
and the challenge of working with them and within them, will always belong to jazz, Conroy says. But now trumpeter Wynton Marsalis, the controversial 33-year-old director of Jazz at Lincoln Center and a leader of the new generation of artists, is taking the music into relatively unexplored territory: "long forms, forms of a length we usually associate with so-called classical music."

Marsalis's *Blood on the Fields*, which premiered at Lincoln Center last year, marks this expansion, in Conroy's view. A three-hour secular oratorio in 20 sections, it presents a narrative about slavery in the South and transcends the old division between classical jazz (Dixie) and modern jazz. "The new generation of jazz players and composers feels free to draw from everywhere, the more sources the better. Dixie, Bartok, be-bop, regional music—all grist for the mill," Conroy says.

Critics charge that Marsalis is leading jazz toward a lifeless classicism. But *Blood on the Fields* shows "how jazz conventions and jazz 'feel' can retain and renew energy while expanding into large forms that contain other elements and other traditions," Conroy writes. "Jazz need no longer be marginalized, neither in its structures nor its emotional and intellectual ambitions."

The Avante-Garde Walt Disney

"Walt Disney: Art and Politics in the American Century" by Steven Watts, in *The Journal of American History* (June 1995), 1125 E. Atwater Ave., Bloomington, Ind. 47401-3701.

Walt Disney's name today is indelibly linked to a corporate entertainment colossus, embracing everything from theme parks to television networks. It was not always so. Disney (1901-66), notes Watts, a historian at the University of Missouri, Columbia, "was once taken quite seriously as an artist."

Throughout the 1930s and early '40s, intellectuals joined millions of moviegoers in praising Disney's innovative animated fantasies. Impressed by his Silly Symphonies series,

his Mickey Mouse shorts, and feature-length animations such as *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) and *Pinocchio* (1940), critics hailed Disney as an artistic genius and modernist pioneer—the most significant figure in graphic art since Leonardo da Vinci, said political cartoonist David Low.

Disney's pioneering work in animation drew on the culture of modernism for much of its "atmosphere," Watts argues. Emerging in opposition to 19th-century Victorianism, modernism challenged "the ascendancy of reason and judgment over impulse, of educated taste over folk and popular preferences, of the adult over the childish, of the conscious over the preconscious mind." In Disney's animation, "the line between imagination and reality" was continually being blurred "to produce a wondrous universe where animals spoke, plants and trees acted consciously, and inanimate objects felt emotion."

Two short films show "the full emotional spectrum of Disney's modernist vision," Watts says—and his awareness of Freudian themes. In *Flowers and Trees* (1932), two young trees fall in love and, with the aid of their forest friends, the wild birds, overcome adversity to marry, before a celebrating audience of wildflowers. In *The Mad Doctor* (1933), by contrast, "Pluto is kidnapped and hauled off to a castle where a crazy physician and vivisectionist will use his body parts for macabre medical experiments." (It all turns out to have been a nightmare.)

Yet Disney was also moving, Watts observes, toward "greater and greater realism in animation. Increasingly, the object of Disney's aesthetic quest was a sunny, naturalistic style with roots in the Victorian 19th century . . . a 'realistic' depiction of people, objects, and scenes where dark or messy dimensions of reality had been wiped away." As the critics caught on, their misgivings about Disney mounted. By the late 1940s, they were portraying him as an innovative artist who had squandered his talent. His films, sneered Manny Farber in the *New Republic*, had degenerated into "lollypop art." Disney deserves more credit, in Watts's view. He was a rare hybrid: a "sentimental modernist."