I just played around with him...had him walk a couple of dozen steps in twelve frames, then in eight...until I got the right cockiness to it...When I finally got rolling on him, he was the easiest fellow I've ever done."<sup>xxxiv</sup>

Since it was decided that Dumbo should be mute, Tim would be his voice. Tim is a confidant, an unlikely friend, compassionate and devoted. In the absence of a father and with a locked mother, he embodies the parents that Dumbo misses. That's why he keeps urging him to act, but also soothes and helps him. There is a lot of Jiminy in there, but in a more casual and joyful way. Later, when it is understood that Dumbo can fly, he will slowly turn into an impresario. Once again, Moore is working on the same sequences as Tytla, as they did with the dwarfs or Yensid and Mickey in *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*.

By the fall of 1940, Fred Moore's alcoholism was taking its toll. Booze was far from being unheard of at the Studio, and people like Frank Churchill or Moore were rarely sober after lunch time. Andy Gaskill, who started when several veterans were still at the Studio in the 1970's explains: "That was a cultural thing from that generation, from that period where men were expected to drink, smoke a lot."<sup>xxxv</sup> In his book Todd James Pearce explains: "But Kimball soon understood that Moore's

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drinking was more serious than an occasional afternoon bender, that his drinking reflected problems at home and his suspicion that his best years as an artist might possibly be behind him.”<sup>xxxvi</sup> Several collaborators remembered that he worked all right during mornings, but you couldn't expect anything from him after lunch, when he would essentially laze around and sing out at his desk. There had been most embarrassing moments like when on a Saturday show for some school, the trio Ward Kimball, Walt Kelly and Fred Moore had willingly and freely been to entertain some children by drawing their favourite characters. Suddenly, a bottle of gin dropped from Moore's pocket on stage in front of a bewildered audience. As we saw, younger artists appeared like Milt Kahl, or Marc Davis who could achieve feats that seemed out of reach for him and he surely resented that, but would do nothing to improve. So, a little cartoon mouse seemed a breeze for the still revered animator who had been a Mickey-man as recalled Bill Peet: “Freddy just couldn't draw a mouse that didn't look like Mickey. It was so ingrained in him after drawing just thousands of them. The nose was too round, so I went over Freddy's things including the storyboards. Freddy did a fine animation job on it, but I refined his drawings so they looked like Timothy.”<sup>xxxvii</sup> Ward Kimball also alleged he sometimes had to redraw Moore's drawings. The writing was on the wall and Moore's days at the Studio were numbered, which saddened everyone.

Though he hardly speaks in that sequence, Tim's voice is Edward Brophy's (1895-1960). The New York born comedian didn't have a great career. He mostly played dumb cops or gangsters. Interestingly, he played a role in *Freaks* (1932), a film taking place in a circus whose theme is, as we saw, quite related to *Dumbo*. Michael Barrier considers him as the best voice of the movie. Ward Kimball once regretted that his delivery could sometimes be too hurried and frantic as in this January 8, 1941 story meeting: “I don't think this guy Brophy should be recorded so excited all the time. I get the idea he's in there panting every minute.”

Moore could not be the only key-animator on the character, given his sometimes poor condition. Besides, Tim was very present all along the film. Woolie Reitherman shared the main credits. Others at the studio started to view the industrious animator as a force to be reckoned with based on successful assignments such as the battle of the dinosaurs from “The Rite of Spring” in *Fantasia*. Although he didn't work on *Bambi*, he distinguished himself in a story meeting for that film. Walt praised him: “Woolie's good all around. He's the kind of a guy you give him a tough assignment, he smiles --takes it with a smile. He goes after it and gives us a good job. A man like that is just—like that whale was a bitch of a problem. Nobody wanted it. But he took it. He has an ability to take masses-- big bulky things.” Although Tim would be a far cry from a “bulky thing.” As a legacy from Albert Hurter's days, the artists multiplied the possibilities of furniture and settings that were to be Tim's universe. All

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kinds of props were devised out of mundane objects, for the most leftovers like a cheese box as a house.

