

**EVOLVING *FANTASIA*: LISTENING FOR FUN AND EDUCATION IN WALT  
DISNEY'S DYNAMIC COMMODITY**

by

**William Daniel Rosenmund**

Bachelor of the Arts, University of Virginia, 2012

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This thesis was presented

by

William Daniel Rosenmund

It was defended on

April 10, 2015

and approved by

Dr. Rachel Mundy, Assistant Professor, Department of Music

Dr. Emily Zazulia, Assistant Professor, Department of Music

Thesis Director: Dr. Anna Nisnevich, Assistant Professor, Department of Music

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William Daniel Rosenmund, M.A.

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Since its first theatrical release in 1940, Walt Disney's *Fantasia* has become an autonomous brand under the stewardship of the Walt Disney Company. Through the seventy-five years of *Fantasia*'s history, it has spawned multiple re-releases in both the domestic and public sphere, as well as a sequel film, video game, and series of live performances. As such, *Fantasia* is a dynamic commodity which has remained culturally relevant amongst audiences. From this relevance, pedagogical value can be derived; the film introduces modes of listening such as Michel Chion's audio-viewing and introductions to the role of narrative in Western art music. Utilizing secondary sources for production history, newspaper reviews, and (auto)ethnography, this project delves into reception history of *Fantasia* as a means to understand the cultural contexts in which Disney's project can simultaneously exist as a populist commodity and pedagogical text.

*Fantasia* as a dynamic project is a site of intersection for entertainment, education, and capitalism. Using the critical theory of media spectacle by Douglas Kellner, the philosophy of Lydia Goehr, and musicological writings by scholars like J. Peter Burkholder and Mark Clague, *Fantasia* can be understood as a commodity with value beyond the profits it garnered for the Walt Disney Company. As such, the *Fantasia* project, through its various iterations, has the potential to be used as a teaching tool for its accessible presentation of canonical art music works that engages audiences through fun and entertaining mechanisms. Combining history, cultural criticism, and autoethnography, this thesis understands *Fantasia* as musicologically relevant because of its cultural relevance.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>PREFACE</b> .....	<b>viii</b>
<b>1.0 INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>1.1 APPROACHING <i>FANTASIA</i></b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>1.2 A NOTE ON SOURCES</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>2.0 CHAPTER 1: HISTORICIZING <i>FANTASIA</i></b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>2.1 GENESIS OF THE FILM</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>2.2 <i>TOCCATA AND FUGUE IN D MINOR: FINDING MEANING IN FORM</i></b> ...	<b>9</b>
<b>2.3 <i>NUTCRACKER SUITE: NARRATIVE COMES ALIVE</i></b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>2.4 <i>THE SOUNDTRACK: AURAL PERSONIFICATION</i></b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>2.5 <i>NIGHT ON BALD MOUNTAIN/AVE MARIA: CONTEMPLATING THE DICHOTOMY OF GOOD AND EVIL</i></b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b>2.6 HISTORICAL CONTEXT</b> .....	<b>19</b>
<b>3.0 CHAPTER 2: SUSTAINING <i>FANTASIA</i></b> .....	<b>21</b>
<b>3.1 THE FILM IN THEATERS</b> .....	<b>21</b>
<b>3.2 <i>FANTASIA AS SPECTACLE</i></b> .....	<b>23</b>
<b>3.3 <i>FANTASIA/2000</i></b> .....	<b>27</b>
<b>3.4 THE STEADFAST TIN COMPOSER</b> .....	<b>28</b>

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>4.0</b>	<b>CHAPTER 3: LIVING <i>FANTASIA</i>.....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>4.1</b>	<b>MEMORIES OF <i>FANTASIA</i>.....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>4.2</b>	<b><i>FANTASIA</i> IN CONCERT.....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>4.3</b>	<b><i>DISNEY FANTASIA: MUSIC EVOLVED: AUDIENCE INTEGRATION</i>...<b></b></b>	<b>38</b>
<b>4.4</b>	<b><i>FANTASIA LIVES</i>.....</b>	<b>40</b>
	<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>42</b>

## LIST OF TABLES

<b>Table 1. Theatrical Release by Year .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Table 2. <i>Fantasia Live!</i> Program July 11, 2014.....</b>	<b>34</b>

## **PREFACE**

I would like to thank my committee, Doctors Mundy, Zazulia, and Nisnevich for their guidance through the processes of writing, editing and completing this project. Each contributed in different ways, all combining to help me produce a work of which I am proud. Additionally, all three have helped me develop as a scholar and assisted in my acclimation to academic musicology. I would also like to thank my family. My father taught me how to listen to music and helped me to think critically. My sister has helped me to embrace that which I love, and to be unafraid to share those passions with the world around me. My mother fostered my love of learning, and helped me understand how to view the world from the perspective of others.

I love you all, for the people that you are.



## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The return from intermission in Walt Disney's 1940 *Fantasia* features something unexpected. Host Deems Taylor introduces a new character, whom he initially calls "an integral member of the production team," only later to reveal a more proper designation: the soundtrack. The soundtrack appears as a vibrating string in the middle of the screen. As Taylor requests different sounds to be represented by the soundtrack, its shape and color change suggesting difference in timbre between the sounds of harps and violins, trumpets and bassoons. At the end of this engagement with the soundtrack, audiences have been exposed to a mode of listening which makes them more attentive to the audio-visual parallels explored throughout the duration of the film.

Lasting only a few minutes, by far the shortest animated segment of the film, this presentation of the aural element in animation encapsulates several themes that can be found not only in the 1940 film, but also throughout the seventy-five year history of the *Fantasia* brand. Fun and entertainment emerge, through the shy personality ascribed to the soundtrack. Possibly referencing the slapstick comedy of other contemporary Disney films, the soundtrack seems hesitant to appear on screen. When asked to perform by Taylor, the first sound emitted is a humorous "pbbbt." Once Taylor comforts the soundtrack and eases its anxiety, it is then able to perform a variety of sounds. Each one elicits a different shape derived from the outline of the physical soundtrack on the celluloid film. The color of the soundtrack also changes with each new sound, making timbre visible in a way even absent from musical scores. Yet the segment

also serves a pedagogical purpose, introducing the audience to the technological manifestation of sound on 1940's celluloid film as well as musical timbre and tone colors

The topics present within this brief reintroduction from intermission remain a part of *Fantasia* through its varying manifestations since the initial theatrical release. Fun, entertainment, pedagogy, technology, and the prominence of sound have combined to make *Fantasia* a brand and commodity quasi-autonomous of the Walt Disney Company. It is a cultural product with a (critical and reception) history worth recounting. The film and its successors offer audiences an opportunity to change how they engage with and listen to music. This thesis is an animation of sorts, understanding the dynamic nature that creates cultural relevance of *Fantasia*, describing the life of a cultural commodity as it has changed through time.

## **1.1 APPROACHING FANTASIA**

The earliest stage of this project was as a hermeneutic reading of *Fantasia* which argued that the film can be understood as an animated ballet rather than a cartoon. Elements of that can be found in chapter 1. However, as I continued to work I realized that there was much more to be said. Changing the analytical approach from film as cinematic text to one of musicological significance allowed for a different type of value to be derived from the viewing experience, a conclusion I have arrived at through history, analysis, and (auto)ethnography. *Fantasia* does more than pair sound and image; it teaches audiences how those two phenomena interact in the film they are experiencing. Additionally, the film exposes a primarily American audience to some canonical works of the European art music repertoire. However, the fun of the film should not be discounted. The pleasure of the experience is one reason it has remained popular.

That popularity (as well as profitability) drove the Walt Disney Company to periodically re-release the film in theaters (detailed in chapter 2). From those successful theatrical iterations, Disney made *Fantasia* even more accessible by releasing the film on home video systems (VHS, and eventually DVD). Fans now had the opportunity to experience the film at their leisure. This further popularization of the film inspired the inheritors of the Walt Disney Company to pursue to corporation's founder's dream of sequel films; *Fantasia/2000* was released in IMAX theaters in the winter of 1999. The history between the films, as well as a reading of the second installment, comprise chapter 2.

*Fantasia* has not ceased to develop. Following *Fantasia/2000*, Disney has continued to market products as being related to the original film. In 2014 Harmonix Games released a video game on Microsoft consoles, titled *Disney Fantasia: Music Evolved*. Additionally, Disney Music Publishing has reconstructed the orchestral concert quality of both films by leasing programs which aim to synchronize a live symphonic ensemble with selected images from *Fantasia* and *Fantasia/2000*. An ethnography of one of these performances, as well as a comparison of reviews written about the video game are found in chapter 3.

In this thesis I hope to establish *Fantasia* as valuable: it has sustained relevance through the twentieth, and into the twenty-first centuries by engaging with audiences in a mode that they find meaningful and pleasurable. I have found it useful in teaching undergraduates the theories of Michel Chion's audio-viewing, as well as personally pleasurable and, at one time, informative regarding music history. As a project which spans seventy-five years, *Fantasia* has remained relevant in cultural contexts. I aim to explore how that has been accomplished, and what audiences have gained from the experiences associated with Walt Disney's fantastical concert feature. Understanding the cultural contexts of *Fantasia* affords the opportunity to utilize the

brand in ways that best reveals its pedagogical potential. Using this commodity as a teaching tool would require input from educators across disciplines like history, film studies, performance studies, marketing, and, in its current video game form, computer programming. This project is meant to begin a conversation, offering one perspective for musicological possibilities.

