

WILLIAM HANNA JOSEPH BARBERA

If you've been wondering where to direct your complaint about your child or grandchild yelling "Yabba Dabba Dooooo!" all last summer, wonder no more. Blame William Hanna and Joseph Barbera. Right, Hanna-Barbera, the animation team. *The Flintstones* founding fathers.

What, you say, isn't that *one person*? Well, this is certainly *the* most often-asked question about Hanna and Barbera, one that has dogged the men since the late '50s, when Hanna-Barbera Productions was founded.

"They think my first name is Hanna," said Joe Barbera, "and that I'm a woman. And then a lot of people say why is *his* name first? Well, we used to alternate on every cartoon, and I said to hell with this, let's toss a coin. And we tossed a coin, and that was it!"

You can distinguish Hanna from Barbera this way: Bill directs, Joe draws. That's the basic idea. Of course, they overlap in the idea department, and perhaps, in that way, the two *are* one. Together, they are two indispensable parts of one creative machine. After all, without a Hanna to complement a Barbera, or vice-versa, this world would never have been graced with the likes of such colorful (literally) personages as:

Tom and Jerry, Huckleberry Hound, The Flintstones, The Jetsons,

Top Cat, Yogi Bear and BooBoo, Mr. Jinks and the "meeces" he hates "to pieces" (Pixie and Dixie), Scooby Doo, Magilla Gorilla, Wally Gator, Auggie Doggie and Doggy Daddy, Snagglepuss, Quick Draw McGraw, Hokey Wolf, Yackee Doodle, Inch-High.

Joe Barbera is 82 now, Bill Hanna is 84. The great animators are still making cartoons(!) Although under present boss Ted Turner, who bought the Hanna-Barbera catalogue for his

24-hour cartoon channel, they are now developing projects independently. With a partnership that goes back 50 years, their résumés include working with many of the other cartoon legends: Tex Avery, Ub Iwerks, Paul Terry, Rudolph Ising, writers Michael Maltese and Warren Foster, voice master Mel Blanc, and

so forth. With the recent passing of Walter Lantz, Hanna and Barbera are just about the last animation pioneers of the century who are still around. (To say nothing of remaining active in the business.)

"People say, How can you work together for 50 years and never fight?" said Barbera, who has just written his memoirs (*My Life In Toons*, a very charming read from Turner Books). "I said, *We did* fight, the very first week, and we haven't spoken since!"

In truth, their instant rapport practically singlehandedly (double-handedly?) bailed out of the fledgling, sputtering MGM cartoon department back in 1937.

"I came out in September of '37 [from the Paul Terrytoons Terry Studios in New York]," said Barbera, reached in his office at Hanna-Barbera Studios in Hollywood. "Bill was already there. The thing was a disaster. We were sitting in a room, and we could see the place crumbling around us. We decided to do our own cartoon."

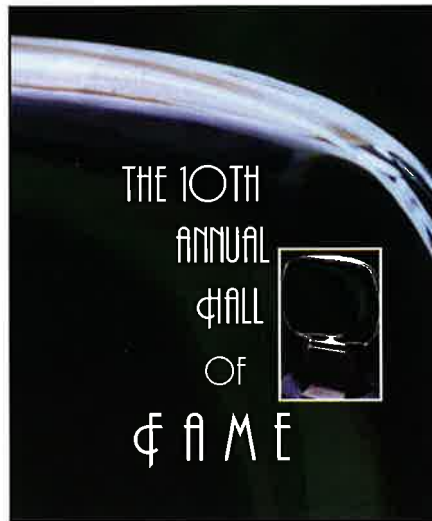
Hanna, reached in *his* office at Hanna-Barbera, picks up the story:

"I always liked Joe's drawings, and when the opportunity came, why, Joe and I worked together. We knew we needed two characters. We thought we needed conflict, and chase and action. And a cat after a mouse seemed like a good, basic thought."

