What's Opera, Doc? and Cartoon Opera

The visual, dramatic, and musical trappings of nineteenth-century opera have become a standard reference point for animated cartoons, and thus no understanding of the battle between classic and cartoon is complete without an examination of opera. Dozens of possible cartoons might be considered, but the best-known example is *What's Opera, Doc?* (Warner Bros., 1957), Chuck Jones's interpretation of Wagner's operatic universe. Disney's *Fantasia* takes a long look at classical music, loving and serious; *What's Opera, Doc?* instead takes *on* classical music. This cartoon and others like it have helped form a new cultural concept of opera, an awareness built on comic appropriations of the form rather than on the operas themselves (see figure 37). A detailed analysis of *What's Opera, Doc?* is the central focus of this final chapter, which also briefly reviews the history of films about opera and the persistent use of Wagner's music in film and cartoon scores. We will consider the animated influences on Jones's story, as well as the short's musical, dramatic, and technical elements.

The score for *What's Opera, Doc?* uses musical conventions from late-nineteenth-century Romantic music and cites melodies from more than a half-dozen different Wagner operas. The screenplay's rapidly changing plot points embrace a complicated collection of generalizations about opera, specifically those associated with Wagner (mythology, magic, love, and fantastic, otherworldly settings). Wagner's concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*—the "total artwork," fusing together and giving equal weight to the poetry, the music, and the staging—is here approached from a modern (or perhaps postmodern) angle. In fact, animation offers the perfect medium for realizing Wagner's hopes for a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, since it sets no physical bounds to the animator's creativity. This cartoon not only represents a total work of art but aspires to sum up the totality of Wagner's artworks in a *single* serving. The creators preserved what

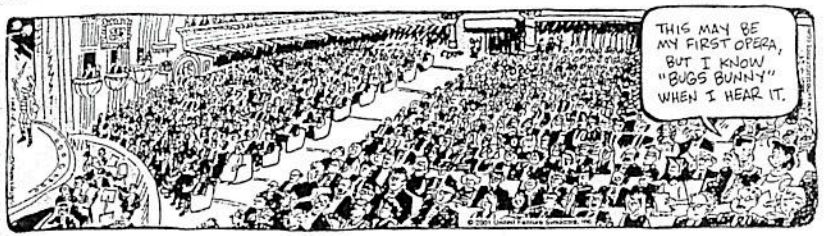


FIGURE 37 Robb Armstrong, *Jump Start*, July 2, 2001. Reprinted by permission of United Feature Syndicate, Inc.

they perceived as the most important ideas, both musical and dramatic, thereby allowing Jones to take, as he put it, "14 hours of *The Ring of the Niebelungen* and reduce it to six minutes."[1]

Despite the fact that he was producing a cartoon, Jones, along with the cartoon's writer, Michael Maltese, approached Wagner carefully. Jones once explained, "Many cartoons using classical music have failed because they don't take the music seriously enough. I always felt that Bugs and Elmer were trying to do the opera right."[2] Jones also told me, "We didn't want people to laugh at the music, we wanted them to laugh at what was interpreted by Bugs and Elmer. . . . It seemed to me that we were paying great respect to the music itself, but we're saying that if you put a bunch of clowns in front of it, it will be a lot different."[3] His sentiment may have been noble, but we will see that *What's Opera, Doc?* actually stands as a testament to what Jones *believed* he knew of Wagner and opera. Dramatically and musically, Jones established a specific set of criteria that he felt needed to be met in order to have a complete opera.[4] He constructed the cartoon out of a hodgepodge of famous tunes with familiar plot devices, taking the most familiar parts from the whole of the composer's dramatic oeuvre, and poured them into the shell of Wagner's single most famous work: the *Ring* cycle.

CHARACTERISTICS OF OPERA AND ANIMATION

Opera has always been an easy target for Hollywood cartoons—almost too easy. Its combination of music and drama, set in distant or even mythical places and featuring characters who often dressed in outlandish costumes as they sang in other languages (frequently about ultra-romantic situations), presented fertile material for satire. The cartoons simply import the dramatic situations and music and then commence with the

comedic treatment, leaving intact only the barest framework of the original. The public's familiarity with operatic stereotypes ensures that audiences get the gags, which rely on generalizations about opera and opera singers. Simply placing opera into an animated medium is intrinsically humorous, because it violates cultural tradition—we laugh at the juxtaposition of high and low. As the cartoons added their (sometimes not so) gentle commentary on operatic conventions, the almost absurdly serious nature of the dramatic form became even funnier.

Such opera parodies are not purely in the domain of cartoons. In fact, probably the most successful large-scale spoof on opera in the twentieth century is the Marx Brothers' 1935 film *A Night at the Opera*, which juxtaposes action on and off the opera stage. As this and other comedies constantly parodied cultural ideals, they created, as Lawrence Levine says, "a rapport with their audiences that generated a sense of complicity in their common stand against the pretensions of the patrons of high culture."[5] Cartoon characters work with the same sense of narrative logic as the Marx Brothers; when Bugs Bunny and other characters enter the opera house they inevitably bring along the outside world, and their injections of popular culture during performances create a string of culture clashes that grow in intensity throughout the short. (We have already seen such a collision of worlds in *Long-Haired Hare*, discussed in chapter 4.) *What's Opera, Doc?* is a notable exception to this pattern, for it takes place within an understood universe of Wagnerian opera; thus the *only* music that exists for anyone—including Bugs, whom we expect to transgress the highbrow conventions of the story—is Wagner's.

Film parodies usually refer to particular operas and arias, and often feature actual opera stars playing either themselves or fictitious characters. Nearly all cartoons are less specific in their approach to opera, in part because many of the writers and directors had only a superficial knowledge of the subject.[6] The directors Bill Hanna and Joe Barbera (both at MGM), as well as Chuck Jones (Warner Bros.), have all stated in their respective autobiographies that they had little background in music and often left decisions about it to their writers or even the composers.[7] Such ignorance may well have worked to their advantage: rather than focusing on details, the cartoon director relies on familiar references and broad, sweeping generalizations to create humor based on stereotypes. Moreover, general ignorance of opera may add to its cultural authority; the musicologist Jeremy Tambling argues that "where opera is only very imprecisely known about, its myth-making powers seem further ensured in terms of promoting images of taste and the good life."[8] For Jones and others, the idea of opera probably was inextricably bound to notions of high art and the upper classes. These associations may explain why the Warner Bros. cartoons that involve opera almost always are set in the opera house, creating an image of that stage and hall as a sacred space (albeit one that must be assaulted), while the music itself does not really matter . . . so long as it's Italian.

The predominance of Italian opera (in particular, bel canto—literally, "beautiful" or "fine singing," an operatic style of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that is typified by Rossini, Donizetti, and Bellini) marks another idiosyncrasy of opera in cartoons. Tambling explains that films privileged Italian operas because of the tunefulness of their arias, duets, and choruses.[9] These same films eschewed Wagner because the vocal lines lacked such catchy tunes. Conversely, while Rossini and Donizetti have singable, memorable phrases in their bel canto arias, those composers are no match for Wagner when it comes to creating short motifs in the orchestral accompaniment, and Wagner is a favorite in cartoons as well as in films for underscore cues. David Huckvale notes that "the appeal of Wagner's nonvocal or orchestrally arranged music has always been considerable."[10]

Cartoon characters often sing in the opera's original language, if for no other reason than the inherent added humor: a cartoon animal singing opera is funny, and a cartoon animal singing in a foreign tongue is funnier still. In *One Froggy Evening* (Warner Bros.; Jones, 1955), for example, the main character, Michigan J. Frog, sings the beginning of "Largo al Factotum" in a public park for his owner, who cannot seem to convince anyone that he can sing at all. The majestic, even brassy voice that comes out of the frog's mouth is a far cry from what we expect to hear. This enormous voice becomes one of the short's fundamental comic devices. Joe Adamson, in a biography of Walter Lantz, describes a similar scene in a Woody Woodpecker cartoon, *Barber of Seville* (Lantz; Culhane, 1944): "Woody just launches straight into the 'Largo al factotum' from *The Barber of Seville*—no translation, no motivation, no explanation. He suddenly becomes a musical purist . . . and the effect is funny."[11] By using opera in its original *foreign* tongue, the cartoon also highlights the vast cultural distance between the music and the cartoon itself. A "serious" performance of an aria in a short—that is, overdubbed in Italian by a professional opera singer, as was done in *One Froggy Evening* and in Tex Avery's *Magical Maestro* (MGM, 1952)—sets up the audi-