With the next closer angle, Moore's Tim is using lots of adjectives boasting Dumbo's triumph "Colossal, stupendous". Throughout the film, Tim is always the one who uses a fine knowledge of psychology to cheer Dumbo up and help him. Psychology is a recurrent theme in the film, a reflection of the times in the USA. A dropped character, the owl Dr Hoot should have been a psychiatrist. But also when Tim is trying to convince the ringmaster to go for a pyramid act starring Dumbo, he tells him he is "The voice of your subconscious". After all, the nightmare "Pink Elephants on Parade" is filled with unconscious elements and it is well known that dreams are what the Freudians use as a basis for analysis. The dropped character Doctor Hoot used to ask Dumbo: "Do you dream about anything?" Now the leader of the crows, Jim, advises Tim to "use a lot of chology, you know psychology". Later with the crows, the magic feather which is supposed to help Dumbo fly is nothing but a psychological talisman ("just a gag" says Tim) which is quickly forgotten when it is blown away by the wind. Even before the character of Tim was created and his role was that of the robin Red, he told Dumbo: "The trouble with you is that you have a complex about your ears", which didn't mean anything to Dumbo. Since Sigmund Freud's visit to the USA in 1909, psychoanalytic theories had started to arouse the scientific community. Then, it sparked a real public interest and reached a zenith in the late 1940's. So, the film was made on this background of a soaring interest in the unconscious and the subconscious.

### **Timothy is lifted by Dumbo so he can clean the back of his ears**

It is back to John Lounsbery to draw them both, as Tim keeps congratulating his friend on his feats. Lounsbery once expressed how much he loved that film in a letter to his colleague and friend Julius Svendsen as reproduced in Didier Ghez's *Walt's People* series. He had just watched some bits and pieces of *Bambi*: "However, if it's a question of whether to have one *Bambi* or three *Dumbos*, give me the *Dumbo* every time for all-around entertainment. Of course, I'm prejudiced though."<sup>xxxviii</sup>

But with the next closer shot on Tim scrubbing the forehead, his voice is less jovial and the word "success" is toned down as the sobbing grows and the melancholic strings are heard. The close-up on Dumbo is now Bill Tytla's. Then, Moore animates Tim proposing a peanut, a trick which has worked fine so far, but not this time. Instead, with the next shot by Tytla, the elephant is randomly picking up a blade of grass. To save on expenses, a well-known trick of only animating the head is used here, the rest of the body is still. Dumbo is clearly deaf to whatever Tim has to say, there is no consoling him. Tim can put his peanut back into his hat. It is to be noticed that every time in the film he pulls a peanut out of his hat, the peanut is way bigger

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than the hat can contain. Tim will have to find something else to cheer the elephant up.

In the next shot by Moore, Tim has got it! He snaps his finger and ravel at his new idea which sounds like a last resort. He slides down on Dumbo's trunk and the elephant suddenly lightens up and opens his blue eyes at the very mention of the word "Mother". Only Dumbo can believe that Tim forgot to tell him they had an appointment. We all understand Timothy has just made it up. It's all John Lounsbery now when Dumbo is smiling. Of course, the play between cheeks and eyes is crucial here in the animation. But quite often only Dumbo's eyes are animated over a held drawing like when he's blinking. In their book, Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston recalled how precious blinks could be: "Blinks are a useful device to ease the shock of going into a held drawing. There is always a visual jar when the drawing suddenly stops moving, and the illusion of roundness and dimension quickly fades as it is held immovable (...) If there is an intensity in a look that does not allow changing the shape of the eye itself, a blink will keep it from going dead."<sup>xxxix</sup> Besides, such extreme close-ups on Dumbo required the most attention by the clean-up artists.

Tim tells Dumbo to get his hat as a mother would. This is just a detail but the storymen understood they had to convey how much Tim is trying to replace the mother (Dumbo shouldn't get cold) but also there's a touch of dignity in wearing his hat as he is going out. He wants to be dressed up for the occasion so his mom would be proud. As to the music arranged by Ed Plumb it is suddenly upbeat with flutes playing a joyful melody to enhance the change of mood.

