

# Betty Boop, What a Dog!

BETTY BOOP was cartoondom's answer to Clara Bow, the provocative "It' Girl" of early motion pictures.

While there were stick-figure females in cartoons before her, Betty had some flesh added in all the right places. That, her big eyes, baby face, scanty clothing and coy flapper charm made her downright appealing in the 1930s.

But what few people today know is that Betty first appeared as a nameless female pooch in a Max Fleischer cartoon short (Dizzy Dishes, 1930). Soon, Betty shed her canine nature and became the "Boop-oop-a-doop Girl."

She was created by animator Myron "Grim" Natwick, who also was lead animator for the leading title character in Walt Disney's Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. He also helped animate Mickey Mouse in Fantasia and worked on early Popeye cartoons.

Betty enthralled theater-goers with her brash and independent, yet disarmingly innocent, behavior. By 1934, though, her free spirit and décolletage had been dampened as the Hays office—the film industry's guardian of decency—started making its presence felt.

Betty's popularity even resulted in a 1934 lawsuit. Entertainer Helen Kane claimed Betty had been based on her stage persona and that Max Fleischer, Fleischer Studios and Paramount Pictures had stolen Helen's popularity and her fans. She lost.

In Betty's heyday—1930 to 1939—she was in well over 100 cartoons. In the only one that wasn't black-and-white, she played Cinderella. The biggest surprise of that cartoon was that Betty's hair was reddish orange, not black.

Music was pervasive in Betty's cartoons, and jazz was often the music of choice. Live-action film of jazz musicians such as Louis Armstrong and Cab Calloway was often slipped into the cartoons as Betty danced away.

Her tiny voice was brought to life by Mae Questel, who also was the voice of Olive Oyl in early Popeye cartoons. (Many years later, Mae appeared in National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation as the delightfully dotty Aunt Bethany.) Betty (and Mae) made a cameo appearance in the 1988 movie Who Framed Roger Rabbit.

Today, Betty remains popular and her image is frequently seen—not bad for a Hollywood legend who mostly retired in 1939!

### **Cartoonist Had the Moves**

SEEKING MORE REALISM in the cartoons he drew, Max Fleischer had his brother Dave dress in a clown suit and filmed him sometime around World War I.

Then Max traced Dave's movements, frame by frame, into a cartoon setting. A variation of the technique, known as rotoscoping, is still used today, with computers now doing the work.

The studio also developed the method of placing cartoon characters in front of moving, three-dimensional backgrounds. Dave's cartoon figure became Koko the Clown, a central figure in the Fleischers' Out of the Inkwell cartoons.

In those cartoons, Koko interacts with the cartoonist, whose filmed hand is sometimes shown. Koko gets into all kinds of trouble after emerging from an inkwell—and sometimes gets erased by the irate cartoonist.

Later, the brothers made Popeye and Superman cartoons, as well as a full-length animated feature version of

“Gulliver’s Travels.”