

INTRODUCTION

In animation film everything is possible. Fairies, witches, wizards, ogres and other figments of the imagination bring a fairytale universe to life. Magic is performed for all its worth, spells cast and then conjured away. Just like with the DEFA Studio for Animation Film Dresden. One of the country's first addresses for children's animation films till the end of the GDR in 1990, just two years later it no longer existed. Conjured away by the magic word "unprofitable".

The 60. anniversary in May 2006 of DEFA's founding, communist East Germany's state film production body, provides an excellent opportunity to look back on a chapter of German film history that may be closed but remains far from forgotten. DEFA was not just the Babelsberg studio and major feature films. DEFA was also the filmmakers who had been shooting films, especially those for the youngest of audiences, on the western heights of Dresden since 1. April 1955. They placed their bets on film's most amazing offspring, animation film. Films were produced in all the common animation techniques, using drawn or cut-out animation as indeed the "black art" of silhouette film which was never cultivated with such intensity like in Dresden. But it was puppet films especially which proved to be a permanent fixture in the productions from Dresden. For cinema screenings alone – no doubt inspired by Saxony's puppet show tradition – 480 films were produced in which animated puppet figures as indeed glove puppet figures played the protagonists.

Everyday stories and especially the inexhaustible fund of popular and literary fairytales represented the filmmakers' source of inspiration. Film adaptations of fairytales were shot with such great charm that their artistic excellence permitted the audiences to forget that the hero had been created from papier-mâché, foam rubber or leather. In the same manner the figures from Goethe's "Novella" were fashioned from Dresden porcelain, just like the witty, substantial "Clever Farmer's Daughter" who just did not correspond to conventional concepts of beauty. It was easy to believe that the chilly court ladies in

“The Myrtle Girl” really did come from the land of “Porcelainia”, while the solid Kracke farming couple, which first flowed from the pen of German satirical cartoonist Wilhelm Busch, immediately aroused the audience’s sympathy.

All of the figures mentioned here and many more besides can be found in the archive section of the German Institute for Animation Film (DIAF) at its premises in Dresden. The institute administers the artistic legacy of the Dresden-based studio, consisting of extensive film footage, written and visual documents, graphic sketches, puppets, sets, props and thousands of animation film transparencies and cells. It is considered to be the largest collection on German animation film anywhere in the country. Ensuring that it remains open and accessible to the public both physically and in their minds is one of the tasks which the institute always enjoys performing.

The German Institute for Animation Film (DIAF) would like to thank the DEFA Foundation for its extensive support in restoring the puppets, as well as in arranging and presenting the exhibition in various European cities.

Sabine Scholze
Managing Director DIAF