### **Cross dissolve and then off to the wagon**

Tytla is animating both appearing from the tent and he gives Dumbo a typically bouncy and heavy walk. The mouse is so tiny that there are hardly any details on his head. Anyway, we rapidly get to the establishing shot of the wagon. Like very often in the film, an upshot was chosen. For the backgrounds, it had been decided to go back to watercolor, just like in *Snow White*. Here, Al Zinnen and his collaborators wanted to underline the isolation and as well as the injustice of the treatment of Dumbo's mom. Hence, the accumulation of boards like "keep off", "danger" or "mad elephant". To enhance the "dangers" of a wild beast, the wagon is reinforced with iron and big bolts. The door itself is all iron and the big locker is very prominent. Tim keeps trying to make it rosier than it is: "Cosy little place ain't it?" as they are walking into the scene, all done by Lounsbery. Then, Dumbo is climbing up to permit Tim to go up the window, and here again Tytla alternates with Lounsbery. They had once envisaged to place a circus pedestal for Dumbo to be higher but dropped the idea. Bill Peet had very early sketched different options to stage things so it allowed a contact between mom and child.

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The challenge of such sequences was to find the right balance between the typically colorful universe of the circus and the sorrow mood of the passage. Of course, setting it at night enabled the artists to stay away from too much color. One of the main artists who helped achieve this is a woman who would later be acknowledged as a major stylist. In those days, she was still better known as Lee Blair's wife, but soon the tables would turn and he would have to painstakingly learn to live in her shadow. Mary Blair was at the time a painter using mainly watercolors and her style was very close to her husband's. Her famous naïve designs with bright colors were yet to come. It would take the legendary trips to South America for her to eventually find her own style. However, her story sketches for that sequence convey very well the idea of quietness and loneliness when the circus is at rest. By the way, those sketches would be one of her first assignments after she was hired on April 11, 1940. She was not too keen on the idea of working in animation and her husband had to urge her to accept a job at Disney's. After 2 months, she resigned.

### **On the window sill, Tim is calling Mrs. Jumbo**

Moore animates his mouse calling Dumbo's mother against a background where the locker is seen on the right, bigger than ever due to perspective. Not to sound too maudlin, which was a real worry, the storymen inserted a few light-hearted or even humorous lines. Tim says "I hope she's in" as anyone would say after ringing at a door, but here, how could a chained elephant locked in a tiny cage go out? Let's add that one of the reasons Moore was so loved by his colleagues is that, beyond being a child in an adult's body, he was very generous with his time and help. He tried to give some responsibilities to his assistants, like Bill Hurtz, who confessed to Mark Langer: "Sometimes he would start an action and allow you to finish, like a character walking out of a scene, or sliding down the bubbles during the drunk sequence. Once he started it, you could create your own extremes there, following what he had laid down."<sup>x1</sup>

The next shot is one of the rare moments when we see Mrs. Jumbo in the sequence. Here again, all her lines of action are down, shoulders up, head very low and a sad face. Of course she is in the dark, and it is night time. Everything is bluish/grey but for the blue of her eyes and the quaint pink hat and blanket on her back. This pink color seems so irrelevant with the distress of the animal. We can see that all her four paws are chained with cannonballs. She looks like an inmate or even a slave. In a previous scene, she had been shown with the shadows of the window bars over her, not this time. Only the head is animated by Bill Tytla. In terms of color, Mindy Johnson explained in her book that, to save on expenses, the number of colors used in the film was reduced to 150, but the elephants like Mrs. Jumbo required more attention as she wrote: "Against the basic primary palette of red, yellow and blue for



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the circus themes, the subject of elephants required an increased range of gray shades utilized throughout the film, even more than in the days of black and white films.”<sup>xli</sup>