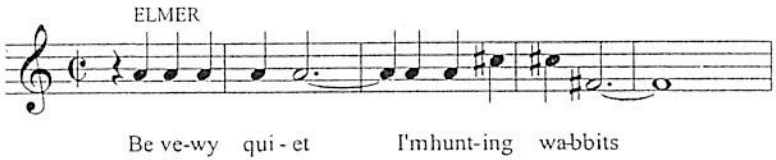
ence for the disintegration that inevitably follows. Such respectful treatment of the original cannot go unchallenged; indeed, veneration of the original exponentially increases the chances that the performance will go awry. In this respect as well, *What's Opera, Doc?* defies the norms established by other cartoons, presenting a story that is funny without sacrificing the integrity of the opera's narrative.

THE STORY: ELMER CHASES BUGS, WAGNER STYLE

Part of the unique standing that *What's Opera, Doc?* holds in the animation world is due to its being one of the few complete operatic parodies, beginning and ending in the narrative space of an operatic drama.[12] It is also the only cartoon to deal exclusively with Wagner.[13]

Following the main title music and the appearance of the Warner Bros. shield to the tune of "The Merry-Go-Round Broke Down," the cartoon begins with a shot of a set of theater curtains surrounding its title (see figure 38). Two more title cards follow with the primary credits; in this sequence of less than thirty seconds we hear various instruments of an orchestra tuning, including snatches of Wagnerian leitmotifs. The screen goes blank for a moment, before a tremendous storm rages, with the shadows of an unseen pair of hands seemingly conducting nature's fury. We then see the silhouette of an ominous figure to whom the hands belong—a horned fiend that appears to loom over the surrounding mountains (see figure 39).[14] The overture for *The Flying Dutchman* is played in a faithful rendition by a full orchestra. (In fact, as we will see below, all of the music in this short appears in its natural state, that is, fully orchestrated in the Wagnerian style.) The camera pans downward to reveal the horned creature as Elmer Fudd, wearing Viking helmet, body armor, and carrying a spear. He admonishes us to "Be vewy quiet—I'm hunting wabbits!" (see music example 8). As he says "hunting wabbits," he turns his head upward and his arms move to either side in the first of many parodies on the stances struck by opera singers as they act.

As he looks over hill and dale, a different kernel of the Valkyrie leitmotif underscores each sequence of steps in a series of pseudo-balletic gestures. Discovering "wabbit twacks," Elmer rushes over to a rabbit hole and begins stabbing in his spear while yelling "Kill the wabbit!" to the tune of the Valkyrie leitmotif (see figure 40). Bugs sticks out his head from a nearby hole, repeating in disbelief "Kill the wabbit?" Elmer continues his assault on the first hole, yelling "Yo-ho-to-ho!" until Bugs walks up and asks him, "Oh, mighty warrior of great fighting stock, / might I



EXAMPLE 8 Melody for "Be vewy quiet—I'm hunting wabbits!"

FIGURE 38 Title card of *What's Opera, Doc?* (Warner Bros.; Jones, 1957).

FIGURE 39 Elmer, the mighty hunter, in *What's Opera, Doc?*

enquire to ask / what's up, doc?" After Elmer reiterates, "I'm going to kill that wabbit," Bugs answers: "Oh, mighty warrior 'twill be quite a task / how will you do it, might I enquire to ask?" Elmer shows off his magical hardware, singing, "I will do it with my spear and magic helmet." "Spear and magic helmet?" Bugs replies. Elmer demonstrates the helmet's power by destroying the tree Bugs is standing under with a bolt of lightning, sending Bugs running for the hills, with a "Bye!" reminiscent of Martha Raye.

Elmer runs after Bugs (with music from *Rienzi* underscoring the chase)

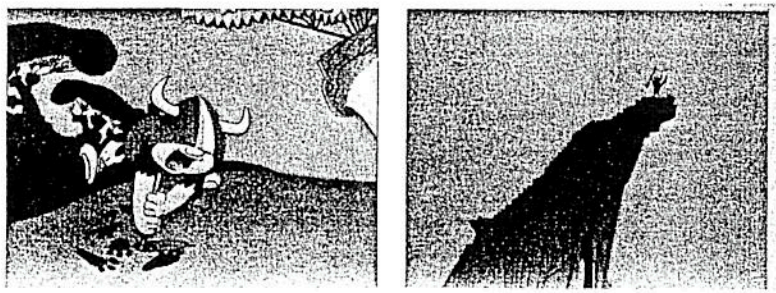
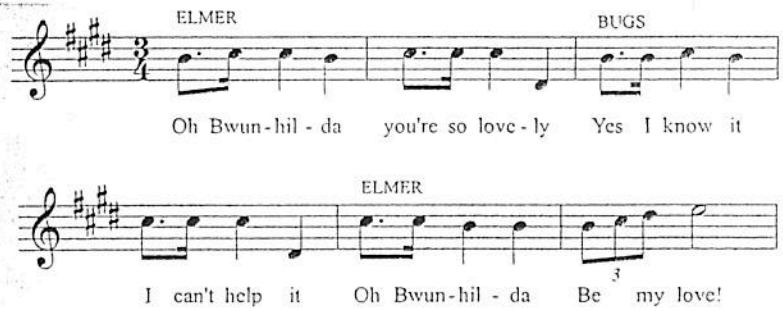


FIGURE 40 Elmer in a rage in *What's Opera, Doc?*

until he spies a "new" character on the scene. Bugs, dressed in a pink top and sporting blond braids, eye shadow, and false lashes, reappears at the top of a hill lounging on the back of an enormous white horse. The horse begins to gallop down the hill, and we see that Elmer, stricken with love, cannot take his eyes away from Bugs. When the horse reaches him, Elmer sings: "Oh Bwunhilda, you're so lovely" (see music example 9). They then dance a brief ballet together (to the Venusberg music), culminating in Bugs running up a hill topped by a neoclassical, Greek-inspired structure with white columns, where he lies on a large couch and begins to sing (to the tune of the "Pilgrims' Chorus") the love duet "Return My Love" (see figure 41):

Elmer: Return my love, a longing burns deep inside me.
Bugs: Return my love, I want you always beside me.
Elmer: Love like ours must be.
Bugs: Made for you and for me.
Duet: Return, won't you return my love; oh, my love is yours.

The song ends with a magnificent crescendo, just as Bugs's wig falls off and Elmer realizes he has been fooled. Bugs rushes off (losing the rest of his costume along the way) as slowly building timpani indicate Elmer's rising anger. As the skies go purple and red, he bellows out, "I'll kill the wabbit! Arise storms! Lightning! Earthquakes! Hurricanes! SMOG! Strike lightning! Strike the wabbit!" With these final words (accompanied once more by the *Dutchman* overture) bolts of lightning level the distant mountains. As Elmer runs over to see the results, we find Bugs lying motionless, his hand poised dramatically over his head, a beam of sunlight breaking through the clouds to illuminate him. Overhead, a flower, whose stem was broken in the melee, slowly drops watery tears



EXAMPLE 9 Melody for "Oh Bwunhilda, you're so lovely."

