Theatre De Hula Hula (19--)  

Here is one in a long list of mystery films from the silent era. Clearly designed to be shown either in a vaudeville house or at a special exhibition requiring several musicians to accompany the action, it looks even to have had a specific score to match movements of the dancers. The film is processed in reverse to provide a negative effect that imparts an appropriate darkened-theater ambience to the proceedings. The bottom third of the picture is an animation “cycle” (a series of drawings repeated over and over) which gives a furious feel to the musicians. Most silent animation is based on wordplay and gag situations, but here the comical dance routines represent a wonderful early use of animation created for purely humorous effect. The animation itself is quite funny and charming, but those responsible for this delightful little gem probably will remain unknown.

The Enchanted Drawing (1900)  

Cartoonist J. Stuart Blackton (1875-1941) was born in England and immigrated to the United States at the age of ten. In 1895, after a brief stint in vaudeville, Blackton became a reporter and cartoonist for the New York Evening World. A year later, Blackton was working for Thomas Edison’s film company, where he appeared on screen (as he does here) doing “Lightning Sketches” -- drawing at a rapid speed to the delight of onlookers. Inspired by Edison’s motion pictures, Blackton co-founded the Vitagraph studio to create films and distribute them to early nickelodeons. Blackton’s The Enchanted Drawing, released in 1900, is considered one of the forerunners of animated films to come. It’s more appropriately a “trick film,” employing stop-action techniques pioneered by Georges Melies to make a sketched face, cigars, a bottle of wine, and a hat appear as real objects after being drawn. Blackton’s animated chalk talk, Humorous Phases of Funny Faces (1906), was a more significant contribution to the art of animation, but The Enchanted Drawing is an important step in the right direction. Blackton went on to pioneer hand-drawn animation (Humorous Phases of Funny Faces) and stop motion (The Haunted Hotel, 1907), and has been rightly dubbed the Father of American Animation.

How Jones Lost His Roll (1905)  

When animation was in its infancy, it was used most often as a special effect. How Jones Lost His Roll (1905) is not an animated film, nor a significant part of animation history, but it is a great example of the kind of early movie Thomas Edison’s crew was producing for nickelodeons and Kinetoscopes. Why should titles be static and still when motion pictures now allowed for movement? The technicians at Edison’s studio magically moved the film’s narrative text via stop motion. Edison used animated titles in several films, such as The Whole Dam Family and the Dam Dog and Coney Island at Night (both 1905), and as a special effect in several films, as well. This use of the camera was said to inspire J. Stuart Blackton’s experiments in his cartoon animation breakthrough, Humorous Phases of Funny Faces (1906), and later, The Haunted Hotel (1907).

Bob’ Electric Theatre (1906)  

Although this is one of the earliest stop-motion puppet films ever created, it is quite sophisticated and loaded with charm. The animation is credited to Segundo de Chomon, who in 1901 opened a film lab in Barcelona, Spain, specializing in shooting film titles, as well as hand coloring and tinting films – his exquisite color work is well showcased here. Chomon was a pioneering director of photography and is credited with the invention of the camera dolly (a cart with which to move the motion picture camera) in
1907. He chanced upon the concept of stop-motion animation while filming titles frame by frame. In 1905 he created *El Hotel Electrico*, a short about an ultramodern hotel, in which he manipulated luggage and clothing to appear as though they were unpacking themselves. Moving to Paris in 1906, he collaborated with filmmaker Gaston Velle to create this film, *Le Theatre de Petite Bob*. Both Velle and Chomon were heavily influenced by the films of Georges Melies. The lifelike use of puppet dolls here predates the work of Ladislas Starevitch (pioneering stop-motion puppeteer) and Willis O'Brien (*The Lost World* and *King Kong*). Like in their work, Chomon infuses his characters with personalities that allow us to identify with their actions.