Dumbo's mother was designed along with all the other lady-elephants. She was a bit slimmer in the very first sketches. Of course, all the previous scenes where we could see her playing and cajoling her son call for our sympathy. Her name comes from an elephant which made a sensation in the USA at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Sudan born, the huge Jumbo was exhibited in Paris, then in the London zoo in 1865 until it was purchased by Barnum in 1882, causing a general outcry among appalled Londoners. Jumbo became a nation star in the USA until his death 4 years later in 1885. His name was then given to many elephants in zoos and circuses around the world, so Disney couldn't miss it. The next shot where we see the tip of Dumbo's trunk trying to touch her could have been animated by any animator, but Tytla wanted to do it. By the way, in the first ever printed story, Dumbo was called Little Jumbo, it was only later, to punish and humiliate him that he was called Dumbo (from “dumb”).

### **In profile, Mrs. Jumbo is rushing to the window**

The succession of shots and its timing are very well conceived. The close-up on a smiling Mrs. Jumbo makes us forget she is chained and we might believe she is going to reach her son's trunk and even see him. But a rattle of chains wakes us up. She even had forgotten it and has to turn back. We then take her viewpoint to watch the chained feet. Again, Tytla wouldn't let anyone do such apparently simple bits of animation, although his assistants surely did a lot. So, on the next shot, we see a disappointed expression on her face, but the joy of contacting her son wins over and she smiles again. Of course the light comes from the outside, but it also symbolizes the light in her life that comes from Dumbo's presence in this discreet shaft of light. But the mother won't be seen again for all the second sequence which starts, the so-called “Lullaby sequence”.

### **Full shot on Dumbo trying to connect with his mother's trunk**

One of the reasons of the success of that simple story may lie here: Beyond the “rags to riches” story that the film is in some way, an American favourite, is another. Many a film has dealt with the downtrodden one, the misfit who is disregarded. That's exactly how Dick Huemer saw it: “It's the story of an elephant that was born a cripple. Naturally, everything is stacked against him; the whole world is stacked against a cripple, isn't it?”<sup>xlii</sup> We could go further and even say that there is a lot here about minorities being discriminated against. Making a clown of Dumbo who “is no longer an elephant” for the lady-elephants is like making him a Negro in a white-dominated society at the time. Interestingly, many have accused Disney of racism by portraying crows as Afro-Americans led by Jim Crow (and God knows the

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name was a terrible lack of taste), but the very deep topic of the film is a pamphlet in favour of the discriminated ones, whether they are freaks or colored. That's why it gets ironic to see the crows mocking him. Movies like *Freaks* (1932) or *Elephant Man* (1980), are both related to the circus world. By the way the word "freak" is later used by Tim himself: "Just because he's got these big ears, they call him a 'freak'". It is interesting to notice that among the many situations imagined by the artists in their sketches, some showed Dumbo passing by the sadly famous freak shows that made Barnum's success. Siamese sisters, bearded women, very tall men and all kinds of other "oddities" were on display.

All these films boil down to Hans Andersen's story of *the Ugly Duckling*, that Disney produced twice as a short, in 1932 and just before *Dumbo* in 1939. We saw that Elmer the Elephant shared the same predicament. Bill Peet didn't see it any other way: "The misfit is one of my themes that probably reaches the kids the most. We are all to some degree misfits."<sup>xliii</sup> Bill Peet remained rather secret about the profound reasons he so embraced that story of second-class people. However, his son Will Jr. claims his dad's father had a lot to do with it: "The following anecdote will give you an idea of their relationship. His mother was on a visit to California just after my dad's first book, *Hubert's Hair-raising adventure* was published. He proudly showed it to his mother. She quickly flipped through it and tossed it on the coffee table saying something like, 'Oh, George could do that'. George was my father's older brother, his mother's favorite son."<sup>xliv</sup>

Moreover, he must have known what it felt like being ostracized like Dumbo. It may have been hard for the small elephant to be laughed at by callous boys, but so was it being called Bill "Peed". All through his childhood, teenage but even young adulthood, he had been the victim of stupid jibes because of this surname. He decided to put an end to this nightmare in 1945, explaining he wanted to spare his son the "hell" he had experienced for too long. Bill Peed had his real name changed, he became Bill Peet.

