

“WANNA FIGHT?”

By

HELEN G. THOMPSON

Donald the Duck

If you didn't see him in *The Orphans' Benefit*, you missed the performance of the generation. Like Bergner's show, it ran for Donald the whole gamut of his emotions. Voted the toughest duck of the season, Long Island included, and now crashing Europe, a breathless American public awaits his acclaim. Will his fare be raspberries or chuckleberries? Donald says whatever the decision, he'll fight.

Donald Duck is practically an egg. He was born into a Silly Symphony in a quiet moment in November. Call him what you please, ballard, mallard, or lucky ducky, he has no mama or papa. He got his start in life and histrionics in Silly Symphony Number Thirteen, a bad number to begin with, where he played the Proprietor of the Idle Hour. There he distinguished himself as a hypochondriac by getting colic when the Wise Little Hen asked him to help her plant her corn. Later, when he wanted to eat some of the corn muffins and corn bread, the Wise Little Hen said, "You were too sick to work, so you must be too sick to eat." That is when he began to understand about life.

He was just a duck in a plot in this show, but he did his part so ably that he was advanced to the Disney graduate circuit—a Mickey Mouse production. Only tried and true performers such as Mickey Mouse, Minnie Mouse, Horace Horsecollar, Clarabelle Cow, Pluto the Pup, and occasionally The Goof, Fifi and Peg-leg Pete get a look-in on these. It was a great honor for Donald at the tender age of one and one-half months to be called by Mickey. He then appeared in quick succession as a nuisance, a policeman, a garage mechanic and a peanut vender. He played opposite Mickey, Fifi, Peg-leg Pete, The Goof, and behind Clara Cluck. More about this later.

From his first appearance under the new contract, he was slated for stardom. In November, at the opening of *The Orphans'*

Donald the Duck

Benefit, he brought down the house, along with bricks, potted palms and other available impedimenta. Critics say he was STU—pendous. He was hailed as the bad penny deluxe. He was called the greatest pest since Flo McGee and chain letters. It was said that no one had been as beguilingly cross-eyed since Ben Turpin. No one had been flattened out with such finality since the steam roller ran over little Fido. His persistence was comparable to Jean Valjean's nemesis in *Les Misérables*.

Could he take it? That duck Donald made Firpo look like a conqueror. Hooked from the stage, pelted, driven out by the malicious taunting of the orphans, he came up for more and then again more. The story was briefly this: Mickey gave a vaudeville show for an opera house full of orphans. Donald played the part of a duck reciting *Mary Had a Little Lamb*. As an encore, which no one wanted, he recited *Little Boy Blue*. Every time he said, "Little Boy Blue—come blow—" the orphans blew their noses. This made Donald mad—very mad. Conscientiously he tried over and over again to say his piece. The last scene found him—still mad—buried beneath a crate of eggs.



There is some discussion as to whether or not Clara Cluck made Donald Duck. We refer to his career as an actor. There is no sex life in the Disney comedies. The point is whether she, with her superb performance in *The Orphans' Benefit*, wasn't the prima donna *super facto* for Donald, and the martyr that turned fame his way.

Perhaps you will remember. Clara Cluck sang the Sextette from Lucia—by herself—magnificently. With the audience roaring applause she strode off the stage. Behind her, ready for the fourteenth time to recite his piece—jaw set and determined—was Donald. If he had spent two weeks in a feed bin thinking up ways to exasperate, he couldn't have done better. Here was a fine song by a fine singer made ridiculous by a little snip of a duck reciter. This was when the enraged orphans gave him the works.

From November until now, Donald has graced several successes. He appeared in Kalamazoo and in Houston and in Minneapolis all in the same evening. After *The Orphans' Benefit*, he performed in *The Dog Napper*, *The Service Station*, and *The Band Concert*.

In *The Dog Napper*, Donald and Mickey saved Fifi from a fearful fate in the Old Saw Mill. It was a kidnapping plot with Peg-leg Pete playing the villainous kidnapper. In *The Service Station*, he really played the monkey wrench rather than a graduate mechanic. He was literally thrown into everything. There was a lot of trouble with Peg-leg's Rolls-Royce, and in the end, after the squeak was located—it was only a cricket—the car fell to pieces. There was a nice moment when Donald was caught in the rumble seat, and another when Peg got blown up and Donald and The Goof smiled at one another.

Donald's second greatest success was in *The Band Concert*, the first Mickey Mouse in

Donald the Duck

color. Here he played the famous role of peanut vender. The first act found him wheeling a little cart with cones and popcorn around the band concert grounds. During a soft moment in the William Tell Overture, led by bandmaster Mickey, Donald called, "Peanuts, peanuts." Then he got out his piccolo, jumped to the stage and played *Turkey in the Straw*. Later he got his neck wrung by three trees—he was so mean even nature protested—and in the final scene one of the orchestra crashed a tuba over his head. The curtain goes down with Donald emerging from the mouthpiece still playing his flute.



It is hard to separate Donald from his professional successes. It has been said that Arliss is Arliss whether he plays Richelieu or Rothschild. Donald is Donald and still ducky whether he is an inn keeper or a mechanic. One of his greatest charms is that he has no light sense of humor. He goes grimly about—getting into trouble and making more—an iconoclastic little fellow, bearing life's burdens and being one.

Little is known of the private life of Donald the Duck. His publicity agents have seen fit to keep him a kind of Garbo. He is seldom seen anywhere outside of his pictures and the colored strips, and he never gives interviews. He graciously appeared on the Christmas Disney broadcast and was a wow. He has been done as a doll in felt and in soap. He's a fine example of a "Darling, don't-be-like-that" Ducky. He's considered a waterproof character and good for umbrellas and such. His fan mail is enormous, but practically all the letters state that he has no sex appeal. That lets him out as the possible great lover of the screen. His favorite line is "Wanna Fight?". His appetite is enormous—he likes apple sauce, but his favorite food is Post Toasties—Plug!

April Fool is his best day and he hates Easter. It reminds him too poignantly of his early youth.

The only opinion we have been able to glean from his fellow players is from Clara Cluck. She says that he never combs his tail feathers. It's just awful.

Bets are that, passionate as his public may be, Donald can never supplant Mickey because he hasn't as many admirable qualities. In fact, he has practically none. He's a big bad wolf in miniature—a menace. Opinion is that if he ceases being ornery he'll be through—like a lot of feminine stars. He's a good stooge for Mickey, and he is to have a stunning part in *The Fire Brigade*. It's a heroic part. He saves the big, stuffed dressmaker's-form. It's a little reminiscent of his late part in *The Dog Napper*. There are those that would like Donald to play the role of the trees in *The Petrified Forest*. Others think he should play Hamlet and just stop there while he is still young and glamorous.

There's plenty of argument as to whether he is really mean or only acts that way. One of his critics says that he is not, but that

Donald the Duck

his outlook is limited. Another claims that he is just a lovable Peck's Bad Boy. Someone else asserts that he has the greatest of all virtues—courage in the face of adversity. Remember, he is a depression duck. It is said that he appeals mightily to the maternal instinct, and that every woman in the audience thinks she can do something about Donald.

Well, I agree with the French chefs that he's plenty tough. Also, that when he ducks his head and says "Wah, wah, wah, wah," he hits a new high in mean repartee. Talking back is just ducksoup for Donald. I wouldn't change him—not one little cross-eyed quack

I'm stuck

On Donald Duck.



"Donald
Duck"