The very first cartoon they did, over and above the doubts of superiors at something so apparently hackneyed, was *Puss Gets The Boot*, starring Tom and Jerry. The "good, basic thought" won an Academy Award (the first of seven that the animators would eventually take home, along with eight Emmys).

"That was quite a coup," said Barbera. "MGM had been struggling to get a cartoon off the ground. They had hired Friz Freling, and he left. They'd hired Tex Avery, and he was unhappy. Finally it zeroed down to Bill and I making cartoons, and later Tex making cartoons, and it began to work."

And work it did, for the next 20 years, until MGM discovered it was more cost-effective to recycle existing



cartoons, and closed the flourishing operation in 1957. "That was our reward," Barbera said, still sounding a little incredulous. "And we were stunned. They cut off the best studio in the business." Bill and Joe grabbed a bunch of their MGM colleagues, and promptly opened Hanna-Barbera on Sunset Boulevard in Hollywood. By the early '60s, Hanna-Barbera 'toons like *Huckleberry Hound* and *Yogi* were household words. *The Flintstones*, don't forget, was prime time. They sold the studio in 1967.

"Of course," said Barbera, "you

Charlotte's Web in 1973 and *Heidi's Song* in 1982), sold out to Great America, and Great America sold out to Turner. Things are solid under Turner; Hanna and Barbera are developing features (*Johnny Quest* and a new *Tom And Jerry*) and new cartoons (Bill Hanna is working on a robot wolf character called Wind-Up Wolf and Hard Luck Duck, the weird tale of a duck living happily inside an alligator's head.)

But, to digress a little . . .

Born in Melrose, New Mexico July 14, 1910, Bill Hanna's first job is

middle of the Depression."

He was essentially following in the engineering footsteps of his father (a longtime Santa Fe railroad man), when a friend suggested he come and work with him at a place called Pacific Title and Art. It was one of those life-defining suggestions.

"I went there and got a job with a company called Harman-Ising Productions," he continued. "Hugh Harman and Rudolph Ising were animators who had started out with Walt Disney. They were making the very first *Looney Toons* and *Merrie Melodies*. I started doing a little bit of everything. I was washing the cels that had been used. We used to watch each sheet of celluloid, and then re-use them for every picture . . . And I very soon found myself working at night with Rudy Ising, thinking up gags. Then, as time went on, I began writing little songs and lyrics for Hugh Harman."

(It is appropriate at this juncture to note that Hanna is the musical half of the Hanna-Barbera team. That's right, he wrote *The Flintstones* song, and if pressed slightly, will delightedly break into "*Yogi Bear is smarter than the average bear/Yogi Bear is always in the ranger's hair . . .*")

"As time went on, I was able to do the direction, or timing of these cartoons," Hanna continued. "I would be working on the story so the animators could draw it. At that point, they were so slow in delivery that I got to do some pictures on my own. In 1937, I did a cartoon called *To Spring* (a minor classic today). It was a musical. I had written some music and lyrics for it, and I understand that one of the executives at MGM liked it very much. To make a long story short, when MGM started to put their own cartoon department together, they hired me as a director. That was in 1937." Shortly thereafter, Joe Barbera arrived.

But for a visit to Stillman's Gym in Brooklyn one morning, Joe Barbera, born in 1911 in New York's Little Italy, might have spent a career more in animosity than animation. That is,



Gene Kelly looks over a sketch. The performer worked with Bill Hanna and Joe Barbera on a mixed live action and animation cartoon and later a feature film.

can certainly say, and with great validity, 'What the hell did you sell it for?'"