If Bill Tytla's work on that sequence has often legitimately been praised, we should not overlook that the storyboards are partly Peet's who put heart and soul in that succession of shots. Andreas Deja underlined how precious this work had been for the animators then: "Peet's work was an animator's dream come true. He worked out story continuity, character relationships, where the camera was placed, and of course dynamic poses with tons of appeal."<sup>xlv</sup> And certainly this sequence reflects Peet a lot as confirm two extracts from his autobiography where he deals with his inspirations: "I seemed to be attracted to the gloomy side of things, or the sordid. No vases of flowers or water lilies for me." And "My portraits were never of beautiful

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people. I much preferred to paint grizzled old men improved with time like gnarled oak trees.”<sup>xlvi</sup>

A bit like *Pinocchio*, the story is filled with hostile characters. Mrs. Jumbo and Timothy are the only ones who sympathize with Dumbo. More interestingly, this is all in a universe, the circus, which is usually associated with fun, laughs and joy. But, from the kids who visit the zoo to the clowns and the ringmaster, everyone is mean. Let's notice that you neither see the real faces of the clowns nor the roustabouts'. The clowns are either masked by their heavy make-up or in silhouettes. The roustabouts are only figures in the dark whose faces are blank. It makes them distant and anonymous. The other elephants are of course the main mean-spirited characters. They are pompous and conceited and ostracize the one who, according to them, spreads shame on their species. Later, out of the circus world, it will take a lot of persuasion to prevent the crows from hassling Dumbo.

Very loosely based on Helen Durney's designs, Dumbo's design changed, more especially as the original story focused on the baby elephant only, Ken O'Connor reminisced: “Bill Peet and also Martin Provensen, he did wonderful shots of the main elephants, which were very helpful on the picture.”<sup>xlvii</sup> The first Dumbos designed by Albert Hurter or Joe Grant around April 1940 were rather crude, with big eyes and in some sketches the hat appeared. For Peet, designing the elephants, from Dumbo to the adults, was exhilarating, as testified by his son Will: “Elephants were his favorite animals before he started to work for Disney. He often went to the zoo and the circus if it was in town. In those days one could walk around the circus and look at the animals at no charge. He also drew animals at a place called the ‘Lion Farm’ in Thousand Oaks, CA, which housed movie animals of all kinds.”<sup>xlviii</sup> As aforesaid, later, several of his albums would deal with circus elephants like *Ella* (1964) or *Encore for Eleanor* (1981). Of course, Bill Tytla, being the main animator like on this first shot, he then refined the drawing, which didn't please Peet and the latter struggled to stick to his vision of the elephant's look. It has been alleged that Peet even reanimated some chunk of Tytla's but it is rather unlikely. This passion for elephants and circus may even have been his springboard as he wrote “With all my years of sketching and painting the circus I was prepared for *Dumbo*, and I contributed so much to the production that Otto (Englander) allowed me to present my storyboards to Walt one day.”<sup>xlix</sup> What is funny is that all along the film, and sometimes within a same sequence, Dumbo loses his eyelashes. They keep coming and going. Don Towsley, who also animated him, usually drew very long and thick eyelashes, but this might also have come from the clean-up artists or even the inkers. In their researches for gags, the artists knew that both the big ears and the trunk would be precious. The tip of the trunk might even have been used in a sequence, morphed into a snake with a big red nose.

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The fact that Dumbo being too small can't see his mom is even more poignant, but the same applies to her. As she is chained, there's no making her see her son. Therefore, as Mark Mayerson noticed in his interesting mosaics: "A great deal of power of this sequence comes from touch (...) There is much physical contact between Dumbo and his mother."<sup>1</sup> The moment the mom's trunk touches Dumbo's forehead, the latter cheerfully smiles, all on a musical background of wistful strings. The touch is so intense that Dumbo literally grabs his mom's trunk.