## 1.2 A NOTE ON SOURCES

I came to this project as a fan who sought to discuss *Fantasia* in academic terms. Although I own two shares of stock in the Walt Disney Company (currently valued at around one dollar each), I do not seek to valorize the man or the corporation which bears his name. Walt Disney was a capitalist who used his advantageous popularity to disseminate a product that had pedagogical value within the realm of music appreciation. The Walt Disney Company is notoriously tight-fisted with regard to his image and the internal affairs of the organization. From the company website,

"Preserving our legacy is something we take very seriously at The Walt Disney Company. In fact, for more than four decades, the Walt Disney Archives has carefully safeguarded the most treasured items from Disney's fabled history."<sup>1</sup>

This resulted in some issues with sources, namely that the only publicly available texts that discuss the production history of *Fantasia* are written by Disney's paid historian (John Culhane) and published by Disney Media. At various times, other historians like John Canemaker, George Turner, and David Heuring have been granted access to the Disney archives. However, the lack of available primary sources has limited my ability to access the production history; as such, I focus on *reception* history. My discussions of the films' production are taken from secondary sources; I do not claim to have accessed archival materials on my own.

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<sup>1</sup> Patricia Sheppard, "Preserving the Legacy: The Walt Disney Archives," *Disney Post: The Official Blog of the Walt Disney Company*, posted 16 May 2013. Accessed 30 March 2015: <https://thewaltdisneycompany.com/blog/preserving-legacy-walt-disney-archives>

## 2.0 CHAPTER 1: HISTORICIZING *FANTASIA*

Searching through newspaper reviews of Walt Disney's *Fantasia* (1940) reveals a stark contrast between the reception by film critics, and those employed to review music. Richard Griffith, in the 26 November edition of the *Los Angeles Times* described the scenario:

"Mr. Disney's brave experiment is something fine and important, a long forward step in the march of the movies. The music critics, not caring where the movies are marching to, content themselves with looking down their noses at a picture which, whatever its virtues, is not the sort of thing they and their confreres would have made if they had the power -- or the money -- to bring it to the screen... The main fault they find with what Disney has done is not that it is worse or better than it should be, but that it is different... 'So what?' reply the movie scribes, stanchly defending the screen's right to independence."<sup>2</sup>

An example of one of the music critiques potentially inspiring Griffith's assessment comes from Dorothy Thompson at *The Washington Post*:

"As the experience recedes in violence I find that my cold hostility mounts rather than evaporates... Mr. Stokowsky [sic], in particular, collaborates to the holocaust of the masters he adores in a performance of Satanic defilement committed before the largest possible public..."<sup>3</sup>

Academic musicology, rather than attacking the film for its faults, has largely ignored *Fantasia*. However, omission and ignorance are simply different modes of violence. Kevin Shortleeve, in a history of Disney criticism, details the trends of cavillous denunciation and

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Griffith, "Critics of 'Fantasia' at Loggerheads." *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, Nov 26, 1940. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/165086029?accountid=14709>.

<sup>3</sup> I understand Thompson as using the dictionary definition of 'holocaust,' i.e., mass destruction wrought through spectacular violence, and not the genocidal anti-Semitism of Nazi Germany.

Dorothy Thompson. "Minority Report on "Fantasia"." *The Washington Post (1923-1954)*, Nov 25, 1940. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/151326104?accountid=14709>.

attempts to place the origin of critical damnation of the Walt Disney Company in the revelations that come with understanding more about that which fans love:

"Since our childhood experiences with Disney are characterized by pleasure, fascination, and wonder, as adults we are troubled when we perceive that Disney may be less than what we thought."<sup>4</sup> Regardless of her motivations, Thompson's suggestion that *Fantasia* commits violence against musical works is not unfounded: pairing abstract images related to music as Leopold Stokowski leads the Philadelphia Orchestra may detract from the detail oriented polyphony of Bach's *Tocatta and Fugue in D minor*. Ponchielli's *Dance of the Hours* becomes a satirical farce when the actors are crocodiles, ostriches, and the most famous and graceful hippopotamus to grace the silver screen. While there is merit to these claims of violence, they are shortsighted and only serve to devalue attempts at other readings of the film. In this chapter, I echo the voice of Griffith and read the film as a populist project with the potential to educate audiences regarding the relationships between sound and image, music and narrative, and ballet and animation. Each segment of the film serves some pedagogical function, incorporating sound and image in an attempt to supplement and enhance the public image of the culturally sacred works. Historical sources, often disseminated by the Walt Disney Corporation, describe the person of Walt Disney as a populist impresario invested in the presentation of works burdened with cultural capital to an American audience. Following the lead of another early twentieth-century populist impresario, Sergei Diaghilev, Disney paired sound and image in a ballet of sorts, liberating the human as dancing subject in favor of the more adaptable animated figure. The film progresses through different modes of interpretation of music, ranging from elucidating musical structure (Bach) to illuminating narrative elements (Chaikovsky); and from the function

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<sup>4</sup> Kevin Shortleeve, "The Wonderful World of the Depression: Disney, Despotism, and the 1930's. Or, Why Disney Scares Us" in *The Lion and the Unicorn* vol. 28.1 (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 5.

of technology (The Soundtrack) to philosophical musings inspired by recontextualization (Musorgsky). By doing so, the project of Disney's *Fantasia* (1940) emerges as a film with a grand aim of educating American audiences and increasing their accessibility to the dominant European art music canon.

## 2.1 GENESIS OF THE FILM

*Fantasia* was born out of a series of animated musical short films Disney had produced starting in 1929 with *The Skeleton Dance*. While some of these shorts were synchronized with works from the Western art music canon, many of them featured music composed specifically for animation. These shorts, known as the *Silly Symphonies*, were essentially exercises in synchronization for Disney's animators. Through this process, Walt Disney discovered the potential he had to move beyond generic restrictions which were assumed to exist for cartoons, including slapstick comedy and comic strip gags.<sup>5</sup> He directed his animators to fit the mise-en-scene to the musical score, instead of, as was the tradition, having a composer write music to fit the action on screen. With a decade of success in this practice, Disney used his new medium to make mass audiences comfortable with music composed for concert venues.

*The Sorcerer's Apprentice* by Paul Dukas was the score Disney selected for introduction to the masses. A chance encounter with Leopold Stokowski in a restaurant brought similar name recognition to the sound as Disney himself brought to the image.<sup>6</sup> Stokowski, the prominent figurehead atop the world of Western art music in America, joined the project and added the cultural significance of his persona. However, production of the short proved too costly to rationalize another *Silly Symphony*, so Disney decided to expand the film to feature length to

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<sup>5</sup> John Culhane, *Walt Disney's Fantasia*, (New York, NY: Abradale Press/ Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1983), 13.

<sup>6</sup> Culhane (1983), 15.

justify the expense (presumably by increasing merchandising).<sup>7</sup> Additionally, a feature film would allow for a program of pieces varying in length and style, much like audiences would encounter in a concert setting, thus the working title *Concert Feature*.

To select the program for the full *Fantasia*, Disney held a series of conferences with several animators, Stokowski, and Deems Taylor, who served as the emcee for the film, similarly to his role for the radio broadcasts of the New York Philharmonic.<sup>8</sup> According to Taylor's biographer, James Pegolotti, Taylor and Stokowski collaborated to suggest music fitting themes decided upon by Disney.<sup>9</sup> Whether intended or not, many of the selected works had some connection to ballet. Disney announced that the segments would rely solely on descriptive music and pantomime images, the same elements which comprise the more conventional genre of ballet. Looking at the compositions used in the film, a ballet connection begins to make a strong impression on the audience, especially considering the popularity of the *Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo*, which was touring the United States at the time. Disney even arranged for his animators to attend a performance by Colonel de Basil's troupe in 1938.<sup>10</sup> Through all this, Disney emerges as holding a plethora of enthusiasm for the power to disseminate the art of music and dance and raise its profile in the public and critical eye.

In Culhane's telling of history, Walt Disney hoped to acquaint American mass audiences with what he referred to as "highbrow" music.<sup>11</sup> For *Fantasia*, Disney intended to explore certain themes: prehistory, juxtaposition of sacred and profane, mythical creatures, and satire.<sup>12</sup> In pursuit of his vision, Disney had few qualms about altering the music, and the employment of

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>9</sup> James A. Pegolotti, *Deems Taylor: A Biography*, (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 2003), 237.

<sup>10</sup> Mindy Aloff, *Hippo in a Tutu: Dancing in Disney Animation*, (New York, NY: Disney Editions, 2008), 139.

<sup>11</sup> Culhane (1983), 13.

<sup>12</sup> Pegolotti, 237.



works not intended to be staged.<sup>13</sup> As such, what the Walt Disney Company did in the production of *Fantasia* was not entirely new: it harked back to Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes*, save (of course) for the use of animation over the human form. With this, animation can even be seen as privileged in its execution of dance. Characters are not restricted by strength or location, and audiences are as much at the mercy of choreographers as they are animators. When viewed as ballet, many of the previous criticisms of the film begin to fall short, and none offer an explanation of its continued popularity. A close reading of selections from the original film may begin to provide answers as to how this film not only became popular but benefitted its audiences.