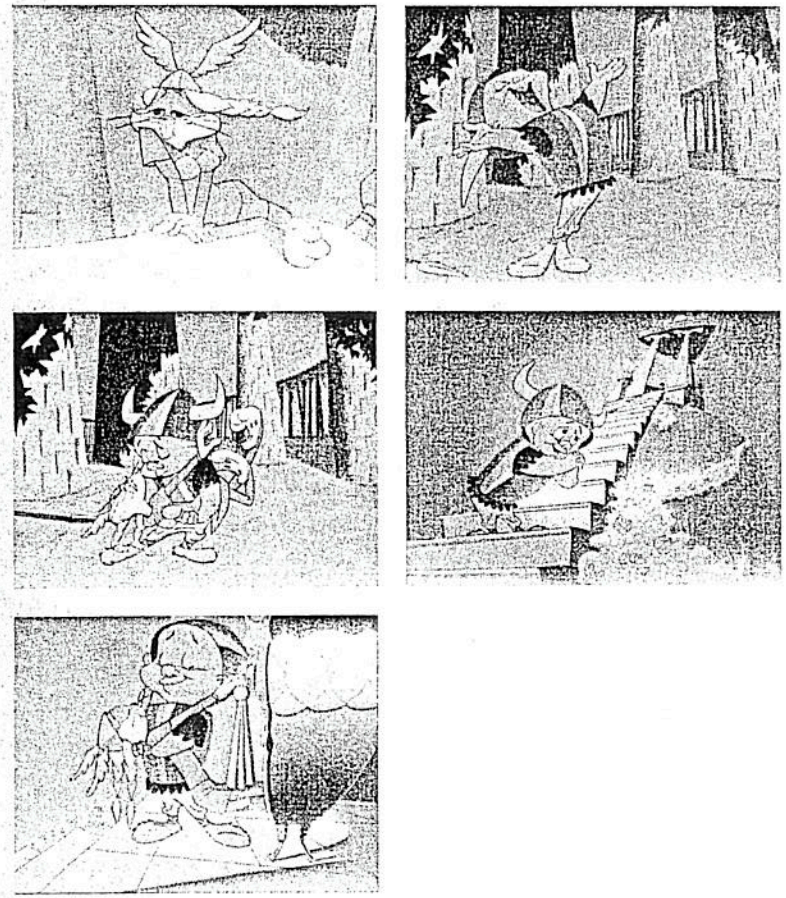


FIGURE 41 Love duet and ballet in *What's Opera, Doc?*

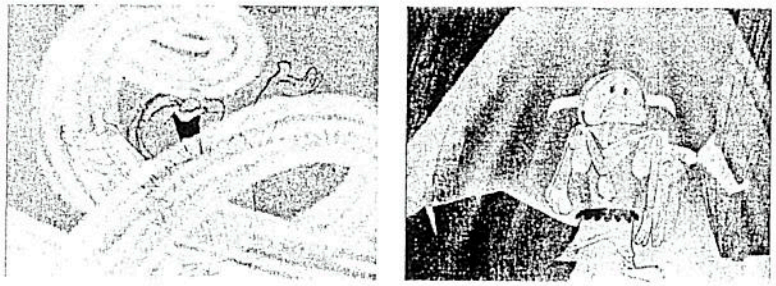


FIGURE 42 Elmer mad and then sad in *What's Opera, Doc?*

on the seemingly fallen hero. Stricken, Elmer exclaims, "What have I done? I've killed the wabbit! Poor little bunny, poor little wabbit . . ." He begins carrying Bugs off into the distance as the instrumental strains of the "Pilgrims' Chorus" are once more heard (see figure 42). Just as all seems lost, Bugs holds up his head, turns to face the audience, and proclaims, "Well, what did you *expect* in an opera? A *happy* ending?"

WAGNER'S PRESENCE IN FILM AND CARTOON MUSIC

Anyone seeking to create a thorough satire of opera for an American audience needed to look no further than Richard Wagner, who already during his lifetime was an icon of the opera world. *What's Opera, Doc?* cites a half-dozen operas, but much of the action centers on an extended excerpt from *Tannhäuser,* refashioned into the love duet and ballet interlude between Bugs and Elmer. Reverence for Wagner's music in general reached almost cultlike proportions in the United States in the late nineteenth century, and in his history of Wagner's American reception Joseph Horowitz shows that *Tannhäuser* enjoyed a particular distinction: its finale is the first piece of Wagner's music known to have been performed in the United States, in November 1852, and when it opened at the Bowery Theatre in New York on 4 April 1859 it became the first of his operas to receive a complete staging in the country.[15] Overtures are often excerpted from operas for concert performances, because they are relatively short, are tuneful, and require no vocalists or even instrumental soloists. More than a century after his music premiered in the United States, Wagner still ranked among the top six composers whose work is performed by American symphony orchestras (after Beethoven, Brahms, Tchaikowsky, Mozart, and Johann Strauss), and the *Tannhäuser* overture remained his most frequently heard piece.[16]

According to Horowitz, Wagner entered American popular culture through two routes: band music and film scores, both forms of entertainment that provided the sounds of Wagner to listeners without any "high-cultural uplift."[17] At the end of the nineteenth century, military-style bands were found throughout the nation, in small and large communities alike. Their conductors all looked to the preeminent bandleader in the country, John Philip Sousa, for repertoire suggestions; what Sousa played, the country played.[18] Wagner topped Sousa's list of favorite composers, and his band drew on numerous arrangements of Wagner's works. The band performances took Wagner's music out of its original context; and when excerpted for use in film scores, Horowitz shows, its excision from its place within the *Gesamtkunstwerk* was even more radical.[19] Selections from Wagner operas appear frequently in manuals for accompanists of silent film, with each piece meant to convey a different mood or emotion through music. For example, Wagner's name is listed in Erno Rapée's *Encyclopedia* under all sorts of descriptive headings, from neutral andantes to wedding music.[20] Both band and film music exposed listeners to a wide variety of composers and musical genres in settings that carried none of the specific cultural associations of the concert hall.

Wagner's music appears in cartoons from the beginning of the sound era onward.[21] Consider the scores of Carl Stalling, whose approach to classical music and general style were widely emulated in all the studios (see chapter 1). A significant portion of the classical music in his scores was Wagner's, especially in the Warner Bros. cartoons. During Stalling's twenty-plus years at Warner Bros., Wagner cues appear in 120 different cartoons. The specific selections break down as follows:

Lohengrin ("Bridal Chorus")	22 cartoons
Rienzi overture	21 cartoons
Tannhäuser overture	16 cartoons
Twilight of the Gods	16 cartoons
The Valkyrie	15 cartoons
The Flying Dutchman	10 cartoons
The Rhinegold	8 cartoons
Parsifal	4 cartoons
Siegfried	4 cartoons
The Mastersingers of Nuremberg	2 cartoons[22]

Not only was Wagner often used in cartoons, but his instrumental music was clearly preferred. Though drawn from his operas, it is primarily symphonic rather than vocal in nature. This bias displayed by Stalling reflects not only the general preference mentioned above but his own background. As a musical director in theaters Stalling was responsible for *all* music played during each show, which could go on for three hours or more; some days the shows ran back to back for almost half a day. Wagner had a formidable presence in Stalling's musical library in a variety of forms, notably excerpts arranged for organ and similar extracts orchestrated for a typical theater orchestra of winds, brass, a few strings, and keyboard. Stalling's experiences with this music in his early film days likely predisposed him to use the same pieces for dramatic purposes in later years.[23]

Because of his background as a film accompanist, Stalling reflexively took advantage of the cultural significance of the music he used to tell the story. In *Captain Hareblower* (Warner Bros.; Freleng, 1954), for instance, the Dutchman motif from *The Flying Dutchman* was meant to create a notion of danger on the high seas, not just through the illustrative nature of the music itself but also through its evocation of Wagner's opera. Just as J. C. Breil used "The Ride of the Valkyries" to accompany the "heroic" ride of the Ku Klux Klan in D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), so Stalling quotes Wagner, knowing well the audience's familiarity with such music and using it to his advantage.