### **Close-up on Dumbo looking up as his mom's trunk caresses him**

Dumbo's design is quite simple and colors are few. A blue-gray for the body with some shades of lighter pinkish grey for the lower parts of the trunk and the inside of the huge ears. The same yellow is used for his cap and one part of his collar. The latter is colored in both yellow and red, which are usual colors for circuses. It was a blessing for a tight-budgeted film to have so few colors on the central character, and even all the other elephants. Of course, Dumbo has beautiful blue eyes that are very expressive.

Then start the lyrics of the song "Baby Mine" whose genesis Dick Huemer recalled in *Funnyworld*: "A songwriter would mostly put his own work through just about the way he had written it. But he had to make it fit, which could always be done of course. I've done that sort of thing myself, on occasion. For instance, we would say 'let's write a song...a mother song for when she's chained up and Dumbo comes to visit her.' Well, naturally, there's some heart-breaking type of lyric indicated, and in this case Ned Washington came up with 'baby mine, don't cry'...A heartbreaker."<sup>li</sup> Composed by Frank Churchill with lyrics by Ned Washington, the song has been covered many times ever since. But here it is sung by Betty Noyes. Later known as the dubbing singer for Debbie Reynolds, even in *Singing in the Rain* (1952), Noyes would do many TV shows. At the time of recording that song, she was a member of *The Debutantes*, a trio of young women in the Ted Fio Rito big band and she had just done some singing for *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) when she was contacted by the Studio.

After winning the Academy Award for "When You Wish upon a Star", Ned Washington (1901-1976) could confidently pen the lyrics for the songs composed mostly by Churchill. Two of those songs were by Oliver Wallace who was also appointed as music director. Surprisingly, of the 9 children of his family, Washington was the only one not to study music, he preferred writing poems. A Tin Pan Alley writer, after working on Broadway in the 1920's, Washington signed for MGM, settled west and then collaborated with several studios like Paramount and Warner Brothers. He was a very enthusiastic man, and it is known that while listening to songs with Walt, he would slap on the boss's knee out of euphoria and give countless comments.

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Lyrics are few on this song and are hardly necessary as everything is in the moves and the eyes of the characters. Still, when the song says “Don’t you mind what they say”, we understand the hint at the bad-mouthed gossipers who reject them both. Of course on this close-up, the emphasis is on Dumbo’s eyes and the tears rolling (done by Cornett Wood). But cleverly, Tytla thought of having the child crack up, and there’s this tear-jerker when Dumbo needs to press his forehead against her trunk as he closes his eyes and cries even more though the lyrics say “Don’t you cry”. The song as arranged by Ed Plumb is mostly done with strings and mainly female choirs. The middle part of the song is hummed. The wonderfully well-crafted sequence of the dwarfs crying over Snow White’s body, essentially done by Frank Thomas, had proved that cartoon characters could convey very deep emotions. This was unheard of before *Snow White* and the storymen were not so certain the audience would embrace it and they even feared mockeries and laughs. Here again with Dumbo, some sobs are regularly heard. It is without a doubt one of the most moving moments the art of animation has ever been able to express.

### **Dumbo is cradled by his mom’s trunk**

The viewpoint is Dumbo’s as we never see the mother and only her trunk speaks for her emotions. Instead of dwelling on the sorrow, she devises a game to distract her weeping son: she is going to cradle him. He is a young one after all, and he needs cuddling as well as playing a bit. Tytla’s animation is subtle, nuanced and delicate. He was surely proud to demonstrate that he was not only a monsters or giants’ animator. So far, he had made a reputation of achieving larger than life creatures very well, but here, he could show the subtlest handle on the character and this pleased his wife Adrienne: “Here was this big, dark, severe-looking man. Yet, many of the characters he created were light, free, full of joy, and like Dumbo, bursting with high spirits. Through his focused imagination, fantasy and dream transformed reality while he rearranged the shapes and forms in life to conform to his vision.”<sup>lii</sup> It is a same passionate Tytla who is animating, not to convey strength, but the deepest emotions, and he explained his approach in a talk conducted by Don Graham on June 28, 1937: “Whether it is called form or force or vitality, you must get into your work, for that will be what you feel, and drawing is your means of expressing it (...) Eventually it is the mood or sensation or feeling you convey in your stuff that is important, and that is the thing you are striving to achieve in your work.”