*Indoor Sports* (1920)

Based on the newspaper comic panels of Thomas “Tad” Dorgan, this animated cartoon is one of a short series produced in 1920 by William Randolph Hearst’s International Film Service. Tad’s comic strips alternated between *Indoor Sports* (gags inside the office, drugstore, or pool hall) and *Outdoor Sports* (taking shots at sports figures and their fans). Dorgan himself is credited with creating the many popular slang expressions used in his comic strips, many of which are still in use today (phrases like “hardboiled,” “dumbbell,” and “drugstore cowboy,” to name but a few). His other comic strips included *Johnny Wise, Daffydills*, and *Judge Rummy*. The *Indoor Sports* strips were published by Hearst’s International Feature Syndicate, which led to their being adapted to the movie screen by Hearst’s own animation studio. Dorgan himself had little to do with the screen adaptations. This particular short was animated by Paul D. Robinson, a budding cartoonist who would go on to fame and fortune as the creator of *Etta Kett*, a popular comic strip for Hearst’s King Features which ran almost 50 years, from 1925 to 1974.

*Joys and Glooms* (1921)

Thomas E. Powers (1870-1937) was one of the most popular cartoonists of the early 20th Century. Beloved by U.S. presidents for his editorial cartoons, he was one of the earliest to draw a color newspaper comic strip. One of the trademarks of his print cartoons was the appearance of several little elves, seen along the borders and on the sides of the panels, labeled “Joys” and “Glooms.” “Glooms” were dour imps with black beards, and the round-shaped “Joys” always wore happy grins. If optimism was in order, “Joy” chased “Gloom,” and vice versa. The shorts based on Powers’ comics were just as innovative as his print panels. This film, *Her Minute* (1921), proves that over eighty years later, some habits and attitudes never change. Animator John Terry (Paul’s brother) makes creative use of the screen by dividing it into sections and using black screens that provide humorous commentary or indicate the characters’ inner feelings to the audience. The “Joys and Glooms” were a regular component in Hearst’s International Newsreel, distributed to theatres in the 1920s by Universal Pictures.

*A Pool Plunge* (1922)

As one of the only surviving sequences from “Burr’s Novelty Review,” a silent comedy series produced by distributor Charles C. Burr in 1922, *A Pool Plunge* is an interesting oddity. John (J.J.) McManus and R.E. Donahue created the amusing combination of live action and animation – not unlike the sort of thing Max Fleischer had already established. The technique required filming the live action first, then making large photographic blow-ups of each 35mm frame. The animators would draw the cartoon character on a paper overlay for each photograph. The drawings would be transferred by ink and paint to celluloid sheets (cels), then re-photographed under the camera, cels on top of the photographs, one frame at a time. It’s a very effective, low-budget way to create amazing special effects. Six “Novelty Reviews” were made in 1922. Burr originally released these shorts through his own distribution company, Mastodon Films.
Animated Hair Cartoon (1925)

In 1923, animation pioneer and producer Max Fleischer started a distribution company, Red Seal Pictures, for greater independence and control over his films – not to mention bigger potential profits. To do so, Fleischer needed more product than his studio normally could produce. In addition to his innovative “Out of the Inkwell” shorts with Ko-Ko the Clown, Fleischer supplemented his release schedule with the production of “Song Car-tunes” (some with sound – predating Disney by several years) and a live action comedy series, “Carrie of the Chorus.” He also picked up several shorts from outside producers, including a stop-motion series called “Gems of the Screen” and a newsreel named “Film Facts.” The “Animated Hair” films, featuring artwork by “Marcus” (not well-known animator Sid Marcus, but a caricaturist for the original humorous Life Magazine) were relatively easy for the studio to produce, using one artist (his hand usually seen on screen drawing the image) and the gimmick of manipulating one caricature with stop motion to create a second caricature (usually by rearranging a hair-do). Audiences were thrilled. Fifty one “Animated Hair” shorts were produced between 1924 and 1927. This entry (No. 18) was released on July 11, 1925. Red Seal ultimately did not work out for the Fleischers. In 1927, they entered into a long-term arrangement with Paramount Pictures and would go on to their greatest success.

