

# MAGOO ON HI-FI

IF you should meet Mr Magoo the chances are that he won't see you—or if he does realise you're there, he'll treat you as if you were a lamp-post or a horse or his grandmother, or anything else he's thinking about at the time. For Mr Magoo is a very short-sighted gentleman indeed. The difference between what is in front of him and what he *thinks* is there, is the basis of the comedies built around him. And although he's primarily a screen actor, Mr Magoo has recently ventured into the sound recording business: as he modestly puts it, "Magoo, the successor to Edison."

On his record he discovers the delights of the high fidelity system, although as might be expected his attempts to assemble a build-it-yourself Hi-Fi set are not entirely free from complications. The music which he does finally succeed in playing is typical of the gay music which Dennis Farnon writes for all Magoo features. On the other side of the LP it comes out of the background to take a solo role in the *Mother Magoo Suite*, in which Mother Magoo exposes the blatant way in which Mother Goose has adapted her very original compositions.

Mr Magoo, of course, is one of the best-known cartoon stars of United Productions of America, who also introduced to the world's screens Gerald McBoing-Boing, and a large number of other highly original creations. The man behind UPA is Stephen Bosustow, who

in looks is not unlike a younger Walt Disney. Indeed, at one time he was working with Walt Disney as an animator. It didn't last long. It lasted long enough, however, for a group of younger artists to discuss their desire to break away from the Disney conventions in cartooning and develop a more impressionistic style, both sound and visual. At first the new unit made training films for the American State Department, but in 1948 it began making entertainment films which Columbia Pictures soon put on the market.

Mr Magoo appeared some time in 1950. The basic idea came from writer Millard Kauffman, and the distinctive voice of Magoo comes from Jim Backus, the American actor who was seen as James Dean's father in *Rebel Without a Cause*, and as the manager of the night-club in *Meet Me in Las Vegas*.

While cartoons from Disney and other companies had been striving after greater realism, trying to make the drawn characters as natural as live actors, the cartoons appearing in magazines and newspapers had moved in the opposite direction. Victorian cartoons in magazines like *Punch* were elaborate works of art in detail and shading, not telling the joke but illustrating the written dialogue. Gradually cartoonists tried to tell the joke in the drawing, simplifying and omitting until only the most important details were left and some jokes even became purely visual. Not only was the elaboration dropped, but an element of caricature crept in and artists developed highly individual styles. Today we see the results of this movement not only in the pages of *Punch*, *The New Yorker* and the *Saturday Evening Post*, but also in the work of local artists like Minninnick, A. S. Paterson and Neville Lodge.

It is to this manner that UPA have turned. Their drawings are simple but highly stylised, with clear outlines, striking colours, and airy design. Their drawings have a deliberate flatness, which nevertheless interprets the essentially human actions of their people. Compared to Disney, they are cartoons for adults. And UPA are having some influences on other companies, not only in style, but in the basic situations chosen for cartoons.

But it is not the style of the drawings that is making UPA so gay, but Mr Magoo, a cartoon hero who is not a dog, duck, cat or mouse. Short, bald and benevolent, this myopic gentleman of late middle age inhabits a world that is a perpetual blur. His idea of what is happening is never close to reality, and the comedy and fantastic

situations arise from his refusal to recognise the fact.

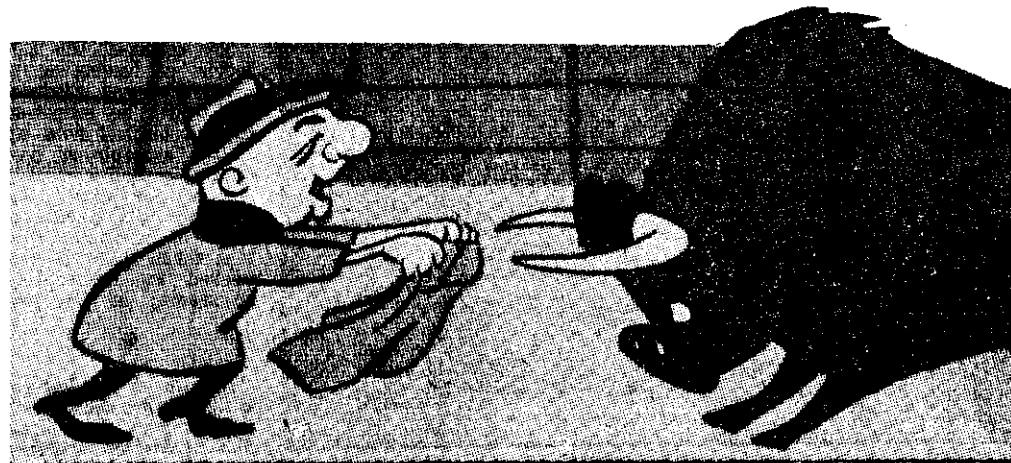
His courage in the face of wildly improbable obstacles and his conviction that all is well with him makes him a clown at odds with reality. Like Buster Keaton, he moves in a world which has been bewitched while his back was turned, but Magoo never realises that. One critic has called him "a victim of a personal fantasy—he believes in the normality of the world." He blunders gaily on, missing death and mutilation by a hair's breadth, yet always saved by his innocence and conviction that he is doing the right thing. Nevertheless, Magoo lives in a real world. David Fisher has found a reason for Magoo's increasing popularity: as compared with the Disney characters in the fact that Magoo personifies a contemporary situation. "Donald Duck, for instance, did the sort of things we did not dare do ourselves; he was the rebel we would have liked to have been. Since then . . . we have had every opportunity of studying the nature and results of irresponsible action. And we no longer admire it. Mr Magoo represents for us the man who would be responsible and serious in a world that seems insane."

## WHEN TO LISTEN

"SOUNDS OF MY CITY" (see opposite page) and "Magoo in Hi-Fi," which mark the start of a new quarter's features for the 9.0 p.m. spot on Sunday evening Commercial station programmes will be heard on September 8—the first from 4ZB, the second from 2ZB. The same evening 1ZB will be playing the first of two programmes starring "Jussi Bjorling at Carnegie Hall," while 3ZB presents "Journey to Johani," the South African contribution to a four-programme series prepared for the BBC by the broadcasting services of South Africa, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The other three programmes will be "Brothers in Arms" (CBC), "Where the World Begins" (NZBS), and "Bokis Belong Sing Sing" (ABC).

Also due to be scheduled at this time on Sunday evenings from the Commercial stations are Leonard Bernstein's illustrated talk on Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*, the Children's Concert from the 1956 Aldeburgh Festival, and two programmes from the Roger Wagner Choral, one of the American folk songs and the other a selection of religious songs of many faiths and many forms, from a Palestrina motet to a Negro spiritual. In lighter vein is a programme by Benny Fields and Blossom Seeley, two veterans of American show business.

These Sunday evening programmes will all be heard in turn from all ZB and ZA stations.



LEFT: Magoo on the screen — "missing death and mutilation by a hair's breadth"