But it took some coaxing as his friend Art Babbitt remembered for John Canemaker: “Everytime he was handed an assignment he would come to me and say, ‘Art, I can’t do it. I’m gonna quit. I’m gonna go back to New York.’ And of course, whatever he tackled just turned out beautifully.”<sup>liii</sup> The way Tytla handled that series of scenes has caused everyone’s admiration, like Frank Thomas’s : “He (Tytla) was

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telling the audience just what he wanted to tell them, he wasn't showing how smart he was, he wasn't showing how much he knew, he was doing what was right for that part of the picture(...) It just overwhelms me."<sup>liv</sup> It is true that his drawings of these memorable moments look rather simple, with few lines, and this was his point as he said in another lecture on December 10, 1936: "We are trying to keep animation simple, which is a very hard thing to do. It is much easier to make a thing look complicated than it is to make it look simple...Just try to make a drawing in outline-how much easier it is to put 101 different lines all over the thing and jazz it up that way-Done simply, it looks much more expressive."

On this film, Bill Tytla gave more free rein to his faithful assistants, and even more responsibility as was explained by Wilfred Jackson to Milt Gray and Michael Barrier: "Bill, on *Dumbo*, had a crew of assistant animators with him. There was Bill Shull, Les Novros—he had three or four junior animators who were working with him, and Bill would hand out some of the scenes to them. They weren't just clean-up men, they actually did animation, but quite often Bill would knock out a few poses to get them started, and would supervise what they did very carefully. Bill, in a way, became a sub-director, of the work that he picked up. He would direct his crew of animators on the scenes that they did, and then Bill would come with them to sweatbox when their scenes were sweatboxed, to see what was to be done, and to help them do it."<sup>lv</sup>

### **Timothy is watching, standing on the hub of wheel, then zebras, and other animals are sleeping**

Then, a series of quick cuts on various animals can be seen. Several were animated by Robert W. Youngquist (1905-1996). The animator from Illinois arrived rather late at Disney since he was already 29 when he was hired in 1935. He was hardly ever credited in the features and worked mostly on shorts, mainly on Pluto. He also animated on some characters in features, starting on *Pinocchio*. He worked at Disney's only until he retired in 1970. He stopped his animation career by the late sixties.

All these shots on zoo animals show the closeness between mothers and their children in all the cages and enclosures, a proximity which is forbidden to Dumbo and his mom. Mary Blair and Aurelius Battaglia painted many of these situations in watercolor and the artists tried all sorts of exotic animals to eventually boil down to a few that permitted gags. To save on costs, it is all almost limited animation. Cleverly, they took advantage of the stripes to only animate the zebra's head caressing the young one who is still, but for its tail. As to the giraffes, it is a simple cycle of two animals sleeping but breathing. The artists had been very inspired by those big mammals whose long necks enabled them to come up with the weirdest ideas. In

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many sketches, the necks could be used as boats'masts, or decorated with flags or any other strange items.

Using the same trick of the stripes with the tigers, Harvey Toombs animated the pups and the mother's belly breathing, then cycles of the swinging monkeys. Again, to avoid being too maudlin, the storymen infused some humour like Toombs's animation of the hyenas laughing even in their sleep, and all together as if dreaming. The next shot on the hippos is not even animated, only some bubbles and distortion glass over the underwater beasts, all by Edwin Aardal. More gags with the ostriches, a rocking-chair like kangaroo (all with creaking noise) by Toombs, and then back to Moore's Tim who can't help shedding a tear (by George Rowley). Let's notice that a drawing of ostriches doing the same was done on one of the boards the strikers were holding in the picket-line, to stress how blind they thought their boss was. In all these animals, Andreas Deja sees an artist's influence: "Some of the animal cutaway scenes actually are very much influenced by an American cartoonist illustrator T.S Sullivant, you can see it in the tiger design, the hyenas, the kangaroo."<sup>lvi</sup> We saw how influential he had already been in *Fantasia's Dance of the Hours*.