## **2.2 TOCCATA AND FUGUE IN D MINOR: FINDING MEANING IN FORM**

In *Fantasia*'s opening minutes, Deems Taylor introduces the film by describing the three types of music that will be played: first is music that tells a definite story, otherwise known as programmatic music. Second is music which suggests images, yet has no established plot. Finally, there is music which exists only for itself, or absolute music. The first piece, Bach's *Tocatta and Fugue* is the last type of composition, in that it emphasizes form and style over narrative. Historically, this type of music, especially a fugue, might intimidate the audience which Disney was trying to reach. It is an example of the type of music which is popularly thought to require foreknowledge to be understood. Pairing images with this piece certainly affects the ability to be attentive to form, yet Disney and his production team present a

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<sup>13</sup> Walt Disney, at least during the production of the *Fantasia* film was compared to Sergei Diaghilev by such collaborators as Deems Taylor and Leopold Stokowski, as well as newspaper critics. It is possible to view Disney as the American analog to the Russo-Parisian impresario, setting the precedent for altering the context and performance practices of instrumental music. Earlier versions of this project explored the similarities between Diaghilev and Disney, arguing that animation can be considered as a non-human ballet. John Martin, "THE DANCE: CHORECINEMA." *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Nov 24, 1940. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/105425015?accountid=14709>.

synesthetic performance of the piece through the addition of colorful images, that does not rely on an understanding of theory to be found comprehensible and meaningful. The synchronization of sound and image allows for the film's introduction to function as a means to revealing and teaching the role of form and instrumentation in the piece.

The toccata section additionally functions as an introduction to the orchestra itself, beginning with the silhouette of Stokowski walking up to his podium. As he cues in the violins, light begins to shine from the direction in which the violin section would normally be situated. This signifies to the audience a sense of location, despite the process of mediation between the time of performance and the viewing of the film. After cutting off the violins at the end of the phrase, their light is extinguished. Stokowski then shifts to the woodwinds, cueing them, and the light on the conductor shines from opposite direction. At the end of the introductory sentence of the piece, the camera moves back, and the various sections within the orchestra become the primary subject in the shot, corresponding to whether or not that section is carrying the melody. The audience begins to associate the sound emanating from a section with the silhouette of the musicians performing, similar to the ways in which Britten or Prokofiev would introduce the sounds of the orchestra to children later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In this case, the camera functions as a narrator.

Through the entire segment, the orchestra can be understood as a ballet troupe of sorts, with the conductor acting as both prima ballerina and choreographer. Illuminating these performers in such a way that their faces are not shown may seem a reduction of their individuality, subservient to the easily identifiable Stokowski; however, the intent is not to emphasize the individuals producing sound but rather the sound which is being produced. Remembering that Disney wanted to use the film as a way to expose audiences to the music of

the concert hall without being subjected to the charades involved in the act of attending a concert this first act of the film is no more harmful to the music than contemporary children's concerts.<sup>14</sup>

This segment also has the effect of obscuring the boundaries of diegetic and extra-diegetic sound. The orchestra becomes the subject of the image, and all of the sound is presumed to be part of the diegesis. Yet the audience has been told by Taylor to expect abstract images, and waits for that to materialize. And so, the orchestra remains the subject of the audience's gaze, but through manipulation and gradual abstraction of the images of its various sections. The audience is continually aware of the presence of the performers producing the sound, when each segue into animation dissolves through an image of the conductor. This is not unlike more conventional ballet when the audience is supposed to be aware of the orchestra during interludes, entr'actes, and other suspensions of narrative progression. Here, however, the animation itself is informed by the visual shapes of the orchestra.

The start of the fugue corresponds with the beginning of the animation in the film. No longer are instrumentalists pictured as part of the mise-en-scene, but instead, images providing metonymical representation. The images on screen correspond to the section of the orchestra responsible for playing the subject of the fugue. This may have the undesired effect of limiting the complexity of fugal counterpoint, yet, as with the toccata, it provides the audience with access to the piece's structure and an understanding beyond emotion. This is the most abstract animation in the *Fantasia* project, and as such de-emphasizes the narrative aspect usually associated with cartoons. The audience is given the freedom to become comfortable with the presentation in this format, and to be given the opportunity to let the music speak for itself. Animated dance only serves to illuminate what is already in the score. As Stokowski said in a

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<sup>14</sup> Culhane (1983), 42.

production meeting: “When there is counterpoint in the music, there should be counterpoint in the picture. The music explains the screen, and the screen explains the music. We must make it clear.”<sup>15</sup>

As the segment progresses, however, the animation becomes less didactic and invites the audience to interpret for themselves. Allusions are no longer to the instruments of the orchestra (although the visual motif of strings remains), but to the shape of the subject and its counterpoints within the score itself. Disney has equipped the audience to make their own subjective assessments of the animation as distinct from the music, once they acquire the skills for identification of various voices. There is not as much freedom of interpretation allowed as would be permitted in the absence of an image, yet the goal of introduction is accomplished. An abstract score, historically heard as beautiful for its technical precision, has been turned into an audio-visual production inviting a wider audience than the circle of Baroque music connoisseurs.

### ***2.3 NUTCRACKER SUITE: NARRATIVE COMES ALIVE***

The second piece in the film, and the first for which Disney attempted to construct a narrative, Chaikovsky’s *Nutcracker Suite*, is possibly the segment in which the animation most nearly matches the score. It also provides a stark contrast in choreographic methodology to the Bach which preceded it. Rather than setting the animation to the full score of the ballet, which Taylor describes as almost never being performed, the choreography is set to six of eight movements from the orchestral suite.<sup>16</sup> The movements are organized in such a way that narrative is produced through a series of vignettes, and the segment nearly acts as a formal reduction of the film as a whole: a tour of exotic(ized) musics reappropriated for animated film, demonstrating visually the story found in composed sounds. In their original context, the scenes

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>16</sup> The opening marches are omitted and the segment begins with the Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairies.

taken from *The Nutcracker Suite* are meant to celebrate an international variety of animated toys in recognition of a triumph of fabulous love.<sup>17</sup> Rather than depicting toys, Disney and his animators took inspiration from images of nature, giving life to a variety of plants, animals, and fantastical elements commonly associated with sylvan landscapes. They successfully maintain the sense of tourism and exoticism, justifying Chaikovsky's musical intimations with matching imagery reinforcing the otherness presented in the music.

A narrative arc is applied to these scenes, compensating for the decontextualization that occurs when the orchestral suite is detached from the ballet itself.<sup>18</sup> Disney wanted to extend the theme of nature such that the change in scenes corresponded to the progression of seasons.<sup>19</sup> Opening with a series of orbs bouncing above a clearing in a forest, the abridged suite begins with the *Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy*; Disney imagined multiple fairies for this segment. As the audience learns that it is these fairies who are responsible for the dew on flowers in summer through audio/visual synchronization, they might be reminded of the *Silly Symphonies*. Animation is matched to cues within the score, emphasizing accents and rhythmic motives. The fact that this music is intended for ballet gives Disney the ability to resort to synchronizing animation without fault; human dancers would move in similar correspondence to the music. Stokowski appears to have slowed the tempi of these segments, allowing more time for the fairies to tiptoe across the petals of flowers, completing their idyllic task of placing the morning dew. Whether a stylistic decision by the music director or the animators, this manipulation of

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<sup>17</sup> John Wiley Roland. "Tchaikovsky, Pyotr Il'yich." *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed December 8, 2013, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.pitt.idm.oclc.org/subscriber/article/grove/music/51766pg6>.

<sup>18</sup> Culhane (1983), 58.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

canonical sounds may have contributed to the impression of violence committed against music as mentioned by Thompson in the beginning of this chapter.

The *Arabian Dance*, reconceptualized as goldfish ballet in *Fantasia*, provides one of the best examples for understanding how human dance was translated into animated choreography. Disney arranged for a famed belly dancer to perform for his animators, with the idea that the pond in which goldfish swim would be understood as a harem.<sup>20</sup> The fish are eroticized and exoticized to the point where, through the perspective offered by the camera, the audience seems to reticently intrude on the group of “othered” beings. The sexualization heard in Chaikovsky’s score is translated to the sensual movements of the fishes’ tails, and at one point the fish even resemble human female form. The point of orgiastic climax occurs when a cluster of black goldfish organize themselves such that their tails resemble a flower. From this blackness, an off-white goldfish -- she has to remain exotic -- emerges like a Cypriniform *Venus Anadyomene*, to dance a final seductive number synchronized with an English horn, long associated with an orientalized, and thus sexed, other in Russian compositions.<sup>21</sup> The primary dancer then re-enters the haven of her counterpart’s shielding tails, and the awkward sexual encounter with fish transitions to another dance from the series.

The suite continues to move through the seasons, ending in winter, each movement continuing to resemble a *Silly Symphony*. Taylor, in his introduction to the piece, mentions that the suite is likely to be recognized by the audience. The established familiarity with the music is what allows Disney to resort to recognizable techniques in choreographing the music. The suite was even considered for a *Silly Symphony* short in 1935, and had always been imagined as a

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 165. Taruskin's chapter "Entoiling the Falconet" traces the lineage of exoticism in the compositions of Russian composers, and notes other moments of Chaikovsky appropriating sonic signification of sexualization.

ballet of nature.<sup>22</sup> Of all the scenes in the original film, it is easiest to imagine *The Nutcracker Suite* as independent from the rest of *Fantasia*. This has become the most popular and expected segment of the film.

