

WHAT HAVE THEY DONE TO MY ART?

Part 3

I really like life in a recording studio. Even after 30 plus years of owning a studio and working as a musician and composer, I really find that the combination of art, craft, technology, psychology and witchcraft really suits me fine.

I spend most of my waking hours in my studio, but as a concession to spring (and a number of errands put off all winter), I decided to venture forth onto the streets of New York. As I walked down the 'revitalized' 42nd street, I happened to look up and who was staring down at me? MICKEY MOUSE! Beneath him was a store run by Disney selling all kinds of strangely useless objects with Disney characters emblazoned on them. Even worse, grownup people, indeed middle-aged people were going in and out.

I hastened on past the Virgin store on Times Square - more of the same, and then I went up to 57th street and there, with no shame and for all the world to see, was a Warner Bros. store, with adult type people running in and out clutching Bugs Bunny trinkets to their breasts.

Forgetting un-run errands, I raced back to the security of my studio, curled up under the console and remained there for three days. The studio is always busy and the engineers are used to occasional odd things that happen in my studio. They didn't seem to think it too strange that the studio owner was curled up under the console, although a few of them would gently kick me if I encroached too far into their leg room.

On the fourth day, I was lured out and back to my desk by a fresh poppy seed bagel. I began to ponder my Odyssey. What is going on? Why had I witnessed these strange events on the streets of New York? All of the sociology, psychology and economics courses that I had taken eons ago came flashing before my eyes. I remember that at the time, the American citizen had a psychological, word skill, intellectual and educational skill level of a 13 year old (math level, 10 years old). Why had this level dropped so precipitously down to a 6 year old level over the course of a generation or two? Why this love of Mickey Mouse?

The horrible conclusion that struck me was that MICKEY MOUSE IS MOTHER. We will never have to grow up as long as our security image is Mickey Mouse.

After World War Two, there were some radical changes in American civilization. Women had gone to work in the defense industries and many wanted to keep on working. Bit by bit, single parents became acceptable. Soon, there were not only households where both parents worked, but where they held down second jobs. This left less and less time for child-rearing. The first two years of a child's life are the most critical. Attitudes about social interaction, language, love, security, society and life are formulated in the child's mind during these critical first two years.

With overcommitted and overworked parents, technology came to the rescue. TELEVISION. Television became the electronic baby sitter, and as the toddler pulled him/herself up in his/her playpen, what did he/she see? MICKEY MOUSE. BUGS BUNNY. (I'm being politically correct - it surely does louse up literary style and the language). These primary colored, simple shape objects and their methods of dealing with each other become a form of reality to the very young child. These images remain forever in the brain. Why should we be surprised at the level of mayhem, sadism and brutality that exists in our society - we have been taught this at a very early age.

Television has succeeded far better than the world's religions, economic theories, and political philosophies could have ever dreamed of, as far as influencing the way people think, work and live. Originally appealing to the broad base of the pyramid, it has succeeded in pulling the entire pyramid down completely to a base line with the universal appeal of Mickey Mouse. We have not been detached from reality - we have a new completely irrational reality - Bugs Bunny. Why else would grownup people be so intrigued with cartoon characters?

My writing was just interrupted by a call from a relative. He told me that he is taking the family on an educational vacation. "Ah, coming to New York to see the Metropolitan Museum? Lincoln Center?" "No." "Going to the Grand Canyon to see the wonders of nature?" "No. We're taking the kids to Disneyland". After I hung up, I was headed back to my spot under the console. I changed my mind when I realized that if I didn't finish this article soon, there would be no one left who could still read and understand the English language.

The icons and examples of my youth were Horatio Alger, Thomas Edison, the Lone Ranger and Jack Armstrong. In their simplistic way, they taught the morality tales of hard work, honesty, citizenship and punishing anti-social beings. Today, one of the recording groups using the studio timed

their dinner break to coincide with the modern ethics-setters, Beavis and Butt-head. I was back under the console in a flash. These two role models of American manhood are dirty, simpering, petty criminal, lascivious, crude, ignorant, simple-minded all around losers. Whatever happened to the heroes of my youth?

I really like life in a recording studio, but I see all of these societal forces working against my art. We used to use the term 'Mickey Mouse' to describe a thrown-together incompetent piece of equipment. Now, it seems, it describes a whole society of childish incompetents. It is hard to find dedicated, educated people who love audio and are willing to work and learn the skills necessary to advance the field. It is still harder to find discriminating clients who will shun bad venues in favor of good ones.

Why has this all come about? Was it the simple fact that television came about at the right time? I'm afraid not. It is far more insidious. As a commercial venture, TV was developed into the most powerful tool for selling in the history of the world, but it flattened out the intelligence curve because at a very early age. It became a source of all truth in the mind of the 1 year old. After he/she is hooked, you can sell the worst garbage in creation if it is advertised on TV. If you look at the quality of television-elected politicians who are running the world, you will have to admit that I am right.

My #1 daughter just called. The family is going to MacDonalds for dinner. "Really" said I with some disdain. Yes, my 4 year old grand daughter has determined where the family will eat since they are giving away some little-play-value bean bag toy as advertised on TV. They have to go early since the demand for this junk far outstipped the factory's production capacity. Where France was noted for its culture, wine, lace and perfume, America is known from the most remote reaches of the Himalayas to the darkest African jungle by Mickey Mouse, MacDonalds, Coca-Cola and Bugs Bunny. What an accomplishment!

It's up to the few of us who are left who can read and write and who have some concept of what good recorded sound can be to fight this forceful trend toward greater and greater mediocrity and conformity. Take a day off. Hide under your console and think about the Mickey Mouse society that we are becoming. IT'S NOT WHAT THEY ARE DOING TO MY ART - THEY'RE DOING IT TO THE WHOLE DARNED SOCIETY!

Walter Sear