Warner Bros. was not the only cartoon studio to focus on Wagner. Fifteen years before *What's Opera, Doc?*, the Disney studio devised an animated scene based on *The Valkyrie* to be used in *Fantasia*. (Disney had originally planned to update *Fantasia* following its original release by replacing sections of the film with new musical sequences.) According to the film historian Robin Allan, more than a hundred sketches created in 1941 for an animated sequence on "The Ride of the Valkyries" show "the descent of the Valkyries from the clouds and their conducting of slain warriors to Valhalla." Walt Disney planned to address the music seriously; in a story conference he warned, "You'll get embarrassing animation if you get Brunnhilde up there mugging, or one of those things." The director of the sequence, Sam Armstrong, had intended to base the sequence on the imagery of traditional Norse mythology rather than the purely Germanic Wagnerian version.[24] Within a year, however, the United States was fully embroiled in World War II, and the presence in film of Wagner's music took on an entirely new, politicized meaning.

THE PREHISTORY OF *WHAT'S OPERA, DOC?*: CARTOONS AND WORLD WAR II

During World War II, several Hollywood animation studios (Warner Bros., Disney, MGM, Lantz) produced cartoons for the U.S. government to use in the war effort as training films; every studio took issues surrounding the war as fodder to inspire new stories, often used to entertain the soldiers overseas.[25] As noted in chapter 1, German and Japanese characters were frequently humiliated in cartoons from all the studios.[26] Numerous cartoons from this period did more than refer to the enemy: they were specifically intended to depict the Axis powers not just as the enemies of good but also as disagreeable, shifty, bumbling, and ridiculous in every possible way.

For the Nazis, Stalling provided several themes; the most commonly used song was "Ach du lieber Augustin." Often Stalling transformed the chorus, with its "oom-pah-pah" feel, into a kind of ridiculous waltz, whose sound rendered the Nazis less menacing by making them look (and sound) foolish.[27] Stalling also used Wagner's music, as well as selections from Johann Strauss, to represent Nazis. What seems to me an obvious choice—Beethoven's Fifth Symphony—for the Nazis is not used, possibly because the main four-note motif had been appropriated as a musical signature for the Allied efforts.[28]

One of the Warner Bros. wartime cartoons that deals specifically with the Nazis and Germany, *Herr Meets Hare* (Freleng, 1945), is a significant precursor to *What's Opera, Doc?* and a source for much of its visual imagery, in particular the ballet sequence featuring Bugs in drag. The film begins as Bugs has made one of his inevitable "wrong turn[s] at Albuquerque"; this time it lands him in Germany's Black Forest, where he meets none other than Hermann Göring, taking a break from the war by going hunting (in lederhosen, in case we forgot he is German). Bugs disguises himself as Hitler, but when Göring realizes the subterfuge, Bugs runs off, only to reenter the scene wearing a wig (yellow hair with long braids down the back), sporting a Viking-style helmet, and riding a white steed (unmistakably a Clydesdale) that almost prances in, accompanied by the main melody of the "Pilgrims' Chorus" from *Tannhäuser*. Seeing Bugs/Brünnhilde, Göring zips off screen and rushes back dressed in a long brown loincloth and his own Viking helmet (whose horns grow in size, becoming quite erect, as the Nazi eyes his companion lecherously; see figure 43).[29] The two then dance—not to Wagner but to two Viennese waltzes by Johann Strauss: "Vienna Life" and "You and You," the latter from *Die Fledermaus*.

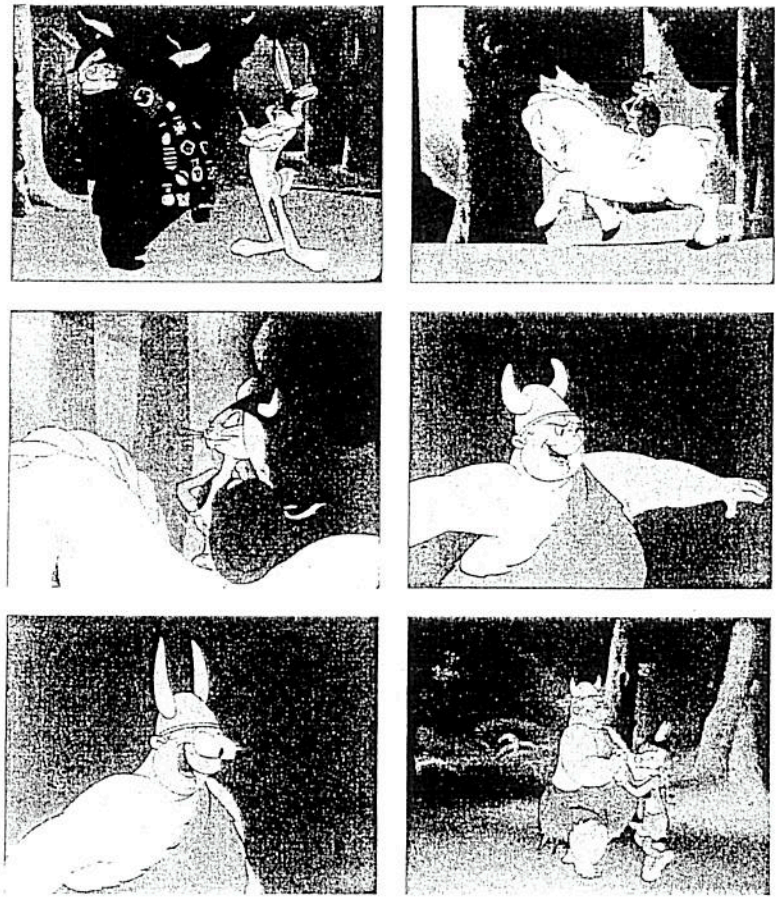


FIGURE 43 Bugs meets Hermann Göring in *Herr Meets Hare* (Warner Bros.; Freleng, 1945).

Bugs's entry onto the scene, as he rides a large white horse while dressed as Brünnhilde, shows up fundamentally unchanged in *What's Opera, Doc?*: the music and much of the staging stay the same. When Bugs and Göring dance together, however, their waltz is almost slapstick, unlike the refined ballet performed by Bugs and Elmer in *What's Opera, Doc?* A dance between Bugs and an admirer appears in both films, but with radically different motivations. Göring, lost in the moment, simply follows Bugs's lead; Elmer and Bugs, in the midst of an artistic performance, enact some of the cultural expectations for such a presentation. Jones did not formally acknowledge the influence of *Herr Meets Hare* on his Wagnerian exploration, although similarities between the two can be at least partially attributed to Michael Maltese's role as writer for both shorts. Perhaps it was in part to distance himself from Freleng's earlier short as well as to inject his own sensibility into the story that Jones created a parody of the opera world itself in his cartoon, focusing only on the performers and the performance and forgoing any references to the composer, conductor, musicians (except for the tuning at the beginning), or audience. Production notes from *What's Opera, Doc?* reveal that several gags that might have more clearly differentiated the two stories were not used. For instance, after Bugs flees from his first encounter with Elmer, the story sketches indicate that Bugs was to steal Elmer's magic helmet and conjure a small storm with it, only to have Elmer sneak up and quickly repossess it. Immediately after this interaction, Bugs would dress as Brünnhilde and toy with Elmer for a while before beginning the love duet.[30]

Though *What's Opera, Doc?* appeared more than a decade after the end of World War II, it is possible that the cartoon contained implicit criticism of Germany in addition to its undisguised satire on opera and high-art music. Through its association with Hitler and Nazi Germany, Wagner's music had become something to fear, something to hate—Leni Riefenstahl's use of *The Mastersingers* in *Triumph of the Will* (1935) was simply one of the more explicit instances of a connection made between Wagner and Hitler in film.[31] In *Herr Meets Hare,* the director clearly intended *all* of the German references as a comment against Hitler, the Nazis, and Germany as a whole, and Stalling clearly viewed Wagner as the suitable musical backdrop for such criticism. The war did not change the music that Stalling and other composers for animation used; rather, it complicated the associations produced when such pieces were heard, adding a political and emotional charge at a time when practically everything in the media referred to the war in one way or another. The comedic elements inherent in what Jones retained from Freleng's cartoon (Bugs in drag and the dance sequence) do little to evoke World War II; Jones's cartoon instead takes on Wagner (as well as opera) directly, with any more general mockery of German culture remaining secondary.