#### **2.4 THE SOUNDTRACK: AURAL PERSONIFICATION**

Following an intermission, marked by an announcement from Taylor, the exiting of the orchestra, the return of the orchestra, and a supposedly impromptu jazzy jam session by the musicians, the most didactic segment of the film takes place. Taylor walks onto the stage and states that he would like to introduce somebody important to *Fantasia* to the audience. Our guest is said to be "very shy and retiring", whom Taylor encountered by chance at production meetings, but whose value to the project is "indispensible" and "screamed 'possibilities.'" Thus the host presents the Soundtrack to the audience.

Before a pale blue background, a luminescent and vibrating string hesitantly appears on screen. Taylor coaxes the personified aural element of the audio-visual experience to the center of the mise-en-scene by describing the very nature of the Soundtrack, "...that for every beautiful sound, [it] also creates an equally beautiful picture." This is then demonstrated by the Soundtrack contorting itself into various visual representations of sound, reminiscent of overtone series depicted in the form of sinusoidal waves. Consequently, the abstract becomes actualized; the process of converting sound to image is laid bare. This is the epitome of what Michel Chion has termed synchronic audio-viewing.<sup>23</sup> The sound and image actively represent each other, and the physical qualities of the sound are transformed from invisible to visualized. The colors used to represent each sound also change depending on the timbre of the depicted sounds, allowing for

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<sup>22</sup> Culhane (1983), 54.

<sup>23</sup> Michel Chion. *Audio-Vision: Sounds on Screen*. ed. and trans. by Claudia Gorbman, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1994), 55-65.

the aural element of tone color to be shown as well. This segment of the film lasts just over two minutes, but its significance lies in the role it serves in helping the audience to decipher the divide between sound and image. This addendum to the intermission teaches the audience about technology and process, illustrating the pedagogical dimension of *Fantasia*.

According to the history written by John Culhane, this segment arose after animators and producers became fascinated by the physical soundtrack in film projection mechanisms.<sup>24</sup> At the time of the film's production (i.e., the late 1930's), sound was recorded on celluloid film, accompanying the visual frames and allowing for simultaneous reading by the projector.<sup>25</sup> The printed soundtrack was converted into an electrical signal via photo-electric cells.<sup>26</sup> The signal was then conveyed through speakers to accompany the enlarged projected image. Thus inspired by the printed sonic signals, animators sought to further synchronize the audio and visual elements. In this return from intermission, the narrative element of synchronic moments elsewhere in the film (e.g., *The Nutcracker Suite* and even the structurally narrative *Toccata and Fugue*) is absent. The image and sounds are totally decontextualized, and the narration by Taylor -- which remains unrepresented by the Soundtrack -- begins and ends the segment, acting as narrator rather than character.

By consciously removing narrative and producing abstract sounds for the stated purpose of representing those specific sounds, the Soundtrack segment makes clear what Chion would later term the phenomenon of "synchresis," wherein sound and image conspire to produce a higher hermeneutic meaning than either element could achieve on its own.<sup>27</sup> From this exposure

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<sup>24</sup> Culhane (1983), 128.

<sup>25</sup> Mervyn Cooke. "Film music." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed February 22, 2015, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.pitt.idm.oclc.org/subscriber/article/grove/music/09647>.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Chion, 63.



to syncretic film, the audience is now more informed as to the process of animation (that the pictures are informed by sound) and how sound is paired with the image (via the unpersonified soundtrack). The Soundtrack also provides symmetry in the film as a whole, echoing Taylor's introduction before the Bach in which he described the different types of music to be experienced. Thus, prior to each half of the film, Disney and company allowed for introductions to become teaching moments. While the shortest animated section of *Fantasia*, the Soundtrack equips the audience with critical technology with which to understand the film.

### **2.5 NIGHT ON BALD MOUNTAIN/AVE MARIA: CONTEMPLATING THE DICHOTOMY OF GOOD AND EVIL**

When Disney indicated that he wanted a segment which juxtaposed profane and sacred themes, it was Taylor who suggested the use of Musorgsky's tone-poem *Night on Bald Mountain*.<sup>28</sup> The segment, the last in the film, transitions from the revelry of humanoid demons to the procession of candle-toting monks. By combining two seemingly oppositional narrative themes, Disney and his staff provide room for the audience to reflect on the film and determine a higher meaning that can be derived using the modes of understanding music presented earlier.

The program for the work was written by the composer, and establishes concrete images reflected in the score which animators could easily visualize. Disney wanted to build upon the *Silly Symphony* from 1929, *The Skeleton Dance*, in its expression of the macabre, yet he desired to speak to the transcendental, ethical "truth" rather than rely on the slapstick humor of the 1929 short.<sup>29</sup> There was to be an explicit sense of morality within this final segment of the film; as described by Disney himself in a conference: "The forces of good on one side and of evil on the

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<sup>28</sup> Culhane (1983), 237.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

other is what I'm trying to see in this thing."<sup>30</sup> The depiction of evil becomes apparent when Musorgsky's own program is presented:

Inhuman voices rumble underground... The spirits of darkness appear, and, after them Chernobog... The Majestic Chernobog and black Sabbath... Sabbath service... In the midst of the Sabbath, church bells from a distant village; the spirits of darkness disperse... Morning.<sup>31</sup>

Although there are no explicit references to dancing in the program, the images conjured easily lend themselves to choreography. The animation closely resembles the composer's description and concretizes the tone poem's ambiguity in the depiction of the Sabbath itself.

The dichotomy of good and evil has long been fodder for allegorical productions of art. Additionally, the trope of the witches' Sabbath has a musical tradition all on its own, most famously exemplified by Berlioz and his *Symphonie Fantastique*. This lineage allowed Disney and his production team to draw from a variety of sources before resolving the question of morality in an elementary fashion. The tradition of juxtaposed good and evil afforded the animators an opportunity to explore these philosophical and abstract concepts. Bald Mountain is a place which would be an unfamiliar site of a familiar occurrence, a witches' dance. Musorgsky is a composer likely to be unknown to the audience, which explains Taylor's need to identify him as one of Russia's greatest composers, a description not given to other composers featured in the film. Musorgsky and his work become associated with a distant place, further fueling the difference between the evil represented in the tone poem and the good that resolves the struggle in Schubert's song glorifying the holiness and goodness in the world.

By ending the piece with bells and the dawn of morning, Musorgsky's score lends itself to an easy transition into a work meant to convey goodness such as Schubert's *Ave Maria*. Yet

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>31</sup> Modest Musorgsky, *Noch' Na Lisoj Gor'*, Arr. Nikolai Rimski-Korsakov, (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Hirtel, 1886), 2. My translation.

there are no bells in Schubert's score, as there are in the film, to introduce the segment. The score was adapted to give the segue greater continuity, as the score was adapted in other pieces for the film (*The Nutcracker Suite* and *The Rite of Spring*, most notably). In fact, *Ave Maria* was further adapted for the film by the inclusion of English text written specifically for *Fantasia*.<sup>32</sup> The contrast between the two halves of the segment, witches' Sabbath and religious procession, particularly in style and context almost demands reflection on their juxtaposition. In the final section of the film, the audience has been exposed to a variety of modes of responding to music. If the populist pedagogical project has been successful, then audio-viewers of the film can emerge from the experience of *Fantasia* contemplating the sound/image pairing and the implications of fusing the disparate ideologies of profanity and divinity for the purpose of reaching a new understanding of music and film as semiotic technologies.

## 2.6 HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Only in the past decade or so has the educational potential of *Fantasia* been discussed academically. In 2004, Mark Clague celebrated the film as a product of its time; in his argument *Fantasia* did not introduce much, but synthesized various elements into a whole through which to present European canonical works for the concert hall to an American audience.<sup>33</sup> While Clague emphasizes the ideology behind the animated segments (e.g., evolution in *The Rite of Spring* and racism in Beethoven's idyllic Pastoral symphony) as the elements which give

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<sup>32</sup> Culhane (1983), 181.

<sup>33</sup> Mark Clague is a musicologist and Americanist who has defended the film against these critics, quoting Leopold Stokowski as saying, "The beauty and inspiration of music must not be restricted to a privileged few but made available to every man, woman and child. That is why great music associated with motion pictures is so important, because motion pictures reach millions all over our country and all over the world. Their influence is immensely powerful and deep. We cannot measure how greatly music and motion pictures contribute toward a higher standard and enjoyment of living, increasing the well-being of each one of us, as well as our nation, by giving us not only recreation and pleasure, but stimulation and nourishment of the mind and spirit." This is meant to provide evidence for the populist agenda of the film, justifying the violence done to instrumental music. Mark Clague, "Playing in 'Toon: Walt Disney's 'Fantasia' (1940) and the Imagineering of Classical Music" in *American Music* vol. 22.1 (Spring 2004). (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press), 91-109.

meaning to the music, it should be noted how compellingly the film also informs audiences regarding phenomenological relationships of sound and image. Although the film clearly fits Richard Dyer's definition of entertainment,<sup>34</sup> its entertainment value does not detract from its educational potential. In addition to learning what hermeneutic readings are offered by cultural authorities like Stokowski and Taylor, through the Soundtrack segment audiences are also offered the opportunity to learn and explore a mode of listening which identifies synchrony and counterpoint in audio-visual pairings. The audience has the opportunity to think more deeply about the relationships between sound and image, music and narrative, ballet and animation. *Fantasia* has the potential to expose audiences to new music, stories, and modes of thinking about what they have just experienced.

