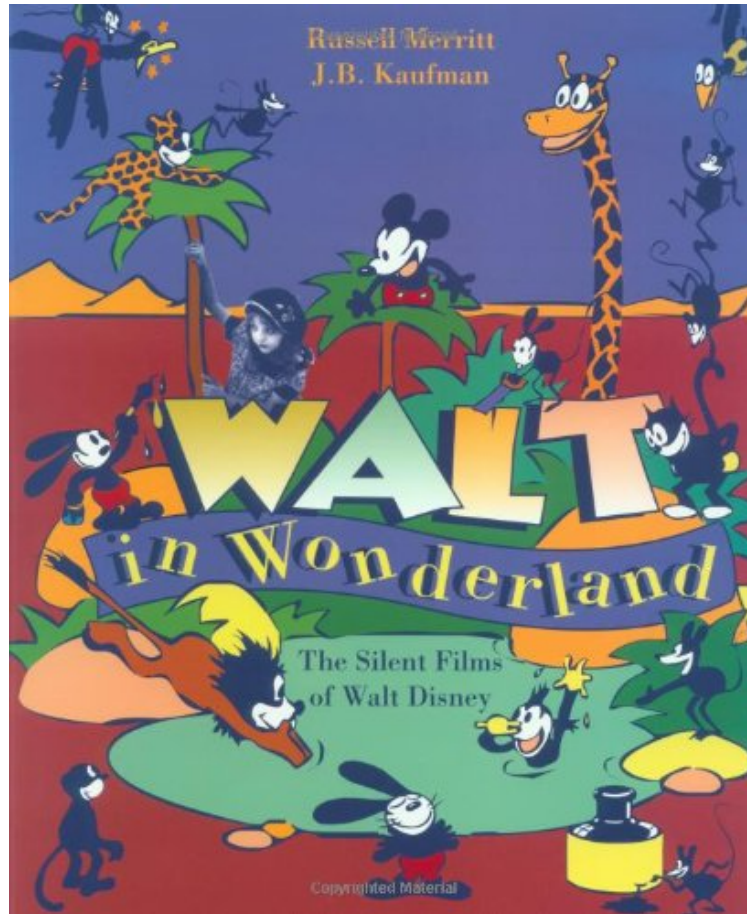


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Walt in Wonderland: The Silent Films of Walt Disney

Russell Merritt, J. B. Kaufman

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Russell Merritt, J. B. Kaufman : Walt in Wonderland: The Silent Films of Walt Disney before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Walt in Wonderland: The Silent Films of Walt Disney:

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Tucker's Tooth. Martha. Alice. Oswald. Before Mickey Mouse, these were the characters and films that represented the Disney name. You might be familiar with some of them and a few of them are only known through production notes, stills and roughed-out sketches. Merritt and Kaufman's book is a historical, critical and very satisfying look at the silent films of Walt Disney. It might sound fairly flat to read an entire book on silent films, but it is engaging and very well-written. Not only will you gain insight into the creativity and themes that developed in the first films, but you will come away with a better understanding of the Company and early animation. Russell Merritt, PhD., is currently an Adjunct Professor of Film Studies at UC Berkeley. In addition to his writings on the silent films and Silly Symphonies of the Disney Company, he is considered an authority on D.W. Griffith. J. B. Kaufman is an independent film historian who has published extensively on Disney animation. This title examines all of the known silent films produced by Walt Disney. Starting with the earliest work in Kansas City (1921) to the beginnings of Mickey Mouse (1928). This is the quintessential look at Walt's silent films and should be in every researcher's library. The authors have created a singular treatise on the evolution of Disney animated films from silence to sound. In addition to covering the films, *Walt In Wonderland* is a fairly in-depth look at the beginnings of Walt Disney Productions. From the Kansas City Film Ad to Laugh-O-Gram Films to the first Disney Brothers' Studio on Kingswell Avenue. There are stills from most of the films and a plethora of historical photos of Disney during his first years in the animation field. Scattered throughout the book are production sketches, scripts and early storyboards. There are four main sections covered in the book: the importance of The Cat and Rabbit Years, the Kansas City Period, Alice Comedies and Oswald the Lucky Rabbit. Each section looks in frank detail at the animation and state of the studio at the time. Often underlined is the importance of certain works in the overall scheme of the Disney creative canon. Included is a complete list of all of the silent films made by Walt Disney from 1921 to 1928. Many times, the only information available was from eyewitness testimonies, sketches, summary sheets and the collection of private individuals. "It is hard to look at Disney's work in silent animation apart from the blinding afterimage of Mickey Mouse, the Silly Symphonies, and Disney's subsequent productions. Inevitably, the associations with Disney, the reinventor of fairy tales and amusement parks, the ubiquitous purveyor of American sweetness and light, affect what we look for when we watch the earliest films. Where did it all come from? Where are the clues that reveal Mickey and Snow White lurking in the wings? Were those bourgeois values always there, lurking below the surface like some Faustian devil, or did they only come later with prosperity and creeping middle age?" --p. 14. Merritt and Kaufman do a fantastic job of answering the questions they pose. You will leave this book with a much greater and deeper appreciation for the strides made by Disney and his collaborators.