The Lost World – Promotional Film (1925)

If you thought Star Wars was the first fantasy film to be exploited via toy and game merchandise, think again! The producers of The Lost World (1925) knew they had a truly unique film on their hands – and did everything they could to trumpet its release. The year 1925 also happened to be the height of a word puzzle craze in the United States, and plans were quickly drawn up to unite the two.

This rare short promotional film features The Lost World star Bessie Love, then at the height of her popularity, as well as cinema personalities and First National Pictures contractees, actor Milton Sills and director Lambert Hillyer, attempting to solve The Lost World Puzzle, a product tie-in created specifically to hype the movie. In a clever twist, the puzzle’s inventor, Bob Sherman, demonstrates the solution via stop-motion animation. The frame-by-frame technique shows how the pieces correctly fit together. Considering how The Lost World was a pioneering stop-motion classic, it’s quite appropriate that the promo employed this bit of movie magic.

The Lost World – Trailer (1925)

“The greatest entertainment the brains of man have ever achieved!” proclaims a title in the coming attractions trailer for The Lost World, and that statement isn’t far from the truth. The 1925 feature based on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s book is best known for its pioneering special effects and the stop-motion animation provided by Willis O’Brien (preceding his classic work on 1933’s King Kong). This preview reel shows several of the innovative scenes that combine miniature animated creatures and live-action photography which completely dazzled audiences of the era. O’Brien had been animating dinosaurs in comedy reels for Thomas Edison’s film company since the mid-teens. Though several of the films O’Brien made prior to The Lost World still survive, many others are lost. In 1919, he began experimenting with ways to bring realistic dinosaurs to life via stop motion for a possible The Lost World feature film. Arthur Conan Doyle showed O’Brien’s test scenes publicly in New York in 1922; the reactions from private screenings to his circle of acquaintances, including Houdini, startled viewers, convincing many that these images were “conjured from the ether.” The footage was so exciting it made headlines on the front page.
of The New York Times. First National Pictures formally announced plans of the production of The Lost World in 1924. The final film advanced the art of special effects in several ways: the animation was more sophisticated, the miniatures more articulate and realistic, and the blending of live action and animation more expert due to new techniques involving double exposure. Matching the actors on sets with the miniature work was unprecedented. This trailer is the first glimpse of the film the public ever saw, and a great example of the hype and ballyhoo that films of the era typically enjoyed. However, in this case, that hype was fully justified. The Lost World was not only a great film, but the predecessor of today's Hollywood special effects-filled blockbusters.

The Wandering Toy (1928)

Lyman H. Howe was a pioneering filmmaker and motion picture showman who began exhibiting films in a traveling show from 1896. Howe collected and produced films depicting the sights and lifestyles of foreign lands, and gained a reputation as an early documentarian. From his base in Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania, Howe distributed educational short subjects and also founded a film laboratory. Shortly before his death in 1923, he contracted with Educational Pictures to create a series of miscellaneous shorts utilizing his accumulated film archive. Over 100 “Lyman H. Howe’s Hodge Podge” subjects were released between 1922 and 1933. Some shorts were completely live action, while others, like this one, were a combination of live action and animation. The Wandering Toy is a late entry in the series (released May 19, 1928), and it combines paper cut-out animation mixed with live travelogue footage of Sweden, Bavaria, Morocco, Holland, Mexico, India, and Japan. Robert E. Gillaum conceived and edited the film, Archie N. Griffith drew the art and animated it. The results are an attractive and unique combination of travelogue and cartoon, certainly quite different from the usual animated fare at the time.

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Jerry Beck is an animation historian with twelve books on the subject including The Animated Movie Guide, Looney Tunes: The Ultimate Visual Guide and The 50 Greatest Cartoons. He is a former studio exec with Nickelodeon and Disney, and has programmed retrospectives for the Annecy and Ottawa Animation Festivals, The Museum of Modern Art and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences. He has taught animation history at NYU, SVA, the AFI and UCLA. He is co-writer of the animation industry blog, Cartoon Brew, http://www.cartoonbrew.com/