

Animation. Pre-visit Activity 5. Fred O'Neill



Fred O'Neill was one of New Zealand's best known animators.

Read the article below on New Zealand Animator Fred O'Neill.

The Enchanted Forest

by Fred O'Neill of New Zealand

490ft. Kodachrome. Sound on tape. camera: Bolex RX16

A fairy tale with a Maori setting, this bit of ancient wizardry was made by Fred O'Neill who is something of a wizard himself when it comes to animating plasticine puppets and placing them in a world of his own creation.

The story concerns a wicked old witch who turns people into animals and makes them her slaves. In the end her victims are restored to human shape, while she is given a dose of her own medicine and becomes a lizard.

With its atmosphere of primitive magic, its transformation scenes and little touches of quiet humour, *The Enchanted Forest* is well suited to O'Neill's particular method of presentation - a method that he has made his own in such past Ten Best winners as *Phantasm*, *Flight to Venus* and *Hatupatu* and *The Bird Women*. Technically, the film is a brilliant piece of work. The puppets themselves and the settings are beautifully made with rich, glowing colours and varied textures filling every corner of the frame. The photography and the single-frame animation work are even more polished than they were in *Hatupatu*. And the sound track too - a weird, unmelodious kind of non-music - is cunningly calculated to heighten the effect of the visuals.

Some may regret that, as he becomes more expert and more sophisticated, O'Neill is tending to neglect the purely comic possibilities of his malleable raw materials, exploited with such slap-happy abandon in his early work. Others may find his characters too grotesque to be viewed without a shudder. None can deny, however, that he has done what he sets out to do with consummate skill.

FRED O'NEILL is a New Zealander who is no stranger to the ten Best competition, having already won three 'Oscars' and a Gold Star. He has also gained top awards in other international contests, including the Cannes Amateur Film Festival, the Australian Gold Cup and the South African Amateur Film Festival.

Forty five years of age, he lives in the city of Dunedin where he owns a large electroplating business and occasionally teaches landscape painting at the local university. blessed with an understanding wife, who shares many of his interests, he devotes every possible spare moment to film animation and his work is now so widely acclaimed that he has received a number of commercial offers - all of which he has refused.

Working at home with his own equipment he has produced a series of films for the New Zealand Government- including some for the Health Department that are shown in schools all over the country - all purely as a labour of love.

Of The Enchanted Forest he says: " I have filmed several Maori legends but their story lines are usually too slight. This time I decided to write the story myself with a good filmic plot and place it within the background and folklore of the Maori people.

"As a guess, it took some for hundred hours to make- I can't say exactly, just as others can never tell you how long they spend at golf or any other favourite pastime. It was, as usual a one -man effort, from writing the script to making the thirty odd puppets and numerous sets, to recording the track. I planned everything in great detail with the result that it wasted very little film and only had to re-take one scene.

"No special equipment was used, apart from a car indicator which allows me to trigger off single frames by remote control. Interchangeable heads were used on the puppets to give them more expression and the were made of the pliable plastic that I described in an ACW article, published January 23, 1964. The camera was mounted on a sturdy tripod and the sets were supported by a strong table.

"Part of the film is shot in subdued lighting, filtered through blue cellophane to give a night effect and in some cases- such as a dawn scene- the models were placed in front of screen and back projection used to fill in the sky effects.

"I feel myself that the film shows some progress over my earlier efforts and some day I may make something that satisfies me but, of course, when that happens it will probably be time to give up."

Answer the following questions:

1. What does the writer like about Fred O'Neill's animation 'The Enchanted Forest'?

2. What does he criticise about the animation?

3. What different jobs in the animation process did O'Neill do?

4. What is a solenoid and why did O'Neill use one?

5. How did O'Neill achieve the subdued lighting?