Drawing live animals was a well-rooted routine for the artists. Either animals were brought to the studio or they went to Griffith Park, not too far. Some publicity photos show artists like Retta Scott sketching an elephant that had been brought to the Studio. In fact, Mable as she was named was there to feature in the movie which was being shot at the same time, that is *The Reluctant Dragon* (1941). The point of that film was to show the behind the scenes of the Studio. The elephant, wearing a little hat, served as a model and the film features young Ken Anderson, Retta Scott, Woolie Reitherman, Jack Kinney and many more sketching the live model as if she were a female live human model. All around on the walls are posters, sheets displaying sketches of characters from *Dumbo* and other films like *Fantasia*, *Bambi* or even *Peter Pan*.

So, this film released in June 1941 permitted to combine promotion for *Dumbo* as well, since the film was scheduled within a few months later. But for this particular movie, they enthusiastically rushed to any circus that came to town, like Claude Coats as remembered his son Alan "Dad visited circuses to research *Dumbo*. I have a photo of him (early 40's) standing in line with a bag of popcorn waiting to buy a 25 cent ticket from the back of a wagon (this wasn't Ringling Bros)."<sup>lvii</sup> Mel Shaw (who was working on *Bambi*) discovered that the Hagenbeck-Wallace circus had a training compound in the Thousand Oaks area of San Fernando Valley. He and Marc Davis approached the lion trainer Mel Kroontz as Shaw explains: "As artists connected with the studios, we would usually find that other recreation industries would cooperate with us. In fact, the public seemed to revere anyone working in Hollywood

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and that 'glow' would open many doors.”<sup>lviii</sup> In addition, the jack of all trades Herman Schultheis took many photos of elephants at the Los Angeles zoo as well as others when he was in New York of the Barnum and Bailey three-ring circus. They were performing at the Madison Square Garden. The great American circuses of that period beyond that one were Clyde Beatty, Arthur Bros, Cole Bros and Dailey Bros. Many others had gone bankrupt during the Depression. By the way, for many foreigners, seeing a circus travelling by Casey Jr. train was quite unusual as almost all circuses had always travelled by trucks in Europe whereas it was already a custom in the USA, given the distances. Travelling by train had started around the 1870's and was generalized around the 1910's in the USA.

Hundreds of photos were taken of circuses for the artists to draw inspiration from. From the roustabouts toiling at the hoisting of the big top to the street parade, many of these actions were used as starting grounds for either settings or sequences. Among them the wonderful night sequence of the faceless roustabouts directed by Sam Armstrong. Bill Peet explained in his book that the show was one thing, but this is not what appealed to him so much: “My circus paintings were never of the dazzling spectacles in the big tops. Never the high-flying Cadonnas or the Riding Rapinskis or the death-defying high wire acts. My paintings were either the great struggle to get the tents up or all the activity in the shadows of the back lot as performers prepared for their entrance into the limelight.”<sup>lix</sup> To also help the artists, models were made of the big top and Photostats of both the inside and the outside were handed over to layout artists. Likewise, a model of Casey Jr., the little train followed the path opened by the carriage in *Pinocchio* and photos from all angles were taken.

Dumbo's circus lacks consistency. Shared between the desire to make it a huge circus as is shown when the big top collapses, and the difficulty to have to animate a long procession of flat cars and wagons, they went back and forth from a big to a small one. It is clear from the beginning that Barnum and Bailey circus is the inspiration. The very first shots show Florida as the headquarters just where the famous circus had its winter quarters in Sarasota. Still, Barnum's big top could stretch to 180 meters long! But then, they had to boil their circus down to eleven coaches so the animation of Casey Jr wouldn't be too time-consuming and costly. But it is very unlikely such a big top with masts and all the animals plus the staff could be crammed into such a small series of wagons. Never mind, this is fantasy and wasn't the circus nicknamed the “Biggest little show on earth” as a clear allusion to Barnum Circus?