PRODUCTION ISSUES: VISUAL APPEARANCES

Certainly the most obvious sign that Jones viewed *What's Opera, Doc?* as something special is the amount of extra time and attention that went

into the cartoon's production. Michael Barrier mentions several of the unusual elements of the film: "Jones said, 'it was one of the few times that we actually corrected a storyboard before I did all the [character] layouts.' [Maurice] Noble made extensive inspirational sketches because, as Jones said, 'a lot of the story had to be told in graphics . . . the imagination of the environment was important.'"[32] Corrections were made on the storyboard because Jones and Michael Maltese, the writer, wanted the story to be completely worked out before animation began, while Noble's inspirational sketches gave the animators a tangible model on which to base their work. Noble's role as layout artist was therefore essential to the film's overall look, as he visually constructed the mythic world for Elmer's and Bugs's interactions. Leonard Maltin calls Noble's designs "bold and forceful, with vibrant colors and shadows." Noble told Maltin, "They thought I was bats when I put that bright red on Elmer with those purple skies. I had the Ink and Paint Department come in and say, 'You *really mean* you want that magenta red on that?'"[33] When production was finished, these details added up to a cartoon unique in its appearance and in its artistic approach. The work was enormously time-consuming, and it forced members of Jones's production unit to give less time than was typical to a Road Runner cartoon, the formulaic series they created and maintained.[34] The director and several of his unit recalled forging their time cards so that they appeared to be giving equal attention to the Road Runner short, when in reality the Wagner was occupying almost all their time.[35]

Barrier also notes that the entire soundtrack for *What's Opera, Doc?* was recorded before animation began. Recording the singing parts in advance is a necessary step in any cartoon, because the animators must synchronize the mouth movements of each character to the final vocal tracks. Jones's concept for *What's Opera, Doc?* took this requirement a step further: all the music had to be in its final form for the animation to proceed so that at all times the characters could move in a choreographed fashion.[36]

THE MUSIC

What's Opera, Doc? divides easily into two narratives at work simultaneously—the visual, discussed above, and the musical. Table 3 presents the musical skeleton of the short, and shows that it breaks down into three categories:

Table 3. MUSIC IN *WHAT'S OPERA, DOC?*

Title	Composer	How Used	Time (min.sec)
1. Merrily We Roll Along	Charlie Tobias, Murray Mencher, Eddie Cantor	Underscoring	0.13
2. The Flying Dutchman	Richard Wagner; arr. Milton J. Franklyn	Underscoring	0.49
3. Mighty Hunter	Milton J. Franklyn	On-screen vocal	0.11
4. Ride of the Valkyries	Richard Wagner; arr. Milton J. Franklyn	On-screen vocal	0.28
5. Siegfried	Richard Wagner; arr. Milton J. Franklyn	Underscoring	0.47
6. The Flying Dutchman	Richard Wagner; arr. Milton J. Franklyn	Underscoring	0.15
7. Rienzi	Richard Wagner; arr. Milton J. Franklyn	Underscoring	0.09
8. Tannhäuser	Richard Wagner; arr. Milton J. Franklyn	On-screen vocal	1.27
9. Return My Love	Richard Wagner, Michael Maltese	On-screen vocal	0.54
10. Ride of the Valkyries	Richard Wagner; arr. Milton J. Franklyn	On-screen vocal	0.20
11. The Flying Dutchman	Richard Wagner; arr. Milton J. Franklyn	Underscoring	0.24
12. Tannhäuser	Richard Wagner; arr. Milton J. Franklyn	On-screen vocal	0.41

A. Purely orchestral forms of Wagner's music used to underscore or mickey-mouse action on screen

B. Melodies of Wagner's transformed into some type of vocal melody

C. Original music—written to emulate Wagner's sound—to underscore or mickey-mouse the action on screen

The production emulates not only the sound but the form of opera, specifically in its stylized movements. Bugs and Elmer's dance to the Venusberg music adds another dimension to the cartoon, which already

included singing, instrumental music, and dramatic acting before the addition of ballet (which in Wagner's operas plays a substantial role only in the Venusberg sequence in *Tannhäuser*). Ever vigilant about realism in portrayals of such performances, Jones researched the scene thoroughly: "When we were making the film, Titania Riabachinska and David Lichine of the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo were working on the Warner Bros. lot, and we went to the studio where they were rehearsing to sketch them before creating the *What's Opera, Doc?* scene."[37] Rather than precisely copying the movements of the ballet dancers by rotoscoping them—that is, tracing a live-action film of the dance, projected one frame at a time, to reproduce it more naturalistically in the animation[38]—Jones and his animators instead relied on their studies to create a more realistic duet between Bugs and Elmer. In the process, they steered clear of *Herr Meets Hare*'s farcical dance.

Similarly, Jones's fastidious attention to detail regarding how in general opera singers move and act broadened the characters' depth. While animation in general requires that attention be paid to the smallest movement, animators often do not take great pains at literalism when rendering visual representations of performance. For instance, they might not bother to make sure that the character is playing in the correct range of the piano at various moments in a performance (in *Rhapsody Rabbit* [Warner Bros.; Freleng, 1946], Bugs is not). We find in *What's Opera, Doc?* a remarkable focus on all aspects of the performer's physical toil, and these too inspire some subtle humor. Such careful planning is evident at a number of points in the opening confrontation between Bugs and Elmer. For instance, Elmer rhythmically punctuates each syllable of the exclamation "Wab-bit tracks!" by jabbing his spear into the ground. And after Bugs fearfully questions Elmer's intentions to "Kill the wabbit," he affectedly flutters his eyelids to the rhythm of the Valkyrie/"Kill the wabbit" leitmotif (being played at that moment on the flute). Finally, between the lines "Oh, mighty warrior 'twill be quite a task" and "How will you do it, might I enquire to ask?" Bugs visibly takes a dramatic, full breath as a singer might in preparation for an important line (see figure 44).[39] Jones may have believed that he was faithfully representing the outward appearance of opera singers, but in making the performance by Bugs and Elmer so highly stylized he underscored the level of artifice that exists in all opera performance. The pensive, heaving breaths taken by both characters throughout the cartoon call attention to the unnatural demands that opera singers must place on their bodies.

Bugs's and Elmer's singing raises an issue touched on earlier: the historical tendency of cartoons not to use melodies (as opposed to musical cues) from Wagner. If we analyze the vocal lines in *What's Opera, Doc?*, we find that each fits one of three descriptions:

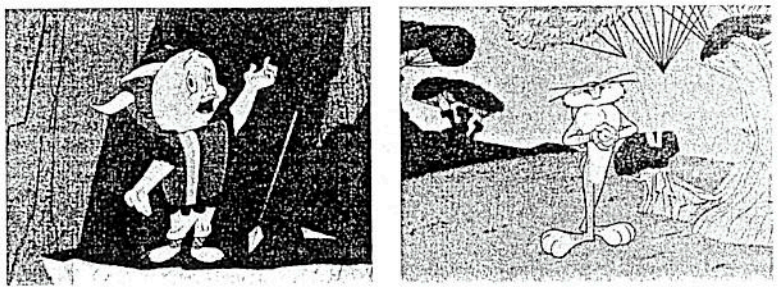


FIGURE 44 Dramatic action and heavy breathing in *What's Opera, Doc?*

A. A leitmotif from Wagner used as a sung melody. For example, Bugs's "Oh, mighty warrior of great fighting stock" (to Siegfried's leitmotif) and Elmer's "Kill the wabbit!" (to the Valkyrie leitmotif).

B. Vocal music from Wagner performed in the style of a bel canto aria. For example, Bugs and Elmer's love duet, "Return My Love" (to the "Pilgrims' Chorus," at some length).

