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The Animated Man: A Life of Walt Disney

By Michæl Barrier



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The Animated Man: A Life of Walt Disney By Michæl Barrier

Walt Disney (1901-1966) was one of the most significant creative forces of the twentieth century, a man who made a lasting impact on the art of the animated film, the history of American business, and the evolution of twentieth-century American culture. He was both a creative visionary and a dynamic entrepreneur, roles whose demands he often could not reconcile.

In his compelling new biography, noted animation historian Michael Barrier avoids the well-traveled paths of previous biographers, who have tended to portray a blemish-free Disney or to indulge in lurid speculation. Instead, he takes the full measure of the man in his many aspects. A consummate storyteller, Barrier describes how Disney transformed himself from Midwestern farm boy to scrambling young businessman to pioneering artist and, finally, to entrepreneur on a grand scale. Barrier describes in absorbing detail how Disney synchronized sound with animation in *Steamboat Willie*; created in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* sympathetic cartoon characters whose appeal rivaled that of the best live-action performers; grasped television's true potential as an unparalleled promotional device; and—not least—parlayed a backyard railroad into the Disneyland juggernaut.

Based on decades of painstaking research in the Disney studio's archives and dozens of public and private archives in the United States and Europe, *The Animated Man* offers freshly documented and illuminating accounts of Disney's childhood and young adulthood in rural Missouri and Kansas City. It sheds new light on such crucial episodes in Disney's life as the devastating 1941 strike at his studio, when his ambitions as artist and entrepreneur first came into serious conflict.

Beginning in 1969, two and a half years after Disney's death, Barrier recorded long interviews with more than 150 people who worked alongside Disney, some as early as 1922. Now almost all deceased, only a few were ever interviewed for other books. Barrier juxtaposes Disney's own recollections against the memories of those other players to great effect. What emerges is a portrait of Walt Disney as a flawed but fascinating artist, one whose imaginative leaps allowed him to vault ahead of the competition and produce work that even today commands the attention of audiences worldwide.



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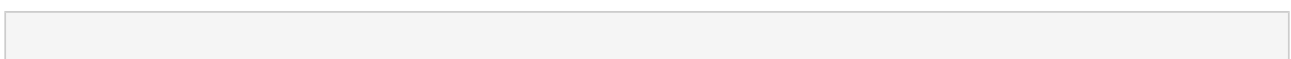
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Editorial Review

From the Inside Flap

"This book is important not just as a biography, but also as a cultural history that provides great insight to one of the best-known creative minds of the twentieth century. Barrier's engaging and highly informative writing style offers excellent perspective on how much changed in the world of animated cartoons during Disney's lifetime, and just how much the Disney studio brought about these changes. The remarkable quantity of first-person accounts, interviews, and other primary evidence is one of the book's most important attributes. This biography chronicles Disney's life while keeping in view the technological and stylistic developments in animation and filmmaking that Disney helped bring about. Barrier's deft navigation of a wide variety of historical streams gives *Animated Man* a uniquely comprehensive and compelling story about Walt Disney."—Daniel Goldmark, author of *Tunes for 'Toons: Music and the Hollywood Cartoon*

"Michael Barrier's biography of Walt Disney is impressive, with a remarkable range of interviews. I was fascinated to see this mysterious world laid out as an industrial process—somehow, this makes what we see on the screen even more miraculous."—Kevin Brownlow, Director, *Cecil B De Mille: American Epic and Garbo*

"*The Animated Man* is by far the best critical study to date of Walt Disney and his worlds: corporate, personal, ideological, architectural. Michael Barrier's years of discussion with Disney's collaborators and family members make for a richly textured discussion of a figure often dismissed by the scholarly community as a vulgarian of the worst sort. Barrier shows us a tireless innovator, a man of deep feeling, a true American original who has woven himself into the very fabric of modern culture."—Kara Ann Marling, editor, *Designing Disney's Theme Parks: The Architecture of Reassurance*

About the Author

Michael Barrier founded and edited *Funnyworld*, the first serious magazine devoted to animation and the comics. He is the author of *Hollywood Cartoons: American Animation in Its Golden Age* (1999).

Users Review

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Karl Harms:

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