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<sup>34</sup> That is, "...entertainment is a type of performance produced for profit, performed before a generalized audience (the 'public'), by a trained, paid group who do nothing else but produce performances which have the sole (conscious) aim of providing pleasure." Richard Dyer, *Only Entertainment*, (London, UK: Routledge, 2002), 19.

### 3.0 CHAPTER 2: SUSTAINING *FANTASIA*

This chapter outlines the history of the *Fantasia* project in the sixty years following the initial theatrical release of the film. During this period, the populist goals of Walt Disney came into conflict with the capitalist motivations of the Walt Disney Company. The focus of the project shifted from a pedagogical text meant to expose an American audience to the European canon of "serious" music, to an economic product intended to make a profit. Rather than exploring the cinematic text itself, here I analyze the project as a cultural commodity with a range of political and social implications. *Fantasia* emerges as a resource for the audience to gain cultural capital and for Disney to become established as a cultural taste-maker. Finally I argue that the eventual economic success of *Fantasia* allowed a later generation of Disney capitalists to reinvigorate the project and create successor film, *Fantasia/2000*.

#### 3.1 THE FILM IN THEATERS

Meant to capitalize on the technological advantages of widely distributed film (that is, the same performances being reproduced across space and time), *Fantasia* was intended to convert the movie theater into a concert hall.<sup>35</sup> As such, the film was designed to be a continuing series, to progressively introduce new musics to the audience through the brand of *Fantasia*. In the words of Walt Disney,

"It is our intention to make a new version of *Fantasia* every year. Its pattern is very flexible and fun to work with -- not really a concert, not a vaudeville or a revue, but a grand mixture of comedy, fantasy, ballet, drama, impressionism, color, sound, and epic fury."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Mark Clague, "Playing in 'Toon: Walt Disney's 'Fantasia' (1940) and the Imagineering of Classical Music" in *American Music* vol. 22.1, (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 92.

<sup>36</sup> Walt Disney in John Culhane, *Fantasia/2000: Visions of Hope*, (New York, NY: Disney Editions, 1999), 10.

In fact, just sixteen days after viewing a private screening of the film, Igor Stravinsky sold Disney an option to the rights of his *Firebird*(1919) suite for use in a future production.<sup>37</sup> With every intention of continuing the project, Disney and his production team planned future segments for the series, until a confluence of events stalled, and ultimately shelved development.<sup>38</sup> Animation historian John Canemaker alleges that World War II, an employee strike at Disney's studios, and production costs forced the impresario's hand in discontinuing the evolution of the film.<sup>39</sup> The result was *Fantasia's* canonization as a singular film, a text that would not be revised.

Even through these difficulties facing the project, the populist goals of *Fantasia's* creators never waned. Rather than the desired updates, the film was re-released as a means to access the widest possible audience.<sup>40</sup> Technology, specifically a speaker arrangement that came to be known as "Fantasound," was an integral part of *Fantasia*.<sup>41</sup> Yet, the cost became prohibitive and determined which theaters could show the film. Certainly this worked against an ideal of populism, so the film was edited and the sound was re-engineered such that it could have a wider release in April of 1942.<sup>42</sup> This established a pattern of re-releases, which became the primary mode of disseminating the film through the second half of the twentieth century. It was not until 1956 that the sonic element desired by Fantasound was incorporated into the majority of

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<sup>37</sup> John Canemaker, "The *Fantasia* That Never Was," in *Print: America's Graphic Design Magazine*, vol. 42.1 (New York, NY, 1988), 20.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>40</sup> George Turner and David Heuring, "Disney's *Fantasia*: Yesterday and Today," in *American Cinematographer*, vol. 72.2 (Hollywood, CA, 1991). Accessed online 4 March 2015 [http://gateway.proquest.com.pitt.idm.oclc.org/openurl?url\\_ver=Z39.88-2004&res\\_dat=xri:fiaf&rft\\_dat=xri:fiaf:article:004/0006629](http://gateway.proquest.com.pitt.idm.oclc.org/openurl?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&res_dat=xri:fiaf&rft_dat=xri:fiaf:article:004/0006629)

<sup>41</sup> 'Fantasound' as initially conceived was intended to recreate the sonic quality of live music in the mechanically reproduced screenings by way of a series of speakers that would each have an independent channel, allowing specific sounds to be located at a different position in the theater. Culhane (1983), 18-19.

<sup>42</sup> Turner and Heuring

screenings.<sup>43</sup> Table 1 charts the periodic releases of the film, and notes specific years as exceptional, when appropriate. These re-releases were not inspired solely by the populism and technological advances, but also attempts by the Walt Disney Company to recoup the production costs of the film.

Year of Release <sup>44</sup>	Notes
1942	Amended from 113 to 88 minutes <sup>45</sup>
1944	
1946	
1953	
1956	Fantasound realized following profits from Disneyland opening <sup>46</sup>
1963	
1969	Extended release, "Pastorale" segment edited to remove the racist caricatures; marketed as 'psychedelic' <sup>47</sup>
1977	
1980	Fortieth Anniversary
1984	VHS; incorporated new audio, digitally recorded in 1981 <sup>48</sup>
1990	

Table 1: Theatrical Release by Year

### 3.2 FANTASIA AS SPECTACLE

Theatrical releases constituted the only means by which audiences could experience *Fantasia*, until 1983 when the Video Home System (VHS) allowed for the private space of the home to be the site of viewing. While this product was not the same as that which was shown in 1940 due to edits intended to shorten the running time of the film as well as the difference in

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<sup>43</sup> Culhane (1983), 31.

<sup>44</sup> Turner and Heuring

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Culhane (1983), 31.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 32

speakers between home systems and theaters, the strength of the project was embodied in the conversion of the domestic realm into a theater. Mark Clague describes several racist, "picaninny" caricatures from the Pastorale segment of the 1940 film, which were omitted prior to the 1969 extended theatrical re-release.<sup>49</sup> The precise synchronization of sound and image meant that to omit these pictures, some of the symphony had to be erased as well. It thus seems likely that the re-recording of the sound in 1981 was intended to maintain the altered image yet replace the missing sound, in preparation for the 1984 VHS release, and thus rectify the discrepancy between Beethoven and Disney.

Regardless, the release of the film for audiences to view at home signified an important step in the pedagogical as well as capitalist goals of the project. Both of these objectives could be accomplished by reaching the largest possible audience, i.e., by allowing the film itself, rather than tickets for a specific screening, to become a commodity. Critical theorist Douglas Kellner, drawing on Guy Debord's theory of the spectacular, describes media spectacles similar to *Fantasia* as exemplifying "media and consumer society organized around the production and consumption of images, commodities, and staged events."<sup>50</sup> The periodic theatrical releases of *Fantasia*, combined with the VHS release, establish the project as one of these media spectacles. Once domesticated, the capitalist aims seemed to matter more for the Walt Disney Company, emphasizing the profitability over pedagogy. Audiences could experience the film at any time, at their pleasure. For Kellner, spectacles engage audiences/consumers through a "fun factor"

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<sup>49</sup> According to Clague, these omissions might have been a result, or at least related to, the Civil Rights movement active in the United States at the time. The Walt Disney Company displayed greater social awareness in the move to cut racialized Others in the film, although it resulted in the need to cut the accompanying passages of music as well. Clague, 102.

<sup>50</sup> Douglas Kellner. *Media Spectacle*. (London, UK: Routledge, 2003), 2.



which pacifies and depoliticizes spectators.<sup>51</sup> This engagement through pleasure creates a reciprocal relationship between product and consumer. The fun in *Fantasia* would be different for each viewer (chapter 3 will explore this further). Kellner also describes an inherent eroticism -- recall the goldfish -- which invites the audience to enter the site of the spectacle, leading to a synthesis of capital and technology as a means to perpetuate the commodities being sold.<sup>52</sup>

The entrance of *Fantasia* into the domicile is the ultimate means of engagement for film, and assisted in transforming the cinematic into a brand. Along with the release of the VHS, the 1980s saw the publication of Culhane's history of the film's production. The name "Fantasia" began to signify a branch of Disney studio productions apart from their live-action and narrative films. Under the guise of perfecting the project, the reproduction of *Fantasia* exposed a new generation of Americans to the Disney pedagogy of audio-viewing and the techniques of synchrony.<sup>53</sup> In the terms of Walter Benjamin, the mechanically reproduced VHS' had the effect of affirming the authority of the original (i.e., Disney's 1940 production) while allowing audiences to be closer to the film.<sup>54</sup> The film started to appear on the shelves and home theaters of consumers, expanding its cultural and social significance while allowing the Walt Disney Company to enter the home in the same space. Disney maintains its authority to disseminate cultural capital, and audiences have greater access to benefit from the available significance. From this, there is spectacular benefit of domesticating the experience of *Fantasia* for both the audience and creators.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 3-4.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 9-11.

