



## A Brief Overview of Golden Age Hungarian Animation

Although you can find such well-known personalities as John Halas or George Pal at the beginning of Hungarian animation history between the two world wars, permanent animated film production was reinstated by a few animators who stayed in Hungary during the postwar period. Most importantly it was Gyula Macskássy, a former colleague of John Halas, who assisted the foundation of the state-owned Pannónia Filmstudio in 1951, which, being one of the leading animation studios of the world until the change of regime in 1989, became the very base of Hungarian animation.

Following the production of stereotypical children films and folktales during the highly centralized 50s, two shorts, *Pencil and India Rubber* and *Duel* by Macskássy and the cartoonist György Várnai, brought a breakthrough for Hungarian animation on an international scale in early 60s. From then onward, along with popular cartoon series for children purchased by the Hungarian National Television, special attention was given to short animations made primarily for a grown-up audience. These shorts, compared to the rigid political control of live action films, were centrally less censored as a matter of show of political liberty to the international arena at filmfestivals abroad. Also, because of the relative autonomy gained by the economic reforms in 1968, the production of animated family features were launched starting with *Johnny Corn cob* in 1973, and followed by other adaptations of Hungarian literary classics and mythology, such as *"Matt the Gooseboy"* (1979) by Attila Dargay, *"Son of the White Mare"* (1981) by Marcell Jankovics, *"Heroic Times"* (1983) by József Gémes, and by such popular animated features as *"Cat City"* (1986), an animal parody of Hollywood spy films by Béla Ternovszky. This rich period between the 60s the 80s is usually referred to as the golden age of Hungarian animation.

The new wave of short animations emerging in the 60s could effectively grasp the multilayered concerns of human existence. Largely influenced by twist-oriented caricatures. These absurd, satirical depictions of everyday situations can be hallmarked with shorts such as *"Concertissimo"* by József Gémes, *"Moto perpetuo"* by Béla Vajda or *"Scenes with Beans"* by Ottó Foky. Some directors choose to depict more universal themes of human existence and its purpose without having a direct (or rather indirect) reference to the current social-political situation. *"Sisyphus"*, an Oscar-nominated short film by Marcell Jankovics, who is one of the leading animation directors until today, gives a truly original twist to the ancient myth of human endeavour. In *"The Fly"*, the Oscar-winning short movie by Ferenc Rofusz, the viewer has to identify with the distorted perspective of a small bug who is trapped in a house for good. The social-political dissonances and, as a result, the lack of perspective as a common generational experience of the age was reflected in allegoric ways by several animations from the 70s onward (*"Hey, You!"* by Péter Szoboszlai, *"Mind the Steps!"* by István Orosz).

Truly the most individual authors of this period, starting their careers in the 60s, were György Kovásznai and Sándor Reisenbüchler. Kovásznai's oeuvre was mainly based on expressive stop motion painted animations, and grasps the mood of his generation in a very unique way. Reisenbüchler, a dedicated hippie throughout his lifetime, made cutout collage short films, each being a harsh criticism of civilization and drawing attention to the universal social, ecological problems of humanity (*"Farewell, Little Island!"*, 1987).

The following film overview of the Hungarian animation surely provides you with a lively and impressive depiction of the socialist era over the Iron Curtain while the relevance and validity of the very best of Hungarian animation short film history have not become outdated during the past decades.

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