figures of earth
a column by Bill Kostura

Earlier today I caught the last few minutes of a TV show which used symphonic music as a background to computer art. The music was Wagner's

"Prelude to Tristan and Isolde," I believe; the art was an ever-changing series of symmetrical designs, one design slowly changing shape, or flowing into another. Whether by plan, or by imagination, the music fit the art well, and the result was an excellent example of a new art form. A certain comparison, however, could not help but come to mind.

Back in 1940 Walt Disney released *Fantasia*, probably the greatest marriage of animation and music ever produced. This was a feature length film consisting of seven short segments, each written around a famous orchestral piece.

The first was Bach's "Toccata and Fugue in D Minor," which was illustrated by a series of abstract and semi-abstract sequences. Interesting as they were, these animations failed to match Bach's music in richness and complexity; however, the rest of the film pulls out all the imaginative stops. Tchaikovsky's "Nutcracker Suit" transfers ballet from the stage to a sort of mythological nature, where fairies and water sprites race through the woodlands, leaving trails of dewdrops or crystals of frost wherever they go; where sunflowers, suggesting Russian soldiers and maidens, break out in a wildly exuberant *trepak*, or Russian dance; and where mushrooms, as grey-robed, oriental priests with folded arms and widebrimmed hats wander around in a quiet procession which somehow evokes a humor both subtle and hysterical.

The next segment, "The Sorcerer's Apprentice," stars Mickey Mouse in Paul Dukas' musical adaptation of the ancient fairy tale. Mickey, apprentice to a great and imposing greybearded wizard, delves into the Great Arts while his master sleeps, with disastrous and hilarious results. My personal favorite is Beethoven's "Pastoral" (6th) Symphony, illustrated as an idyllic Grecian countryside populated by centaurs, a pegasus family, various gods, and, of course, several cherubs who play matchmakers for the centaurs. Everything is idealized in this world—all unhappiness is temporary. Even when Zeus and Vulcan create a tremendous storm, hurling thunderbolts to earth and flooding the countryside, the terror induced and the damage inflicted pass with the storm. Thus, the conflict is token, yet the mythological world is so perfectly realized that it doesn't matter. At the end, night falls and Artemis. using the crescent moon for a bow, fires and arrow from which a stream of stardust trails, falling over the entire countryside.

It is impossible to indicate with words how much detail is painted into each frame, or how much care was taken with the personality development of the characters in the film. But, as overwhelming visually as *Fantasia* is, it is merely represenative of the feature animated films of Walt Disney.

Disney began producing cartoons in the early 1920's, and such was his zeal for his profession that he employed every technological development as it came along, combining it with his own unpatentable imagination to improve his product. In 1928, one year after the appearance of *The Jazz Singer*, Disney auditioned Mickey Mouse in

"Steamboat Willie," using his own voice for Mickey's (as he did for 20 years) and employing music in the plot. The next year saw the first of Disney's Silly Symphonies, more elaborate cartoons written around symphonic and other music. In 1932 Disney signed a two year contract with Technicolor for exclusive animation rights to the process. Far ahead of the rest of the field, Disney never rested; in 1937 he introduced *Snow White*, his first feature-length film.

Too many people regard the Disney films as merely long cartoons, something to take the children to (if they're not yet too old for such things) on a Saturday afternoon; few realize the pains Disney took with his creations. For *Snow White*, Disney developed the multiplane camera for creating accurate depth perceptions. Since detailed realism was to be an integral feature in most of Disney's subsequent films, and knowing that the slightest unnatural representation of a human's movements would be noticed by the audience, he hired models for filming and study by his artists.

The lasting importance of his films, however, rests with the personalities of his characters. Over the years Disney and his artists became unexcelled masters of depicting a varied array of emotions. In *Snow White* we have, besides the heroine, the wicked Queen, an admittedly wooden Prince, and the seven dwarves: Grumpy, Dopey, Sleepy, Bashful, Sneezy, Happy, and Doc.

In *Peter Pan* Disney provides us with a sort of ultimate escapist film. Wendy, Michael, and John are transported to Never-Never Land by Peter, with the unwilling assistance of a resentful Tinker Bell. There, they engage in mock battle with the Indians and a life-or-death battle with Captain Hook and the pirates: loosing the first and emerging quite victorious in the latter. The major flaw in the film is that Peter's victories over Hook are too effortless, depriving us of any real conflict. Nevertheless, the animation is excellent. Late Victorian London is depicted quite convincingly, and the overhead view of Peter and the others flying hundreds of yards above the city at nighttime is breathtaking.