<sup>53</sup> "FILM"Disney has restored the flawed classic for a new generation Revisiting the magic of Fantasia." *The Globe and Mail (Canada)*. October 5, 1990 Friday . Date Accessed: 12 March 2015. [www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/lnacademic](http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/lnacademic).

<sup>54</sup> Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version," in *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media* ed. Michael W. Jennings et al., (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2008), 23.

Kellner describes the space of the museum as exemplifying the reciprocal relationship between cultural producers and consumers that establishes the 'fun factor.'<sup>55</sup> For him they are places of deliberate pacification, since the spectator is subject to an event at hand. Expanding the definition of museum to include locales in which audiences passively become immersed in events (e.g., the concert hall, movie theater, and even the private viewing sphere) allows for an understanding of these spaces as engaging audiences phenomenologically in the same way.

Music philosophers and musicologists, such as Lydia Goehr and J. Peter Burkholder, have similarly utilized the term "museum" to discuss the effects of this passivity on audiences and the works presented to them. For Goehr, placing works of art in a museum is an attempt to legitimize appreciation and criticism of any possible depreciation of the status quo, which may explain the early critical resistance to recontextualization of musical canon in *Fantasia* described in chapter 1.<sup>56</sup> Museumification, however, is itself an attempt to decontextualize and essentialize music, suggesting that expanding the museum to the home is a means to accomplish the populist and pedagogical aspects of *Fantasia's* production.<sup>57</sup> The museum as a spectacle aligns with and parallels the spectacular film, transforming any viewing space into one which legitimizes appreciation while simultaneously commodifying the product subjected to an audience's gaze.

Burkholder presents the museum as a way to understand the cultural context of works, furthering the relevance of Kellner's critical assessment of spectacular events.<sup>58</sup> The failings that can be found in the commodification of the music through the dissemination of the film are a result of the capitalist system in which *Fantasia* was produced. The effect on audiences is the

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<sup>55</sup> Kellner, 8.

<sup>56</sup> Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music (Revised Edition)*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007), 71.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>58</sup> J. Peter Burkholder, "Museum Pieces: The Historicist Mainstream in Music of the Last Hundred Years," in *The Journal of Musicology*, vol. 2.2 (Oakland, CA: University of California Press), 116.

availability of an educationally beneficial exposure to the historicist European musical canon, albeit presented in a mechanically reproduced form which canonizes the film itself. When reading the film through these critical frameworks, it emerges as being caught in a vicious cycle of cultural and capitalist products which perpetuate their own relevance.

### 3.3 *FANTASIA/2000*

The greatest indication of the success of the project is the fact that a second film was eventually produced by Disney. Initiated by Roy E. Disney, the vice chairman of the board at the Walt Disney Company, the successor film sought to capitalize on the new generation of audiences created by the 1984 home release of the original film.<sup>59</sup> The revival of the project was intended to focus on the fusion of technology and art, which begun in 1940, utilizing computer animation, IMAX production, and Dolby audio.<sup>60</sup> The pedagogical goals were seemingly absent. Instead, the producers used the time between animated segments to valorize the production and history of the first *Fantasia*. Yet the release of *Fantasia/2000* was a continuation of the original project by more than name alone. New works were introduced to the audience, seeking to appropriate the authority of the *Fantasia* brand that was successfully established and maintained by the periodic re-releases. The history of the project (as well as that of the Disney enterprise itself) was treated as a character in the film, represented by the preservation of Mickey Mouse as a sorcerer's apprentice, and the inclusion of other familiar Disney characters like Donald and Daisy Duck. It is a celebration of the production of Disney films, one which continues to utilize the spectacular framework, but also adds an ideological aspect to what had thus far been praised as a technologically motivated project.

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<sup>59</sup> Culhane (1999), 10-11.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

### 3.4 THE STEADFAST TIN COMPOSER

One of the main discrepancies between *Fantasia/2000* and its predecessor is that each piece is introduced by a celebrity with some musical connection. These introductions situate and historicize this new film in the context of accessibility for a wide audience. One of the more informative introductions, which discusses the intended history for the *Fantasia* series, is presented by Bette Midler before Shostakovich's Second Piano Concerto. She starts,

“Hi. You may not know this, but over the years Disney artists have cooked up dozens of ideas for new *Fantasia* segments. Some of them made it to the big screen this time, but others, lots of others (how can I put this politely?) didn't.”

She points out some of the examples of works that were passed over, including animation inspired by Wagner, illustrations by Dalí, and a “bug ballet” accompanied by an illustration of what appears to be an angry bee.<sup>61</sup> Midler continues: “But finally, a success. The Disney artists wanted to create a short film based on Hans Christian Andersen's wonderful fairy tale ‘The Steadfast Tin Soldier,’ but they could never find the perfect musical match, until now.”

This goes against the mission presented by Deems Taylor in the introduction of the original *Fantasia* film from 1940, in which he states: “What you are going to see are the designs and pictures and stories that *music* inspired...”<sup>62</sup> Thus Midler's introduction serves as a point of departure from the intended purpose of the *Fantasia* series; she explicitly states that the story came before the music. Audiences aware of the original film are likely to wonder why the change in approach and, more importantly, what makes the first movement of a concerto by Shostakovich, which he himself considered to have no redeeming artistic merit and which exists outside the popular canon, to be the perfect musical match for the story?

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<sup>61</sup> The Dalí segment was eventually completed and released in 2003 under the title *Destino*; accessed online <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1GFkN4deuZU> 11 March 2015

<sup>62</sup> Emphasis my own

One way to answer this question is to look at the text of the story as it relates to the genesis of the piece. A boy receives a box of twenty-five tin soldiers, all alike save for one with only a single leg, for his birthday.<sup>63</sup> The concerto, too, has a connection to birthdays; it was premiered by the composer's son Maxim on his nineteenth birthday, during his final year of study at the Central Music School.<sup>64</sup> However, since the recording used in the film was performed by Yefim Bronfman as opposed to the younger Shostakovich, this extra-musical connection seems unlikely. Additionally, the animation barely alludes to the birthday element in the story; the only indication is a bow on the top of the box from which the soldiers emerge. This clearly is not what makes the piece the perfect musical accompaniment for the story.

Thus, it becomes necessary to investigate further this connection. In the film there are only five soldiers, and the reason for the disability for the last one is never given.<sup>65</sup> The ballerina is present, although she appears to be made of porcelain or some other delicate material which glistens as opposed to the paper from which she is constructed in the Andersen tale. The jealous jack-in-the-box is also present, in all his menacing grandeur easily dwarfing the soldier and ballerina. The jack-in-the-box uses his size and power to ward off the competing suitor who uses his military training to put up a fight; in the original story, it is implied that the larger toy uses cunning to cause the soldier to fall from a windowsill. Instead, the Disney animators have the jack-in-the-box hurl a wooden boat at the soldier, which he uses as his vessel through the sewers. The soldier continues his picaresque journey as told by Andersen, with the only difference being that rats pursue him for no reason other than evil, as indicated by their glowing red eyes, rather than accosting the soldier for his lack of documentation. Upon his return, the soldier's story

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<sup>63</sup> Hans Christian Andersen, "The Steadfast Tin Soldier," trans. Jean Hersholt, updated 8 October 2013, [http://www.andersen.sdu.dk/vaerk/hersholt/TheSteadfastTinSoldier\\_e.html](http://www.andersen.sdu.dk/vaerk/hersholt/TheSteadfastTinSoldier_e.html) (accessed 20 October 2013).

<sup>64</sup> Fay, 199.

<sup>65</sup> In the original tale, it is explained that there was not enough tin to fill the mold of the twenty-fifth soldier.

again departs from the narrative crafted by Andersen: instead of being cast into the stove by a child, the soldier fights his foe in a choreographed ballet battle and uses his opponent's aggression against him such that the jack-in-the-box is launched into the fire. The soldier reunites with his love and all is well in the toy world as the music finishes in the tonic key; the lights fade out as though the audience had witnessed a stage production and curtains should close.

These changes show that Disney wanted a happy ending in which the lovers are united in life, rather than Andersen's tragedy in which they are united in death. The addition of a clear antagonist also makes the story about the struggle between good and evil. The solo piano is not utilized as a character, and there are numerous other works which are in sonata-allegro form and utilize staccato articulation and percussivity, so the question remains, why Shostakovich?

It seems to me that the composer was chosen because of the myths of his struggles against the state, which has become a popular sentiment among many American audiences. To see him as a dissident struggling against the omnipresent and inescapable reach of Socialist Realism, and to be understood as victorious (particularly concerning the popularity of his fifth symphony and eighth string quartet) makes it easier to understand the rewriting of the soldier's tale. If the story truly came before the music, then there would be little reason to rewrite the events depicted. However, by choosing music by a composer so popularly seen as a political hero against totalitarian control in the arts, the rewritten story becomes an allegory for that struggle. The ballerina is porcelain to reflect the delicate nature of artistic ideal and craft, the soldier with one leg becomes the artist hobbled by an overbearing government, and the jack-in-the-box comes to represent the towering figure of the state and its censors, forever determined to control art. The truths of Shostakovich's politics are irrelevant in comparison to the popular

conception; the introductions to each segment remind audiences that this is intended for the widest possible audience. As such, Shostakovich becomes the soldier steadfast in his pursuit of art, less a person but a metallic facsimile of a dissident.

