

Let's All Go to the Lobby

By Thad Komorowski

For one of the more iconic shorts in the National Film Registry, Technicolor Refreshment Trailer No. 1, better known as “Let’s All Go to the Lobby,” easily has one of the murkiest histories.

The cloudy background has to do with the very nature of its genre, the theatrical trailer, or snipe. When projectors ran single programs for hours on end, there had to be something between the entertainment, to inform the audience of an intermission or advertise the theater’s policies. Distributed and sold to theater chains, the snipes served this purpose, and were always made in haste by commercial outfits. The producers rarely trademarked or copyrighted their product, as they knew its ultimate destination was the trash once it had run its course.

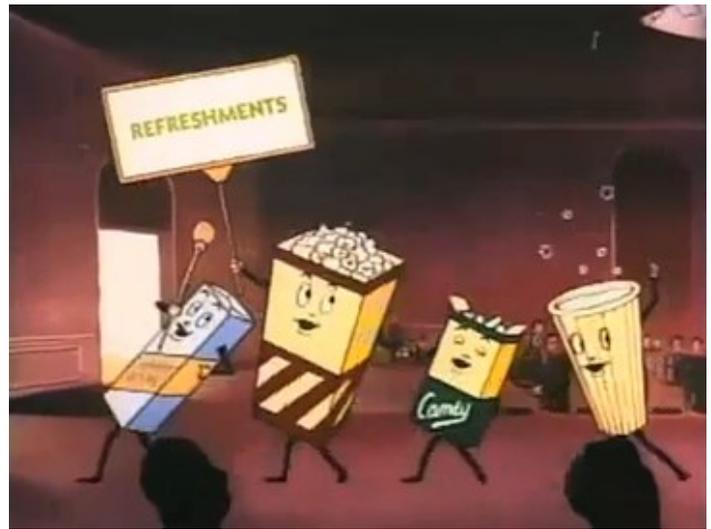
Preservation efforts have been implemented in recent years to ensure these snipes aren’t completely lost; they played a role in the 20th century movie experience, and many film collectors and fans retain sincere affection for them. But the only individual one with any arguable cache, simply because it hasn’t been forgotten by the general public, is “Let’s All Go to the Lobby.”

The Chicago-based Filmack Trailer Co. produced the forty-second Technicolor animated snipe, one that a theater could buy for the measly price of \$10.75. Official records at the still-existing company can’t determine a specific date, but advertisements were taken out for the cartoon as early as 1951.

Filmack proudly touted that Dave Fleischer, of former Betty Boop and Popeye fame, animated the snipe. (Though, obviously, he had hired some nameless freelancers to do the actual drawing.) Fleischer, having long been ousted from the studio he and his brother Max had founded, was deep into a strange period of uncredited work all over Hollywood, mostly for Universal. He was also becoming something of a real-life approximation of the bizarre characters he brought to life in the depression, sans the charm.

The actual animation of the snipe isn’t particularly good; by the standards of even the weaker studios of the early ‘50s, it’s downright primitive. But it is representative of a common motif that Dave Fleischer took from job to job: inanimate objects come to life, bouncing to a metronomic beat. And Fleischer had a pretty catchy beat to bounce the characters to.

What kept the snipe alive in the public’s memory and outlast any other trailer of its kind was not Dave Fleischer’s



animation, but Jack Tillar’s composition. Which, as Tillar says, wasn’t particularly original.

“I did it in all of about five minutes,” he said. Long before he went onto a brilliant career that earned him an Oscar, an Emmy, and a Grammy, composer Tillar was working at Filmack, piecing together scores for trailers “to make it look a little better than the ‘chippy-choppy’ it always was.”

Tillar said he knew as soon as he came up with it that people would remember “Let’s All Go to the Lobby,” because it was cribbing a song everyone knew by heart: “For He’s a Jolly Good Fellow.” All that was needed were original lyrics—and a little basic knowledge of human nature, Tillar said.

“I said, ‘We need something for getting the people out to the lobby.’ And my first thought was, everybody loves to be part of a gang, so, let’s all seemed appropriate. People don’t like to be the first one, they don’t like to get up on stage. But if everybody else is having a good time, going back to the stage, or going back to the lobby. It was just natural.”

Some sixty-odd years later, Tillar’s trick seems to have worked. In the modern age where everything about the midcentury movie-going experience is long forgotten, “Let’s All Go to the Lobby” is a chestnut that remains a standby of the eternal movie-going experience. The theater chains still want you to go to the lobby. And they want you all to get yourselves some treats.

The views expressed in these essays are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the Library of Congress.

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