

Man behind voices of Tweety, Bugs Bunny refuses retirement

NEW YORK (AP) — Thufferin' thuccotash!

Mel, ah-say-Mel Blanc, the voice behind Bugs, Daffy, Tweety, Porky, Woody and almost every cartoon character from here to Cuc-amonga, is 80 years old and has just written an autobiography.

Blanc, in a warm-hearted and fascinating new book, "That's Not All Folks: My Life in the Golden Age of Cartoons and Radio" says Warner Bros. produced 1,003 cartoons, and he voiced 848 of them.

His favorite character? Reached by telephone at his Los Angeles home, Blanc answered in the voice of Brooklyn's most famous bunny: "Everybody knows who I am, doc. I don't cayuh where dey are or who dey are. Even up in Mars dey know about me. HEHEHEHEH!"

"Bugs: that's my favorite character. I even have him tatooned on my shirt."

The "Looney Tunes" and "Merrie Melodies" churned out by Warner Bros. in a dank office dubbed Termite Terrace by Blanc and his cartooning co-workers had their heyday from the 1930s to the mid-'50s.

Their reruns are arguably still the funniest things on television. They parodied film stars from Humphrey Bogart to Katharine Hepburn, tweaked politicians and contained salty, hilarious characters that are a far cry from the phoney, unfunny

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— Mel Blanc, the voice of numerous cartoon characters

goody-goodies and baddy-baddies that populate today's junk-food TV cartoon shows.

The box-office success this summer of "Who Framed Roger Rabbit," a mystery-fantasy in which cartoon characters must contend with the human world, proves that the public still eats up good animation.

Blanc, in fact, did the voices of Daffy Duck, Tweety Bird, Bugs Bunny and Sylvester the Cat in "Roger Rabbit," but he says he hasn't seen the film yet.

Cartoon connoisseurs will find plenty of tidbits to relish in Blanc's autobiography, co-written by Philip Bashe.

- A few samples:
- The theme music for Warner Bros. cartoons is a tune called "The Merry-Go-Round Broke Down."
 - Voice characterizations are done first, not the pictures, to the surprise of many.
 - A single six-minute Warner

Bros. cartoon took four or five artists sketching about 16,000 pictures and 60 backgrounds.

• Bugs Bunny in his earliest incarnation in the late '30s was called "Happy Rabbit." Blanc hated the name, and in 1940 he changed it to Bugs. He decided to give him a tough-guy Brooklyn accent, even though Blanc grew up in San Francisco and Portland, Ore., and has never set foot in Brooklyn.

• The hardest voice characterization for Blanc was Yosemite Sam since it had to be done at a constant holler. Sylvester was the easiest because he sounded closest to Blanc's natural voice, except for the exaggerated lisp.

After the demise of Termite Terrace, Blanc went on to do more modern cartoon characters, from The Flintstones' Barney Rubble to the Frito Bandito.

Blanc gained more fame than fortune from his cartoon characteriza-

tions. The most Warner Bros. ever paid him for being the voice behind their cartoons was \$20,000.

The only hint of bitterness in his autobiography is about the way Warners copyrighted the voices of the cartoon characters Blanc made famous. It means he can't publicly say, "What's up, Doc?" or "I tawt I taw a puddy-tat" or other taglines he coined without getting the studio's permission.

He did considerably better financially as a radio and TV personality. For years on the Jack Benny program he did the sound effects for the wheezing old Maxwell that the skinflint comedian supposedly drove. He played the train depot caller who broke up audiences with, "Train leaving on track five for Anaheim, Azusa and Cuc-amonga!"

Age and the emphysema that forces him to use oxygen at night have fortunately not impaired the gifted larynx of "the man of a thousand voices." Well, maybe he's down to a few hundred now.

The thought of retiring is, as Daffy would say, deth-picable.

"You know, I don't think I'll ever stop until I'm dead," he says. "I have to have a driver now. He drives me to work, either to Warner Bros. or one of the studios in town. I allow two hours for them to record me. It never takes that much, because they still call me 'one take Blanc.'"

Mothers can give normal childbirth after Caesareans

NEW YORK (AP) — Women can go through labor and normal childbirth after three or more Caesarean sections, even when delivering twins or facing other complications, an obstetrician says.

Labor and normal delivery after multiple Caesarean sections can cut the nation's skyrocketing Caesarean section rate by 30 percent, Dr. Jeffrey Phelan of Los Angeles said.

"At the present time, Caesarean delivery is the No. 1 most common hospital-based operative procedure," Phelan said.

About one in four children in the United States are born by Caesarean section, Phelan said in a recent interview.

About 455,000 of the 906,000 Caesareans performed in 1986 — the last year for which figures were available — were unnecessary, according to the Public Citizen Health Research Group in Washington.

It said adherence to the outdated policy of "once a Caesarean, always a Caesarean" was one of the main reasons the number was so high.

Surgical deliveries — at nearly

twice the cost of natural delivery — accounted for 5.5 percent of all births in 1970, 10.4 percent in 1975 and 20.3 percent in 1983, according to federal statistics.

The average cost of a Caesarean section in 1986 was \$4,270, compared with about \$2,560 for normal birth in a delivery room and \$2,450 for birth in a birthing room, according to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.

In a series of studies of labor and delivery following Caesarean sections, Phelan found that women who have had one Caesarean have an 80 percent chance of delivering a second baby normally if they are allowed to go into labor.

Women with two prior Caesareans have a 70 percent chance of normal childbirth if they attempt it, Phelan reported in Boston at a recent meeting of the ACOG.

Phelan is now analyzing data from more recent studies in which he has found that women can have normal childbirth after Caesareans even when carrying more than one fetus or when the fetus is turned in the so-called breach position.

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