C. A completely new melody in the style of a Wagner recitative (his least tuneful music). For example, Elmer's opening line, "Be vewy quiet, I'm hunting wabbits."

A and B have precedents, in that cartoons, as needed, constantly appropriate familiar melodic lines from all forms of music, opera included. But the third possibility is surprising: why write music in Wagner's style, which has already proven to be unpopular for use in films? Because Jones wanted to parody *all* aspects of Wagner and his art, this familiar aspect of his operas had to be incorporated. Even more important, performers and audiences alike know that singing in opera, no matter how unmelodic it may sound, is nonetheless supposed to represent something innately beautiful; "Opera singing . . . is self-consciously beautiful, and it takes itself completely seriously," as Jeremy Tambling explains.[40] In other words, the voice itself—not what is being sung—is of paramount importance for the fan of opera.

Of all the selections from Wagner's operas used in cartoons, the one least familiar to today's opera fans appears the second most often (after

Lohengrin's famous "Bridal March"): music from the overture to Wagner's highly successful third opera, *Rienzi*. Stalling used this piece for particularly intense moments; Rapée's *Encyclopedia* appropriately classifies it as "heavy" dramatic. In this music, like that of Franz von Suppé and Alphons Czibulka, we see how cartoon scores became a haven, if not a final resting place, for once-popular concert pieces that have fallen out of favor or vogue. Probably the most famous use of this piece in film outside animation occurs in the scene from *The Birth of a Nation* mentioned above; Martin Marks has documented that the *Rienzi* overture, in combination with "The Ride of the Valkyries" and Louis Hérold's overture for *Zampa* (also popular in the nineteenth century), constitutes the background to the Ku Klux Klan's final heroic ride in the film.[41]

Jones acknowledged, years before *What's Opera, Doc?* appeared, that such familiarity with music was important to help the audience in understanding when a pun (or an extended satirical situation) was being presented: "In this field of satire, one factor constitutes a limitation of sorts: the piece selected should have a certain amount of familiarity, because this adds anticipatory enjoyment for the audience."[42] In light of this comment, we can presume that Jones and Maltese, along with Stalling and Milt Franklyn (Stalling's orchestrator and the primary composer for *What's Opera, Doc?*), picked those excerpts from Wagner whose melodies they believed the audience would recognize. This principle of selection begins to explain the musical choices for the film from *The Flying Dutchman, Rienzi, Tannhäuser, The Valkyrie,* and *Siegfried.* Instead of trying to satirize any one of Wagner's operas, Jones appropriates what is most powerful or widely recognized, confident that such tunes will get the biggest audience reaction. It is unlikely Jones knew much about the true sources of the music being used; he repeatedly stated in his two autobiographical books and in interviews that he knew little of music, or Wagner, beyond his favorite (mis)quotation of Twain's on the subject, "Wagner is better than it sounds."[43] Thus, the music used in *What's Opera, Doc?* was what Jones and Maltese understood to be Wagner's most popular melodies—a misquotation viewed by David Huckvale as a "deliberate confusion" on Jones's part.[44] This is not to say he did not know how to present the music appropriately; on the contrary, as Jones recalled, the production purposely mimicked grand opera: "To keep Wagnerian opera's sense of grandeur, we used a huge eighty-piece orchestra. It would have been less majesty *[sic]* to do anything unfair to the music. Although when I visited Wagner's grave, I did hear a whirring sound."[45]

STORYTELLING IN *WHAT'S OPERA, DOC?*

As the critic Jaime Weinman suggests, Jones seems to take his subje matter *very* seriously.[46] But at the same time, he conflates various idi syncrasies of Wagner's characters without any sense of wrongdoing; t characters are there to be violated. For instance, David Schroeder poin out that Bugs takes on the visual appearance of a Rhinemaiden with h golden locks and helmet, while Elmer, whose first prominent vocal utte ance echoes the Valkyrie leitmotif, wears the cuirass and horned helm specifically associated with the Valkyries.[47] The musical and visual a tributes that Bugs and Elmer exhibit constantly shift from gag to gag. is this scattershot approach to hitting all the familiar stereotypes that e ables the cartoon to capture so many elements of Wagner's music.

Yet even those who see *What's Opera, Doc?* with little or no know edge of Wagner, the *Ring,* or the composer's notion of *Gesamtkunstwe* find the cartoon funny. Because Jones and Maltese drew on the mo typical, if not stereotypical, scenes in Wagner's narrative arsenal, mo viewers are familiar enough with the standard plot points of operas to g the idea. There are five main episodes, each accompanied by a cue fro Wagner:

1. Overture	*The Flying Dutchman*
2. The mighty warrior (Elmer/Siegfried) on display as warrior/hunter	Valkyrie and Siegfried leitmoti
3. Love duet between hero and heroine (Bugs/Brünnhilde)	*Tannhäuser* (Pilgrims' Chorus)
4. Magical power of the gods/battle sequence	Valkyrie leitmotif
5. Tragic death scene	*Tannhäuser* overture

The most noticeable shift in the drama occurs when Elmer, chasing Bu on foot across the countryside, is brought to an abrupt stop by the sig of Bugs, in drag as Brünnhilde, riding down to greet him (see figure 4 The music marks this drastic change in direction (and attire) by switc ing from *Rienzi* to the beginning of the *Tannhäuser* overture, replete wi bold trombones to properly illustrate the majesty of Bugs's descent fro on high. It makes no difference that no such scene ever takes place Wagner's world; Bugs (or, rather, Jones) resolves the conflict with Elm by switching to the narrative logic (or illogic) of cartoons, in which h

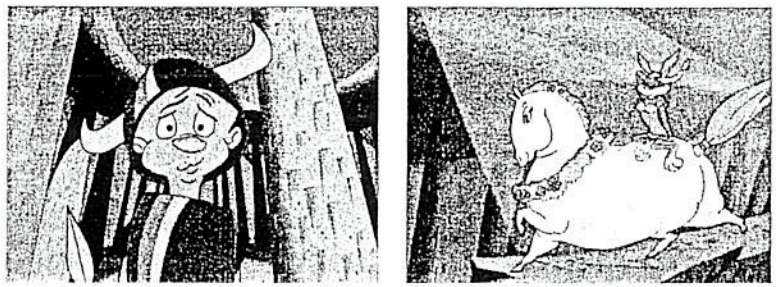
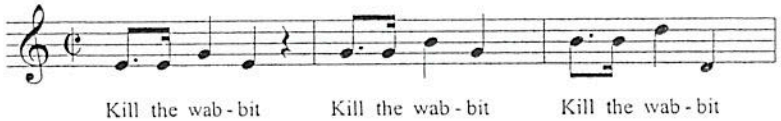


FIGURE 45 Bugs as Brünnhilde in *What's Opera, Doc?*

cross-dressing subterfuge, inspired by *Herr Meets Hare*, is sure to succeed. In fact, we can trace none of these episodes directly to any Wagnerian original. Jones, Maltese, and their creative colleagues instead fabricate such generalized situations (dressed up in Wagnerian garb) that most in the audience never know the difference.

The scene in the film that most perfectly combines the Warner Bros. approach to comedy with Wagner's melodramatic style occurs early on, when we first encounter Elmer's character. Though the ubiquitous music from *Tannhäuser* is prominent in *What's Opera, Doc?*, no melody in this short is more memorable and arresting than the Valkyrie leitmotif, appropriated and then fused with Elmer's hunting cry of "Kill the wabbit!" (see music example 10). Elmer makes this declaration in the briefest of scenes, yet this phrase has lasted more indelibly than any other in the collective memory of countless cartoon viewers. The phrase "Kill the wabbit" encapsulates almost two decades of struggle for Elmer (he began hunting Bugs in 1940), and it is grafted onto a leitmotif that perfectly exemplifies the form: short, distinct, unique, and thus easy to identify. Uniting the epitome of Wagner with the essence of Elmer was a brilliant idea; it is so effective, in fact, that those who see the cartoon seem unable to tear apart the two icons—one visual, one aural. This musical gesture still signifies Wagner, but it is now Wagner as portrayed by Bugs and Elmer.