The liberation from pedagogical motivation, as initiated by Roy E. Disney, allows for the politics contained within the project to be disseminated among the audience alongside the cultural capital of exposure to a musical canon. Countering Kellner's assertion that spectacles are depoliticizing, the pacification they inspire actually subjects the audience to the politics of the text. Thus, both *Fantasia* and *Fantasia/2000* promote fetishization of technology, the malleability of musical meaning, and the idealized conception of the musical canon as being a tool of popular political persuasion rather than didacticism.

#### **4.0 CHAPTER 3: LIVING FANTASIA**

This chapter explores the developments of the "Fantasia" brand since the release of *Fantasia/2000*. Disney's music publishing branch has released a program of music contained in both films to be performed live, often incorporating projections of video associated with the excerpts from *Fantasia* and *Fantasia/2000*. Two versions of this program exist, one with a featured pianist and one without. These concerts have recently been performed by such major professional orchestras as the National Symphony Orchestra (Washington, D.C.) and the Boston Pops Orchestra (Boston, MA), and a performance is scheduled by the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra (Pittsburgh, PA) in May, 2015. Additionally, in 2014 the Walt Disney Company licensed a kinesthetic and synesthetic video game under the name *Disney Fantasia: Music Evolved* which incorporates motion-capture technology to encourage players to become physically engaged with music. Through an ethnography of a 2014 performance of *Fantasia Live! in Concert* and a close reading of the video game, I examine the ways in which Disney has continued to expand the capitalist goal of Walt Disney's 1940 project through which the pedagogical goals are disseminated to a new audience.

#### **4.1 MEMORIES OF FANTASIA**

I was lucky enough to spend a night in the Baltimore Aquarium at the end of 1999. I was there with my Boy Scouts organization, and we were invited to sleep in the aqua glow of dimly lit tanks filled with marine life. Only nine years old at the time, I have to imagine the aquarium staff and our chaperones were nervous about the havoc dozens of children could raise. As a means of pacification, we were invited to watch a film in the IMAX theater: *Fantasia/2000*. By virtue of my birth year, I had only experienced the 1940 film on VHS which my parents had bought for my Disney-indoctrinated older sister. The technological restrictions of IMAX



production meant that the film was in limited release, and Baltimore was the only city within a two hour drive that was showing the film.<sup>66</sup> For me, this was a fantastical experience of Disney's concert feature: I remember being overwhelmed by technology, entertained by animation, and consumed by music both new and familiar. It was more spectacular than any home viewing could offer, and still sticks out in my mind more strongly than the aquarium exhibits. As with the 1940 film, critical reception was antagonistic towards the treatment of music in the film,<sup>67</sup> with a local Baltimore music critic gave a grade of "B-" to the film's soundtrack. Yet as a fan, I could not care less what they thought.

For my sister's birthday in July 2014, she requested that I accompany her to an outdoor performance at the Wolf Trap National Park for the Performing Arts' Feline Center. The Feline Center, an outdoor venue in Vienna, Virginia, combines tiered covered seating and a vast lawn available to picnickers. When I saw that the scheduled performance was something called *Fantasia Live!* my excitement transcended the sense of kinship to which she appealed. As a self-professed "film buff" my sister openly admits to enjoying the sense of camaraderie that accompanies viewing cinematic events in public settings like theaters and outdoor presentations. She had seen neither *Fantasia* nor *Fantasia/2000* in theaters, so before that summer she only had memories of our family's copies viewed on the television.

I, however, still remember the experience of *Fantasia/2000* in the Baltimore Aquarium. This discrepancy in our memories of the animated concert project was representative of many of

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<sup>66</sup> "Imax theaters running 'Fantasia/2000'.", *The Associated Press*. Date Accessed: 2015/03/23. [www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/lnacademic](http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/lnacademic).

<sup>67</sup> J.D. Considine, "'FANTASIA' SOUNDTRACK OVERSIMPLIFIES GREAT WORKS." *Fresno Bee* [Fresno, CA] 13 Jan. 2000: E4. *Business Insights: Global*. Web. 23 Mar. 2015. Considine was employed by *The Baltimore Sun* and his review was reproduced in the cited *Fresno Bee*.

the other audience members we saw at the venue on 11 July, 2014; the program is provided in Table 2.

Performed Work	Film in which it appears
Excerpts from Beethoven Symphony No. 5 (Exposition and Coda from <i>Allegro con Brio</i> )	<i>Fantasia/2000</i>
Excerpts from Beethoven Symphony No. 6 ( <i>Allegro 'Bacchanale,' Allegro 'Storm,' Allegretto 'Sunrise'</i> )	<i>Fantasia</i> (1940)
Chaikovsky 'Nutcracker' Suite, Op. 71a (Dance of the Sargar Plum Fairies, Chinese Dance, Waltz of the Flowers, Arabian Dance, Russian Dance, Dance of the Reed Flutes)	<i>Fantasia</i> (1940)
Debussy <i>Claire de Lune</i>	Omitted from <i>Fantasia</i> (1940)
Stravinsky <i>Firebird</i> suite (1919 version)	<i>Fantasia/2000</i>
Ponchielli <i>Dance of the Hours</i>	<i>Fantasia</i> (1940)
Dukas <i>The Sorcerer's Apprentice</i>	Both films
Elgar <i>Pomp and Circumstance</i> marches 1,2,3, and 4	<i>Fantasia/2000</i>
Excerpt from Respighi <i>Pines of Rome</i>	<i>Fantasia/2000</i>
Finale from Saint-Saëns <i>Carnival of the Animals</i>	<i>Fantasia/2000</i>

Table 2: *Fantasia Live!* Program July 11, 2014

The audience members sitting under the cover of the Feline Center tended to be gray-haired retirees, many of them subscribers to the National Symphony Orchestra's summer season residency at the park. The lawn was populated by a mix of young adults sitting on blankets, many which had printed patterns of Disney characters, and parents or grandparents with small children. The three generations seemed to be attempting to access different types memories. The oldest generation sought to revive experiences of seeing *Fantasia* in theaters; I could overhear one such couple discussing how they would get 'juiced up' before going to a theater during the 1969 release. The middle generation (to which my sister and I belonged) were remembering Disney experiences in general, discussing their favorite Disney movies and stories from trips to Disney theme parks, and *Fantasia* memories at home. I saw the youngest generation, those too young to have seen even *Fantasia/2000* in its theatrical release, were the most likely to be

wearing generic Disney paraphernalia and seemed to be experiencing *Fantasia* as a project for the first time, introduced through their previous experience with other films. Since the children present were unable to buy tickets themselves, it seems likely (as evidenced by my questioning the grandmother and her 3 companions who sat in front of my sister and I on the lawn) that many of them were there to enjoy the animation while their guardians remembered the films represented.

Despite their three different routes to accessing Disney and *Fantasia*, all three generations appear to have enjoyed the performance. Many people could be heard discussing and debating their favorite segments, and were impressed by the performance of the orchestra.

#### **4.2 FANTASIA IN CONCERT**

As was made clear by the pamphlets distributed by ushers upon entrance to the lawn, the concert program was determined by Disney Music Publishing, who offers two variations of the performance based on instrumentation.<sup>68</sup> The determining factor in providing one or the other program is whether or not the performing orchestra plans to feature a pianist: if so, then Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* is presented. That July evening, the National Symphony Orchestra was without a pianist, and so Ponchielli's *Dance of the Hours* was performed instead. The orchestra on the stage of the Feline Center was playing under the direction of conductor Emil De Cou. They sat before a large screen on which the animation from the films was projected. Some of the segments were truncated, most notably the excerpts from Beethoven's symphonies Five and Six ("Pastorale"), which opened the show. A second screen was provided for the audience on the lawn; the projector for the screen on stage was housed inside of the building, while the lawn projection originated from a truck at the top of the lawn. Speakers were placed all around

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<sup>68</sup> 'Disney *Fantasia* Live in Concert,' *Disney Concert Library*, accessed online: 25 July 2014, <http://www.disneyconcertlibrary.com/disneyfantasia.html>

the lawn, amplifying the orchestra. In this way, the general seating outside of the center was closer to an outdoor film screening than an orchestral performance of the *Fantasia* program. The bucolic environment of the lawn was undermined by the presence of popcorn hawkers and millennials drinking cheap wine out of glasses featuring Disney princesses. Instead of the floral smells Disney imagined could accompany the Chaikovsky suite, the odor of bug spray wafted through the air.<sup>69</sup> The incessant hum of cicadas, metallic snaps of beer cans opening, and the dramatic glow of a full moon were omnipresent.

At 8:30pm, the screens depicted the above image of Mickey Mouse dressed as the sorcerer's apprentice, which serves as the logo for the *Fantasia Live!* series of concerts provided by Disney (pictured above). The concertmaster walked onto the stage to begin tuning five minutes later, and the conductor gave the downbeat a few minutes after that. Sunset happened at 8:52, around the end of the second piece, the excerpts from the "Pastorale" symphony of Beethoven. Bats could be seen flying around the lights that provided direction to and from the restrooms. De Cou not only conducted the orchestra, but acted as the master of ceremony, frequently out of breath that humid evening after the quick-tempos of the works meant to match the recordings of Stokowski and James Levine as they are heard on the films. At one point De Cou mentioned that the performance was a venue premier, although he never explained that the Walt Disney Company has been leasing the program to orchestras since at least 2012 when the Chicago Symphony Orchestra gave a performance.<sup>70</sup> His notable commentaries included the introduction to Stokowski's arrangement of Debussy's *Claire de Lune*, in which he claimed the

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<sup>69</sup> Canemaker, 13.

