Serious Business: The Art and Commerce of Animation in America From Betty Boop To Toy Story

Stefan Kanfer
An intimate and astonishing illustrated history of American animation, its legends, and its legacy.

Acclaimed critic and historian Stefan Kanfer follows the ascent of America's most beloved and successful original art form from vaudeville sideshow to global industry, in the process holding up a mirror to the passing parade of cartoons, a mirror in which their captured reflections leave an indelible record of the changing nature of American tastes, values, and dreams.

Mark Kausler reviews "Serious Business: The Art and Commerce of Animation in America From Betty Boop to Toy Story," and has some serious problems. By Mark Kausler | Tuesday, July 1, 1997 at 12:00am. In Reviews | ANIMATIONWorld. Oh! My achin' eyeballs! The title "Serious Business" led me to believe the book might cover the business side of animation, history reflected through numbers, and include profit and loss statements, salary highs and lows for animators and other creative workers, and reports on profit participation by producers. I'd love to know if Leon Schlesinger or Fred Quimby got any kickbacks or percentages of their operating budgets, and how much!
Certainly the optical toys generally credited with having led up to the invention of the cinématographe, were more often dependent upon drawings than photographs. Emile Reynaud’s Praxinoscope projected a moving strip of images onto a screen for a paying audience in 1892, three years before the Lumièrè première; his strips were hand-drawn, did not repeat in cycles as the zoetrope bands did, and lasted for several minutes each. Photographed onto modern film stock, they can still be shown as animated cartoons. Stokowski’s influence expanded the project and the idea eventually evolved into the landmark animation feature film Fantasia (1940), for which Stokowski had suggested the title, as one which indicates “a musical composition without a strict form”; quoted in Serious Business: The Art and Commerce of Animation in America from Betty Boop to Toy Story (2000) by Stefan Kanfer. I would like to have been present, if I could have my choice of all moments in music history, when Stokowski suddenly became conscious of his beautiful hands. That must have been a moment. Like stout Cortez [sic] on a peak in Darien (I know it was Balboa) he saw before him a limitless expanse, a whole uncharted sea that might be subjected to his influence, free from the encumbrance of a baton. Art and commerce combine and collide again and again in Stefan Kanfer’s history, with results that range from predictably dismaying to hilarious. Take Daffy Duck’s signature voice: If Warner Bros. producer Leon Schlesinger hadn’t been such a tightfisted employer, Chuck Jones, Tex Avery, and the rest of his legendary animation team might never have created the thputtering duck to lampoon the boss’s speech impairment. To know the cartoons America has loved is to know America: the Jazz Age’s infatuation with Betty Boop’s shimmy; F.D.R.’s public embrace of Disney’s The Three Little Pigs and its smash theme song "Whose Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf" during the Great Depression; the adoption during World War II of brash, indomitable Bugs Bunny as an.