Dumbo and *Bambi*, unlike *Pan*, are almost exclusievely animal-oriented. In *Dumbo* the animals are depicted in caricature, and the story relies heavily on the atmosphere of its circus setting and the personality of Dumbo's mouse friend, a maverick who gets the baby elephant into as much trouble as he is trying to get him out of. *Bambi*, by contrast, is very naturalistic. For this film Disney kept live deer in the studio back lot and instituted special art classes using numerous texts and thousands of feet of live action film to ensure accurate portrayal of the animals by his artists. In *Bambi* the conflicts are genuine — the hunters and the forest fires inflict a certain amount of real and irreversable tragedy on Bambi's world. Comic relief is provided by Thumper the rabbit, Flower the skunk, and Bambi himself, who makes his share of mistakes while growing up in a fairly complex world.

These are only a few of the major Disney films. *Pinocchio, Cinderella, A Hundred and One Dalmations, Lady and the Tramp, Sleeping Beauty, The Sword in the Stone*—all are at least excellent, and all have their great moments. It is true that a few of these employ some cliches. Nevertheless, the virtue of these films far surpass the few faults.

Few other filmmakers have taken advantage of the relative freedom of animation with as much imagination as Disney has; only the Beatle's *Yellow Submarine* comes to mind at the moment. None, however, even approach him in excellence of technique or in the more deeply satisfying nature of his content. If you can drop your prejudice against "cartoons," give these films a try. They give the sort of spontaneous, soul-releasing pleasure that may have been missing from your life these past ten years or so.

Rocking, rolling and letting it all hang out

No Aggies, it is not Elvis who is shaking, swaying and singing to a group of A&M students gathered near Rudder Tower. It is Michael Williamson, a sophomore meteorology major who lives in Hart Hall. Williamson knows many of Elvis' tunes and uses introductions and gestures when mimicking the rock star. He sang into an imaginary microphone and did not actually play the guitar during this weekend performance which lasted over an hour.

Battalion photos by Edgar Peláez

British film

Climax lost in fantasy, bizarre actio

By JEFF GILLEY

A band of early American pioneers stop their chores for a moment to gaze out across the New Mexican wilderness. A dust cloud is heading for them from across the prairie. Mothers grab their children and cower as the object speeds by — a large, black limousine.

It all sounds a bit bizarre, but "The Man Who Fell to Earth," now at the Cinema I and II Theater, is a pretty bizarre movie. British director Nicholas Roeg (an ex-cinematographer and the director of the brilliant "Don't Look Now" has chucked away the rule book on this one and handed the reins to his imagination. The result is a surrealistic, atmospheric film sure to be loved by some and loathed by others.

"The Man Who Fell to Earth" is actually a fantasy disguised as science fiction. Rock star David Bowie is Thomas Jerome Newton, a waspish alien who comes to earth to escape a massive drought ravaging his own world. In hopes of someday returning for his family, he succeeds in

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forming a gigantic, global corporation with himself as its eccentric Howard Hughes-type leader.

He shares his rise to the top with his patent lawyer (Buck Henry), a devious college professor (Rip Torn), and a klutzy bellhop (Candy Clark). Inevitably, suspicion falls upon Newton's true identity, and, in a superb scene of macabre humor, he unmasks himself to Candy Clark in the grand tradition of "The Phantom of the Opera." The greed and intolerance of the earthlings eventually dash Newton's hopes of rescuing his family; he is left a lonely alcoholic, stranded in an alien world.

Throughout it all, the viewer has the impression that he's been taken for a wild ride in a cement mixer: unrelated sequences are intercut together, ambiguous shots creep in, and the plot acrobatically flashes backward, forward and sideways. It is incredible, then, that the film manages to be not only coherent but actually gripping for four-fifths of its length. Near the end it unfortunately loses its direction, and the patron trods out with the notion that he's somehow missed the climax.

David Bowie is physically perfect for the role of the ashen-faced alien, and is quite effective drifting around with a countenance reminiscent of Count Dracula. (It's admitedly difficult to restrain a smirk when, at one point, Candy Clark reprimands him by urging him to "eat more." Bowie, falling out of a building, Buck Henry has little to do in his role, but praise of praise go to both Rip Torn and Candy Clark for marvelous performances.

As in Roeg's previous films, "The Man Who Fell to Earth" explores the consequences of a man wrenched from the security of his normal life. In the end, Thomas Newton sacrifices both his physical and spiritual identity to the planet. The audience may well sacrifice a few fixed notions about film and film-making while watching "The Man Who Fell to Earth" isn't a perfect movie, but it definitely proves that we've been invaded by a promising talent named Nicholas Roeg.

Whodunnit? The author did

By LUCINDA JOHNSON

Getting to know the unraveler of the mystery is a substantial part of the pleasure derived from reading mystery novels. The mention of a mystery brings to mind the character who has been the solver rather than the particular puzzle which required solving. Such a character is usually a police officer, a detective, or some amateur crime-stopper enthusiast — someone who is likely enough to be caught in such a role. How likely would a 60-odd-year-old executive be in such a role?