During the Roaring Twenties--from 1921 through 1928--Walt Disney and his friends made more than ninety silent cartoons, turning them out as often as one or two per month. Years before Mickey Mouse, the young entrepreneur recruited and nurtured an extraordinary array of talented people. Drawing on interviews with Disney's coworkers, Disney's business papers, promotional materials, scripts, drawings, and correspondence, the richly illustrated *Walt in Wonderland* reconstructs Disney's silent film career and places his early films in critical perspective.

From Booklist There are plenty of coffee-table books on the films of Walt Disney, one, it seems, for virtually each Disney feature. This tome's different, though. It's a serious look at the silent films Disney made in the 1920s before he revolutionized the industry with the first sound cartoon, *Steamboat Willie*. Its first section affords an incisive critical overview, showing how these early, often pedestrian "apprentice" films--which reflected Disney's midwestern values and showed the influence of live-action comedies--laid the groundwork for later animation techniques and conventions. Many characteristics of these cartoons resurfaced in Disney's later work--particularly the personality-based comedy that was as integral to the popularity of Mickey Mouse as initially was the gimmick of sound. The book's lengthier second section, based on studio records, promotional materials, and interviews with survivors, is a detailed history of this period of Disneyana. An important and valuable contribution to film scholarship. Gordon Flagg "A scholarly and entertaining book that is a combination of film critique, studio history, and oral history illustrated with wonderful original animation drawings, storyboards, and rare photos." -- John Canemaker, *New York Times* Book "Merritt and Kaufman have delved deep into the business of the art as well as into the art itself... They show us genius emerging by trial and error, not in a puff of Aladdin's lamp." -- Simon Louvish, *Sight and Sound* "Merritt and Kaufman's enthusiasm is infectious and they point out much that is new and important about the early work." -- Robin Allan, *Animation Journal* "Scholarship has rarely been so engaging and charming as in Merritt and Kaufman's detailed study of the silent film animation of Walt Disney. The work is, simply, wonderful." -- Choice "The whole fascinating 8-year period predating Mickey is chronicled in [this] meticulously researched book... The authors point out interesting links to the work of other animators (of such characters as Felix the Cat and Krazy Kat) and also demonstrate parallels to the routines of such silent clowns as Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd, and Charlie Chaplin." -- Linda Rosencrantz, *Miami Herald* About the Author Russell Merritt is a visiting professor of film history at the University of California-Berkeley. He has published on D. W. Griffith, silent film, animation, and fairy tales. He has also served as senior consultant for the 1993 Kevin Brownlow and David Gill Emmy-nominated program, *D. W. Griffith: Father of Film*. J.

B. Kaufman is an independent film historian living in Wichita, Kansas, who has published extensively on Disney animation and silent film history.