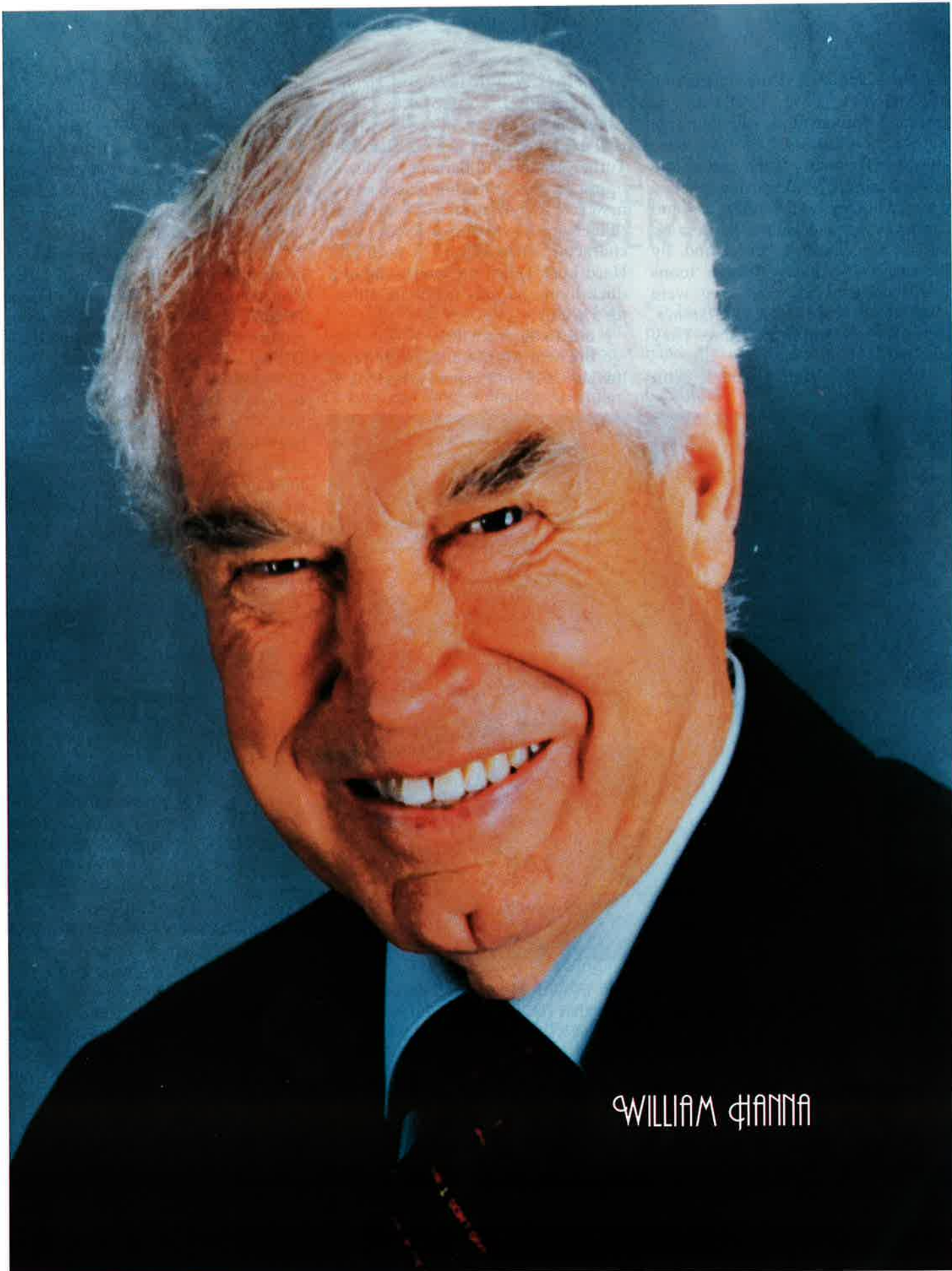
Okay. What the hell did you sell it for?

"Well, at the time, about \$12.6 million. You've got to imagine that a few years earlier, we were out of a job. So that seemed like a tremendous amount of money. I never looked back."