The irony of the mundane Elmer expressing his desires through music, and especially through *Wagner's* music, makes for a truly comic moment; the film critic Philip Brophy declares that "it is almost as if this is actually a *serious* cartoon—which is precisely what makes it so comical."[48] Of all the serious moments in *What's Opera, Doc?*, none is more so than this one, and it is therefore the funniest moment as well. Part of the scene's gravity comes from Elmer's expression of murderous lust. By the time this



EXAMPLE 10 Melody for "Kill the wabbit."

short appeared in 1957, the meetings between Bugs Bunny and Elmer Fudd had moved well beyond the predictable. As an adversary, Elmer did not offer much of an opponent for Bugs; he was just too gullible. In order to revitalize the feeling of conflict for *What's Opera, Doc?*, the stakes between hunter and hunted had to be higher. In earlier cartoons Elmer proclaims "I'm hunting wabbits," or "Ooooh, I'll get you for this, you, you . . . wabbit!" Here, he audibly states that he wants to *kill* Bugs.[49] Although other Warner Bros. directors had characters "die" on screen (for example, Clampett, in *Hare Ribbin'*, 1944; Freleng, in *Back Alley Oproar*, 1948), and attempted murder and involuntary manslaughter occur in almost every cartoon, *What's Opera, Doc?* marked a particularly dramatic exploration of these ideas for Jones. The safety of the operatic diegesis allows Jones to deal with death almost lightly: the comic juxtaposition between the opera and cartoon worlds predisposes the audience to ignore issues of mortality—after all, how can a cartoon character be killed? At the same time, however, Elmer's hunt and Bugs's subsequent death suggest that in Jones's mind, a death is a natural if not essential part of an operatic narrative, an inference confirmed by Bugs's parting shot as the cartoon ends.

Thus we come to the other shaping force behind this story, which allows Jones and Maltese to bring two worlds into conflict: the metanarrative of the animated cartoon, in this case the chase. Fundamental to this type of story line is expecting the unexpected, since Bugs has every right to use *any* means at his disposal to keep Elmer from catching or killing him (or both). Cartoons that fall into the chase subgenre usually consist of disparate scenes in rapid succession. *What's Opera, Doc?* contains the expected and reassuring story details that any Wagner opera should have, while still displaying the unpredictability for which the Warner Bros. cartoons had become famous. By putting the two styles together, Jones can appeal to the cartoon and opera fan at the same time. Seeing Elmer and Bugs in the same story is enough for any cartoon fan to fathom the core narrative of the cartoon: Elmer hunting Bugs. And in case some of us do not get the point immediately, Jones clearly indicates the chase subplot with the opening words/arioso: "Be vewy quiet—I'm hunting wabbits!" The subplot is more than simply just the motivation

for the story itself: the ongoing conflict between Bugs and Elmer bridges the gaps between the five operatic episodes. Elmer's consuming desire to catch Bugs transcends time, place, and setting; Bugs always verbally toys with Elmer, and then mentally and physically abuses him until a critical moment when somebody gets "hurt." Knowing that all this will unfold gives the cartoon fan a sense of security; so, too, an opera devotee takes comfort in the belief that generic norms will be maintained, though they are norms of a different nature.

Indeed, the story must end in accordance with the audience expectations not just for a cartoon but also (as perceived by Jones) for an opera. Christopher Small points out that all such stories "partake of the nature of myth," and that even the conventional "happy" ending leaves us wondering, "What makes people happy?"[50] In this case, Elmer triumphs over Bugs, for Jones's notion of Wagner's universe dictates that the story involve a tragic death—even though such a death confounds the archetypal Warner Bros. chase, in which Bugs prevails. Elmer/Siegfried carries the lifeless Bugs/Brünnhilde off into the distance, perhaps to a funeral pyre. Lest we forget we are watching a cartoon, Bugs breaks character and the fourth wall to address the audience with "Well, what did you *expect* in an opera? A *happy* ending?" A death provides the audience with what they "expect" from a dramatic opera, while Bugs's trickery at the expense of death fulfills our desires that he outsmart Elmer the hunter. Everybody is happy.

When the thrust of the opera's narrative momentarily weakens in the cartoon, the protagonists' personalities as *cartoon* characters reenergize the scene. The humor comes from the collision between their established personas and the fantastic yet straitlaced world of Wagner, not from the pratfalls and explosions typical to cartoons, especially those in the vaudeville-based style of the Warner Bros. shorts. Jones apparently felt that some sign of respect toward the composer was necessary, insisting, "There are *no gags* in the film. We believed that a rabbit and a hunter working with that grand music in a fully Wagnerian environment would be funny enough in itself. But with the humor coming from personality rather than from gags, the need to play the music properly and to make the action logical became more emphatic."[51]

The claim that there are absolutely no gags in *What's Opera, Doc?* is not quite true; more accurately (and what Jones likely meant), there are few cartoon-based gags in the film. In his quest to preserve Wagner's dramatic integrity, Jones refrains from the physical or word-based humor that usually pervades his cartoons. Instead, he relies on the seeming mismatch of high and low art forms to create comedic tension. As Michael Barrier puts it, "Jones obviously respects *both* his principal ingredients, Bugs Bunny and Richard Wagner. He invites his audience to sneer at neither one, but to enjoy the incongruity of Bugs Bunny in a Wagnerian setting instead."[52]

Those gags that do occur are not as explicit or gratuitous as in most cartoons. For instance, as mentioned earlier, when a distressed Bugs rhetorically repeats back Elmer's "Kill the wabbit!" he blinks his eyes rapidly, exactly in sync with the Valkyrie motif on the flute; thus his gesture is both distraught and momentarily comic. And when Elmer conjures the forces of nature to "strike the wabbit," the final and most deadly earthly power he calls down is "Smog!"—a curse he yells at the top of his lungs. The topical joke about the pollution in Los Angeles (especially in the 1950s) briefly startles the audience out of the opera's universe.[53] In a gag that plays with Wagnerian convention, as Elmer stabs furiously at Bugs's rabbit hole, he yells out "Yo-ho-to-ho!" rather than the familiar "Ho-yo-to-ho!" of *The Valkyries*. In case we think that Elmer has simply switched his syllables, he ends his onslaught with a final "Yo-ho!," just short of a slightly more congenial "Yoo-hoo!"

When Elmer destroys the mountains around him in retaliation for Bugs's drag deception (see figure 46), Jones puts the narrative perspective of the short into question. As the mountains come crashing down, the audience wonders whether the action is taking place on the stage of an opera house or in a world of animated make-believe. We can see the falling mountains either as a stage's backdrop—perhaps even sets at Bayreuth—crumbling, or as proof that Elmer indeed has the powers he claims to wield in Wagner's universe. The beginning of the cartoon as described above, a title card and credits shown while the sounds of a tuning orchestra (including bits of leitmotifs) are heard, complicates the question of interpretation. Maurice Noble recalled, "We'd had a production designer that wanted to have the proscenium arch right on stage all the time. I said, well, to hell with that, you know, I wanted to have *super* grand opera. We threw away the arch completely and immediately began writing on a grand scale."[54] Jones also stated repeatedly that in *What's Opera, Doc?* he took two unpredictable elements (Bugs and Elmer) and simply dropped them into the ordered world that Wagner had created.[55] The audience understands that they are seeing an animated spoof on opera and all its stereotypes; whether they believe the story is set in the Rhineland where the *Ring* takes place does not matter as long as Bugs and Elmer play out their parts to the fullest, which they do.

