

I Believe...  
"I Tot I Taw A Puddy Tat: The Lasting Power of Cartoons"  
by Rhett DeVelay  
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I believe...it's truly amazing that every person I talk to regarding their favorite cartoon becomes very animated (pun intended) as they gladly recall a favorite episode, or will grin from ear to ear at the thought of a cherished cartoon character. Try this experiment at the next party you go to: Ask people who their favorite cartoon character was and stand back. I've seen this happen for years and realized that we're still heavily influenced by the cartoons we all grew up with whether they were the Katzanjammer Kids, Mickey Mouse, Betty Boop, Bugs Bunny, Tweety Bird and Sylvester, Johnny Quest, the Smurfs, Mutant Ninja Turtles, Mr. McGoo, Wile E. Coyote and Roadrunner, Blondie, Lil' Abner, Prince Valiant, Powerpuff Girls, Mary Jane and Sniffles, Yogi Bear, Scooby Doo, Speed Racer, Justice League, Space Ghost, Peanuts, Beanie and Cecil, Felix the Cat, Super Friends, Hong Kong Phooey, Mighty Mouse, the Flintstones, Tarzan and the -Man's: Bat, Super, Spider and Aqua.

Whether you're 18 or 80 I'll bet a whole bunch of other cartoon characters you loved are racing through your mind and you're wondering how I could have overlooked them. Well, there are too many to list but I want you to think about how those characters have stolen into our hearts and minds no matter how old we are. Anyone who loves cartoons will know who spoke the first seven words in my article title. And, who wouldn't know who said, "What's up doc?" unless, perhaps, they're still in their momma's womb. (Answer: Tweety Bird and Bugs Bunny, respectively, for the woefully cartoon-challenged).

The great animator and cartoon director, Chuck Jones, wrote a couple of wonderful books on the creation and development of Bugs Bunny, Pepé Le Pew, Speedy Gonzales, Foghorn Leghorn, Daffy Duck, Henery Hawk, and all the rest from the Warner Bros. collection. His asides in the two books he wrote, *Chuck Amuck* and *Chuck Reducks*, could have been spoken by Bugs Bunny himself since they're sarcastic and hilarious. The man was an extension of the cartoons he drew and directed. He gratefully credits his success to the two other most famous cartoon creators/directors Friz Freleng and Tex Avery, whom he actually considered to be the greatest of all. Sometimes, I feel like Bugs Bunny (my personal favorite) when dealing with someone REALLY stupid and clueless similar to Elmer Fudd (whom I, unfortunately, physically resemble more and more every day). Check out the following cartoons if you've never seen them featuring Daffy, Pepé Yosemite Sam, Witch Hazel, Elmer, Porky and Bugs: *Deduce, You Say; Cats-Bah; Bewitched Bunny; High Diving Hare; Rocket Squad; A Sheep in the Deep; Duck Dodgers in the 24 1/2 Century; Rabbit of Seville; Ali Baba Bunny; Frigid Hare; Feed the Kitty; Often an Orphan; Scaredy Cat*; and the great *What's Opera, Doc* which is one of the three cartoons in the National Treasury of Film that lists only 375 films such as "Birth of a Nation", "Gone With the Wind", "Casablanca" and "Citizen Kane". Pretty good company. In the April 7<sup>th</sup> edition of the Wall Street Journal reported that "What's Opera Doc", "Rabbit of Seville" and "Long-Haired Hare" were part of New York's Lincoln Center weekend family series "Reel to Real" which introduces children to the world of Opera through cartoons.

And then there was Jay Ward and his crew of crazy characters: Rocky and Bullwinkle (naïve and dumb), Dudley Do-Right (dumber), George of the Jungle (dumbest), Mr. Peabody and Sherman (truly subversive stuff making the dog the smart one), Boris and Natasha (communists, oh my), Snidely Whiplash (dastardly and inept!) and Fractured Fairy Tales that pre-dated Shrek's twisted antics by almost forty years. I remember an article written by Jay Ward in which he spoke about being with all these guys and a lone woman (the great June Foray who voiced all the female characters) around a table smoking nothing stronger than filterless cigarettes, discussing story ideas and trying to top each other with outrageous concepts until they were crying with laughter. Ward swore they *never* made their cartoons for children. They made them for themselves and if children found humor in their product, so be it, but it was never their goal (much to every adult's delight that remembers those wonderful cartoons). There used to be a Jay Ward gift shop on the corner of Sunset Blvd. one block west of Crescent Heights Blvd. in Los Angeles where you could buy CD's, DVD's, T-shirts, and numerous *tchochkes* of your favorite Ward characters. You couldn't miss the shop since it had a huge, garish statue of Bullwinkle holding Rocky in his hands. Wonderful stuff.

Whatever kind of childhood you may have had, cartoons still make us smile. Personally, I fondly remember lying on the floor laughing until my sides ached. They were, and still are, a bit of heaven on earth. To contact me write to [Musical.Theatre@hotmail.com](mailto:Musical.Theatre@hotmail.com)