<sup>70</sup> "'Singin' in the Rain' to End Symphony Series." *Windy City Times*, Jan 02, 2013.  
<http://search.proquest.com/docview/1269701375?accountid=14709>.

piece was omitted for political and economic reasons.<sup>71</sup> After a synchronization error in which the orchestra began playing Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance* while the screen showed the flying whales associated with Respighi's *Pines of Rome*,<sup>72</sup> De Cou apologized. Prior to the encore of the finale from Saint-Saëns' *Carnival of the Animals*, he commented on the relaxed nature of the audience.<sup>73</sup> The orchestra performed well, generally maintaining the precision of synchronized sound and image,<sup>74</sup> and the audience appeared to be pleased, although several patrons sought an early exit to avoid the traffic jam of the post-concert exodus. As my sister and I made our way to her car, a father asked his daughter perched on his shoulders if she liked the music or the cartoons better. She replied affirming the latter.

*Fantasia Live!* sought to incorporate an element of newness into a performance primarily dependent on memory and remembering. The inclusion of the *Claire de Lune* in the performance without a pianist, as well as the utilization of live performers in an unconventional outdoor setting accomplished this at Wolf Trap.<sup>75</sup> The alternative program offered by Disney Music Publishing replaces the Debussy with another segment of the larger project which was not included in either film: a bee themed animation titled "Bumble Boogie" that was derived from

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<sup>71</sup> De Cou stated that the segment was omitted from the 1940 film for economic and political 'restrictions' without explanation; Culhane (1983) suggested that it was omitted because the film was too long. This discrepancy deserves further research.

<sup>72</sup> De Cou apologized for the error: "I thought I was hallucinating because I'm so overheated from [the previous piece] *Sorcerer's Apprentice*. This was supposed to be Daffy (Donald) Duck, but it turned into some kind of weird whale graduation ceremony." The correct animation was provided and the concert proceeded from there

<sup>73</sup> The comment that garnered the loudest laugh from the audience: "We'll be playing this program tomorrow. I know some of you have been drinking wine and may not have even been aware of the second half."

<sup>74</sup> The only discrepancy I noticed was during the Chaikovsky excerpt, during which the orchestra struggled to maintain the conductor's tempo during the 'Russian Dance' and ended two beats after the screen faded to black, signifying the end of the selection.

<sup>75</sup> The performance by the Boston Pops Orchestra was also at an outdoor venue, Tanglewood, in Watertown, MA. <https://www.bso.org/brands/pops/press/press-releases/archived-press-releases/november-2012/20130429-watertown.aspx/MobileContentPage>

Rimsky-Korsakov's "Flight of the Bumblebee" interlude from his opera *Tale of Tsar Sultan*.<sup>76</sup> In this way, the experience of the live performance continues the educational project of the pedagogically successful 1940 film and the historically situated *Fantasia/2000*.

#### **4.3 DISNEY FANTASIA: MUSIC EVOLVED: AUDIENCE INTEGRATION**

Released in 2014 by Harmonix Music, *Disney Fantasia: Music Evolved* is a video game that might represent the most complete realization of Walt Disney's fantastical project through the game's ability to perpetually and continually update itself. Available on Microsoft's Xbox 360 and Xbox One, the game periodically adds new music to a catalogue, creating a dynamic library for players.<sup>77</sup> The integration of music, audience, and technology closely exhibit the synesthetic ideals Disney envisioned.

Through a narrative loosely based on the *Sorcerer's Apprentice* segment of the *Fantasia* films, players are given the ability to utilize their bodies to "conduct" songs played for them. According to a commercial trailer for the game, icons appear on the screen, synchronized with whatever music has been selected by the player, with the goal to earn points by waving arms at the icons.<sup>78</sup> The game requires motion-capture hardware to read the bodies of players; the corporal self directly correlates to the digital self. More dancing -- possibly even ballet -- than conducting, the game seeks to immerse participants in the *Fantasia* universe.

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<sup>76</sup> 'Disney *Fantasia*, Live in Concert,' Disney Concert Library  
<http://www.disneyconcertlibrary.com/disneyfantasia.html>

<sup>77</sup> 'Disney *Fantasia*: Music Evolved,' <http://www.harmonixmusic.com/games/disney-fantasia-music-evolved/>;  
<http://games.disney.com/fantasia-video-game> accessed online: 12-15 February 2015

<sup>78</sup> <http://video.disney.com/watch/experiential-trailer-fantasia-music-evolved-4ff0b5d1c4b11dfcc750fa41>

According to Miranda Sanchez of the video game review website IGN, the tutorial levels for the game are led by the sorcerer for whom Mickey Mouse served as apprentice, Yen Sid.<sup>79</sup> The game progresses as players complete levels to unlock new songs. Points are accumulated by performing the right motions in time with visual and musical cues. Gamespot reviewer Kevin VanOrd, a former violinist and choral singer, notes that the motions are not similar to those taught in conducting; Sanchez describes them as more fun.<sup>80</sup> Here the 'fun factor' described by Kellner (and discussed in chapter 2) is evident: players engage with the *Fantasia* experience in a way that is pleasurable and interactive, creating a reciprocal relationship between consumer and product. Reviewer Cory Wells makes a point of the pleasure derived from the game: "[*Disney Fantasia:*] *Music Evolved* has the opportunity to be the ultimate party game, as its creative depth, functionality, and fun-factor go unmatched in comparison to any other music game."<sup>81</sup> VanOrd also explains that interaction goes beyond kinesthetic mimesis: users have the options of drawing from multiple mixes of the songs to affect the soundscape, thus allowing each playing to be different from the last.<sup>82</sup> Sanchez describes a "Composition" feature that allows players to create and integrate new or alternative rhythms and phrases into the preexisting recordings with which players are interacting, furthering the creation afforded to consumers.<sup>83</sup> The videos of players provided by game reviewers show people enjoying themselves through corporeal involvement

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<sup>79</sup> Miranda Sanchez, <http://www.ign.com/articles/2014/10/21/fantasia-music-evolved-review>. Culhane points out that Yen Sid was the name given to the mute sorcerer during production meetings for the 1940 film; it is "Disney" spelled backwards. Culhane (1983), 79.

<sup>80</sup>Kevin VanOrd, <http://www.gamespot.com/reviews/disney-fantasia-music-evolved-review/1900-6415918/>; Sanchez, <http://www.ign.com/articles/2014/10/21/fantasia-music-evolved-review>.

<sup>81</sup> Cory Wells, "Fantasia: Music Evolved Possibly the Ultimate Party Game," from Examiner.com:GameOn. Accessed online 30 March 2015: <http://www.examiner.com/review/fantasia-music-evolved-possibly-the-ultimate-party-game>

<sup>82</sup> "Fantasia is not just an elaborate game of Simon Says: you actually contribute to the soundscape as you play. Each song comes with three mixes in total (including the original mix), and while playing, you often have the opportunity to incorporate various aspects of those mixes together." VanOrd, gamespot review

<sup>83</sup> Sanchez, IGN review

with the music, a new dynamic that is not afforded to spectacular, non-immersive viewings of the films.

The music available in the game is constantly changing, with developers adding new songs and the above mentioned capability for players to compose and remix songs as part of the game play. Many of the songs which are added to the library after purchase of the game software are popular artists ranging from The Cure to Justin Bieber. The only tracks the game shares with the *Fantasia* films are Musorgsky, Chaikovsky, and Bach; however, other canonical art music includes Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons* and Symphony No. 9 by Antonin Dvorak. It would seem that, licensing concerns ignored, the library for *Disney Fantasia: Music Evolved* was established by perceived recognizability and popularity. This makes sense considering the manufacturer's suggested retail price for the game disk is \$39.99, a full eighteen dollars more than I spent to see the National Symphony Orchestra. The cost of the game is in addition to the hardware; an Xbox One console is listed currently as \$499.99. This cost, prohibitive to some, establishes the game and its platform as a means of stratifying consumers. Just as at Wolf Trap, where subscribers to the entire season of the National Symphony Orchestra are protected by the Feline Center, a larger financial investment offers a closer and more intimate *Fantasia* experience. Disney and Harmonix are asking for a greater financial investment to enjoy the most immersive, and least educational, iteration of the *Fantasia* series.

#### **4.4 FANTASIA LIVES**

As the twenty-first century progresses, the Walt Disney Company has continued to develop the *Fantasia* brand. Furthering the integration of technology has assisted in greater domestication and interaction with motion-capture video games. Disney Music Publishing has provided the means for professional orchestras to create a new experience in viewing the films of



the larger project by combining live orchestras with visual imagery. Both of these installments in the *Fantasia* series have led to the exposure of Walt Disney's pedagogical project to a new audience, while simultaneously profiting from the nostalgia and memories of already dedicated fans. As such, consumers have been integrated into the *Fantasia* experience, increasing the spectacular "fun factor" described by Kellner, and allowing for the brand and fans to enjoy a dynamic and synesthetic program (both on Xbox and in the concert hall) and perpetuate Disney's desire for a changing fantastical phenomenon.

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