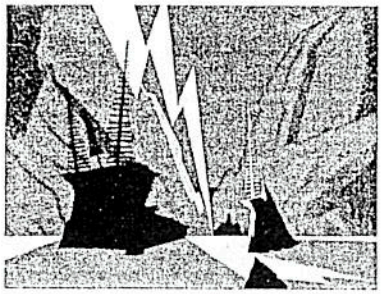


FIGURE 46 The world comes crashing down in *What's Opera, Doc?*

Perhaps one of the few stereotypes that Bugs does not take on is the prototypical woman of opera. The roles of female characters in cartoons are limited at best, and the use of opera and opera narratives did nothing to add to them, despite the ease with which images of the loud female opera singers, or the proverbial fat lady, might be spoofed. The Rossini and Donizetti arias mentioned above as frequently used in cartoons are performed by men; no such famous aria for women appears. The few women that are depicted in operatic roles are usually a hybrid form, wearing the costume associated with Wagner's Rhinemaidens but singing Italian words. Occasionally we see someone performing as Carmen, as in *Chile Con Carmen* (Lantz, 1930) and *Carmen Get It!* (MGM; Deitch, 1962). Apparently, the use of female characters simply did not occur to the directors. Jones once commented on the general absence of female stars in Hollywood cartoons, "This always comes up. . . . It's a pity. I can only beat my breast and say that I should be nailed to the wall. But I didn't [consider having any female characters]. So I don't know how to answer that except to say I'm sorry."[56]

Jones fails to mention the host of instances when male characters dress in drag, a device he uses in all three of his opera cartoons: *Long-Haired Hare*, *The Rabbit of Seville*, and, most extensively, *What's Opera, Doc?* He injects his characters into an unusual performance space, but he compels them to adopt only the attire appropriate to their environment and not the physical form of its usual inhabitants. For Bugs, this means assuming the costume of a Wagnerian diva, but not her stereotypical size.[57] The horse Bugs rides while posing as Brünnhilde, however, more than makes up for his (unusually—for a diva) svelte figure. Jones exaggerates Bugs's steed to the point of absurdity, enabling the bunny as Brünnhilde to make a truly grand entrance. As already noted, Jones clearly modeled

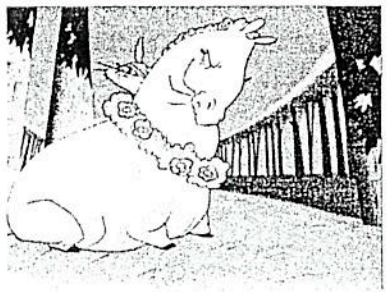


FIGURE 47 The disdainful steed in *What's Opera, Doc?*

his horse on the one that appeared in a similar scene in *Herr Meets Hare*, which itself seems to have been influenced by the centaurs in the Pastoral Symphony section of *Fantasia*, which in turn were inspired by classical Greek vase paintings. In his autobiography *Chuck Amuck*, Jones explains: "Missing the great pink, busty quality of the proverbial Wagnerian diva, we invested all the fat curves we owned in Brünnhilde's charger." He tells the story slightly differently in *Chuck Reducks:* "Since we didn't have a voluptuous soprano at hand, I designed a voluptuous horse as a stand-in."[58] The horse acts as a surrogate because Jones cannot change Bugs physically. He even gives the horse a bit of personality: at one point during Bugs and Elmer's ballet, Bugs hides coyly behind the horse as Elmer gives chase playfully, while the horse looks on at their capers with a clearly perceptible sneer (see figure 47).

WRESTLING OPERA

In his discussion of storytelling and the use of myth, Christopher Small claims that "the historical accuracy of a myth is more or less irrelevant to its power as paradigm."[59] Rather than striving for complete historical accuracy—using a scene directly from a Wagner opera with its original music intact—Jones and Maltese instead go for a more entertaining approach: they create a cartoon that is *culturally* accurate, satisfying the common notions of what Wagner's operas look and sound like. Nothing that occurs in the narrative of *What's Opera, Doc?* is drawn directly from Wagner—all the events are parodies or stereotypes—and the cartoon likewise almost entirely avoids using its own heritage of comedy and timing developed over twenty-five years (rooted largely in film comedies and vaudeville routines). That is, we can imagine the better part of the action

of *What's Opera, Doc?* occurring in any Wagner opera; nothing Bugs or Elmer does goes beyond the bounds of operatic spectacle. Thus Jones adroitly likens the operatic nature of his own medium to the cartoonish tendencies of Wagner's world—perhaps his intent all along. Because of its spectacular nature (fairly reeking of high culture), opera invited its own comeuppance; what better way for Jones to simultaneously deal with the two entertainment media than by showing that opera and cartoons appeal equally to the desire for melodramatic spectacle?

For most people in the 1950s, as Joseph Horowitz notes, Wagner represented "Opera" both musically and stylistically;[60] *What's Opera, Doc?* gives those who never had the opportunity to see an opera a glimpse of what it's like even as the cartoon levels some satire at a few of the sacred icons of the spectacle. This approach may begin to explain the short's success. A film like *Fantasia* presents a novel and in some respects modern way of looking at a piece of classical music, but the Disney studio's reverence for classical music prevented the animation from having any significant effect on the music. Warner Bros. (and other studios, including Lantz, MGM, and Fleischer) allowed much more interaction between the worlds of animation and music, and as a result the story often commented explicitly on the music. *What's Opera, Doc?* is a case in point, through its lampooning of high culture. Jones represented opera through a fixed musical and visual vocabulary; as long as the overall gesture worked, the means to accomplishing it didn't matter. *What's Opera, Doc?* exists as a testament to opera's most familiar stereotypes, many of which had, by 1957, become associated with Wagner; the two were inseparable for Jones, and thus there was no need for Wagner's name ever to be seen or heard in the cartoon.

I began chapter 4 by noting that cartoons have come to provide rudimentary training in music appreciation, since many people claim to have first been exposed to classical music while watching cartoons. The same is true of opera, as recently demonstrated on *The Jeff Foxworthy Show.* In an episode titled "Wrestling Opera" (1997), the main character, played by Jeff Foxworthy, has to take his child to an opera for a school trip. In one scene his stereotypically redneck friends discuss the outing:

Andre: And why are you bad-mouthing opera? I know you like the music.
Florus: I do not. Take it back.
Andre: You like cartoons, right?
[Florus smiles and nods, then drops his smile.]
Florus: Is this a trick question?
Andre: Well, cartoons are full of opera music. Remember Elmer Fudd on stage in a little Viking hat? (*Hums*) Da da di daaaa da, da da di daaaa da, da da di daaaa da.
Florus: Yeah . . .
Andre: That's Wagner. That's opera.
Bill: Yeah, but if you take Elmer and Bugs out of it, opera's really boring.[61]

The *Jump Start* comic strip at the beginning of this chapter (figure 37) offers another example of the extent to which popular notions of opera are drawn from cartoons. We don't know what opera Joe and his wife Marcy are attending, and it doesn't matter—his musical knowledge of opera derives, as he says, completely from Bugs Bunny.

In a 1946 article, Chuck Jones foresaw the possible role his cartoons might take: "The animated cartoon can match, enhance, make credible the melodic fantasy of the composer. Overlapping here a little bit, I believe that the educational system will one day demand a library for its public schools of just such painless introductions to classic and semiclassic music."[62] Many would argue that such exposure renders Beethoven, Mendelssohn, and Wagner anonymous (in cartoons, there is no time to mention the names of the composers being spoofed), chopping up their respective works and reducing them, like a stockpot of classical melodies, down to the barest essence of the now-defunct canon—the same short melodies that found their way into silent film underscores only decades earlier. Yet the music in cartoons can inspire audiences to learn more about the composers caricatured and parodied. Similarly, though *What's Opera, Doc?* and cartoons like it are often accused of undercutting and weakening classical music's rightful place in the cultural hierarchy, in reality they do as much to maintain music's elevated status as do more worshipful representations. Just as *Fantasia* firmly places Bach and Beethoven in the temple of high culture, so too *What's Opera, Doc?* reminds us that classical music is high art; every time we see these cartoons, we are reminded that the object of their parody—opera—occupies a place of honor in our culture. By focusing on music and concert hall culture as worthy subjects for deflation, these cartoons more firmly set the music and spectacle in their high place.