This is to introduce the reader to the unlikely hero, John Putnam Thatcher, who animates the delightful mystery stories of Emma Lathen (a pseudonym). Emma Lathen has a uniquely sophisticated and urbane sense of humor which she puts to enviably entertaining use in her numerous inner sanctum mysteries. Emma Lathen manages to not only amuse with fine storytelling and a superb command of the language, but she familiarizes the reader with many different intimate aspects of finance and business since each of her books deals with a specific industry or business venture. She has been turning out her special mysteries for many years now. They are special because they center primarily around the heart of the throbbing economic capital of the world, Wall Street, and because her champion is the indefatigable John Putnam Thatcher.

John Putnam Thatcher is the 60-odd-year-old senior vice-president of the Sloan Guaranty Trust, the third largest bank in the world. He is

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the director of the Sloan's trust and investment departments. It is through the Sloan's loans, backings and investments that Thatcher is drawn into one incredible inner sanctum situation after another.

Among the many Lathen titles, Murder To Go" (Simon & Schuster) is a great one for anyone to read if they have ever eaten or worked in a fast-food restaurant. "Murder To Go" is concerned with a series of mass poisonings on the East Coast. The poisonings stem from a Sloan investment — a new and very successful franchise company, a highly automated, phone-in chicken dinner delivery company (boasting more than 30 kinds of chicken dinners) called Chicken Tonight, Inc. Miss Lathen takes us deep into the franchised, automated food service world through the unique viewpoint of the financial backers. As in all of Emma Lathen's stories, the wrongs must be righted; not purely for the sake of justice, but for the sake of the investment, for the sake of money. It is not as cold-blooded a motive as it might at first appear to be. John Putnam Thatcher is the element that keeps Wall Street human and warm enough to lean on comfortably.

I must send you on to another of Emma's finest, "Sweet and Low" (Simon & Schuster). This time our beloved J. P. Thatcher is in Dreyer, New York for a trustee foundation meeting for the Dreyer Chocolate Company, when, oh no, the company's chocolate buyer is found murdered in a motel pool. The situation is complicated by a bold series of murders right on the ticker-taped floor of the Exchange in New York. Emma teaches us all about the futures market, chocolate futures in particular, and of course all about the chocolate industry. It is a revealing tale told with Emma Lathen's unmatchable wit.

Emma Lathen has masterly caught this civilization by its real and driving super-structure — high finance. She shows it to us with a wry smile on her face and a knowing nod of her head.

Stills and Young, together again

By PAUL MUELLER

Some bands never die — they just keep regrouping forever. Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young is one such band. The band broke up in 1970, after releasing only two studio albums (the first was actually recorded without Young), but ever since then its four members have been reunited in various combinations both on records and in concert.

The post-CSN&Y groups that have appeared so far include Stephen Stills and Graham Nash, Nash and David Crosby, and now the latest, Stills and Neil Young. Stills and Young have just released an album entitled "Long May You Run."

Stills seems to have had more influence on this collaboration than Young. Overall, the musical style of the album resembles his style more than Young's, being a bit more relaxed than Young's music usually is. The fact that both men are good guitarists keeps the music interesting but keyboards and strings are used effectively to smooth out the rough spots. The vocals are also more restrained than might be expected and Young shows little of the whiny voice that makes him difficult to listen to at times.

Lyrically the album is more evenly balanced. Stills and Young contributed about equally in this respect and it is not hard to tell which

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one wrote which songs. Young's lyrics here have a characteristically vague quality, and one gets the feeling that he is often writing more about his daydreams than about real life. One theme he has used before is that of the "dream girl" whom he visualizes but hasn't found yet, and she makes her appearance in "Midnight On The Bay" and "Ocean Girl." Stills, on the other hand, likes to sing the blues, a form which traditionally deals with hard reality. His blues songs on this album include "Make Love To You" and "12-8 Blues."

The song on the album that most people are likely to have heard is the title track, which is not the best song on the album. It is, however, a good illustration of the fact that blandness can sell a record just as easily as real quality. Also on the first side are "Make Love To You," with a good combination of guitar and organ; "Midnight On The Bay," with Young's harmonica contributing to the romantic atmosphere; and

"Ocean Girl," which tries to be regga but isn't.

Side Two begins with "Let It Shine," a good example of Neil Young's brand of country music. The lyrics are a bit fuzzy around the edges, but the guitar playing makes up for that deficiency as Stills and Young trade off on lead and rhythm. Next comes "12-8 Blues," featuring Stills' guitar and good bass backing. This is followed by "Fountainebleu," a Neil Young song reminiscent of "Down By the River" with its high-pitched guitar and vocals. The album ends with "Guardian Angel" by Stills, featuring some fine guitar playing and vocals.