

# Disney Channel kisses off Walt, Annette, Zorro

**Dear Ken:** I need your help. I remember reading in your column once that you liked the old *Wonderful World of Disney* program *For the Love of Willadean*. I like this and a lot of the other *Wonderful World* shows as well. I don't know if you've heard but The Disney Channel is dropping its Vault Disney programming, including *Wonderful World, Zorro, Spin and Marty*, etc. These shows already had been shunted to a few wee-of-night hours each day but now, even with a VCR, they won't be available.

This stinks. If there's not room for these shows on The Disney Channel, even at 1 a.m., for Pete's sake, where will they ever turn up? Fortunately, Disney's decision is creating something of an outcry.

You can read more about what Disney is doing in the discussion board, television section, of [laughingplace.com](http://laughingplace.com). Included there is a good summary of things by Bill Cotter, author of *The Wonderful World of Disney Television — A Complete History*. I believe his summary also is available on his Web site.



Walt Disney holds an early model of his most famous creation, Mickey Mouse, in 1960.

I have a 2-year-old son. He loves Donald Duck cartoons. The first feature he watched all the way through was *Bedknobs and Broomsticks*.

Television needs more family friendly programming, not less, even if it's only in the middle of the night. I hope you'll find space in your column to mention this issue. Maybe we can get the Disney Channel to rethink this one.

—JJ/Nashville

**Dear J.J.:** We may be too late to stop this but, like you, "I want my Vault Disney." The Disney Channel, like any good business, is going where it smells the money. We can't blame them for that, but it would be nice to think there could be room for a bit of compromise.

I checked the Web sites you mentioned, and there is quite a buzz on this programming change, mostly coming from baby boomers who grew up on all things Disney, such as *The Mickey Mouse Club*, the



Annette Funicello, the most famous Mouseketeer of them all, and Jimmie Dodd pose on the set of *The Mickey Mouse Club* in 1956.

*Davy Crockett* miniseries, *Zorro* and *Wonderful World of Disney*. Many of these shows were airing under the Vault Disney banner from midnight to 4 a.m. here in Middle Tennessee.

Now the channel is going with reruns of more recent youth shows such as *So Weird, Jett Jackson, Boy Meets World, Smart Guy, Sister Sister, Even Stevens* and *Lizzie McGuire*. The natural question is what kids would be up watching TV at those unearthly hours (I guess that goes the same for adults, but we can set our VCRs)?

The Disney Channel explained their actions of dropping the oldies because they want their channel to be 24 hours of kid stuff.

Richard Ross, president of entertainment for the Disney Channel, told the *Los Angeles Times*, "The Disney Channel is a service for kids and their families; it's not a general entertainment service for everybody. We can't be all things for all people."

Writer Bill Cotter, a champion of the old Disney shows, counters by saying, "There is actually very little Disney still airing on the Disney Channel." He also recorded comments made by a Disney executive to *L.A. Times* reporter Richard Verrier on his Web site and responded to them.

Disney: "By taking these shows off the air, we can save money and divert it to create new shows."

Cotter: "Totally non-sensible. They do not pay anyone for the older shows, which they own outright..."

Disney: "There is actually a wide market for children at this time of night due to different time zones."

Cotter: Doesn't hold water. With two satellite feeds, they are offering

the service at the same time or close to it in most parts of the country. I gather they offered Hawaii as an example. Well, as I pointed out, a show on at 1 a.m. in L.A. is 10 p.m. in Hawaii, and it's doubtful a lot of kids will be watching sitcoms at that hour. Even less at 1 a.m. for our 4 a.m., right?"

Disney: "They want to create a 24-hour family channel."

Cotter: "What — the parents and adults aren't part of the family? So shows oriented toward 16-year-olds is it?"

Cotter concludes on his Web site, stating, "I agree that Disney does need to stay current and that you can't live 100% in the past, but offered the opinion that leaving the classics on for two hours or so a night would be a small price to pay to keep the legions of baby boomers happy. I suggested they could do a Classic Disney channel as they did with Toon Disney."

To contact Disney, write Anne Sweeney, president, The Disney Channel, 3800 Alameda Ave., Burbank, Calif. 91505.

For Cotter's Web site, go to <http://www.billcotter.com/zorro/disney-channel-news.htm>.

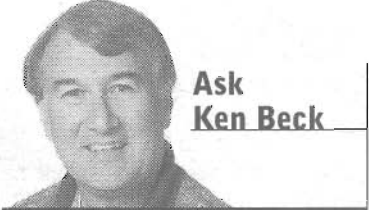
**Dear Ken:** I've got two questions for you, but first a statement. In *Bells of Rosarita*, an old Roy Rogers flick, he pulls together a band of B-western stars to fight the baddies. As he calls for them, he asks for John Wayne (who, he is told, is not available). Since both John Wayne and Roy Rogers were huge Republic studios stars, why didn't they make any films together?

Second question: In the mid to late '60s, there was a country singer, a Japanese or Japanese-American, named Eddie Fukano, who hit it (kinda) big on records and in package tours, then faded from the spotlight. Can you give any information about what became of him?

—B.N./Goodlettsville

**Dear B.N.:** You have stumped me on Japanese country music singer Fukano. I do not know what happened to him, but he once was a guest on *Hee Haw* and he appeared in the 1969 movie *From Nashville With Music*.

Regarding Duke Wayne and Roy Rogers, Republic did pair them in one film, 1940's *Dark Command*.



Ask Ken Beck

Basically, the studio wouldn't pair such stars because they were aimed at different audiences and Republic made money off of each.

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*The New York Times* has reported, via writer William H. Honan, the Aug. 29 death of Paul Tripp, a Pied Piper of early children's television who created the musical fantasy *Tubby the Tuba* and appeared as the host of his own show, *Mr. I. Magination*. He was 91.

*Tubby the Tuba* told the story of Tubby, an orchestral instrument who is disheartened because he, unlike the other instruments in his orchestra, did not have a melody of his own. He was relegated to playing Oom-pah. Tubby meets a friendly bullfrog who shares his melody with him. The melody, in turn, is picked up by other instruments in the orchestra and at the end the whole orchestra triumphantly plays Tubby's melody.

The record, released in 1945, sold eight million copies, making it one of the best-selling children's records of its time.

*Mr. I. Magination*, a weekly show on CBS TV from 1949 to 1952, featured Tripp on a toy train dressed in the striped overalls of a railroad engineer. Surrounded by young children on the train, Tripp, with a wide smile and careful, almost exaggerated enunciation, would tell stories from history and literature.

Some young actors, including Richard Boone and Walter Matthau, got their start on the show, and Yul Brynner directed some episodes. ■

**GOT A QUESTION?**

If you have a trivia question for Ken Beck, drop a line to Ask Ken Beck, *The Tennessean*, 1100 Broadway, Nashville 37203. E-mail: [kbeck@tennessean.com](mailto:kbeck@tennessean.com). Fax: 259-8057. Sorry, but because of the volume of mail, personal replies cannot be guaranteed.