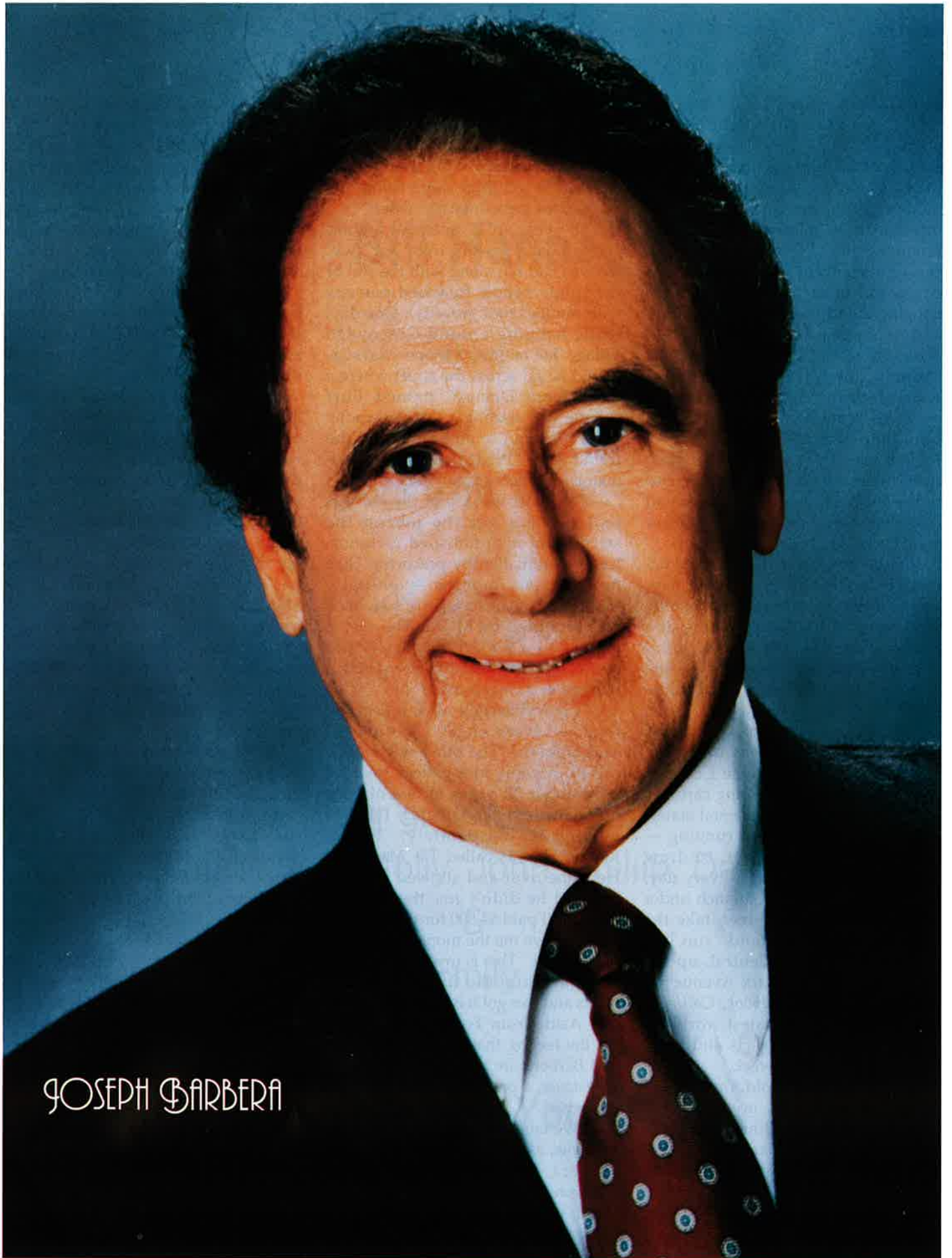
Taft Broadcasting ran H-B for 22 years (during which it produced the award-winning, highly popular

tied in with Hollywood history in a way that has nothing to do with animation:

"I was 20 years old, was working with the engineers on the Pantages Theater on Hollywood Boulevard," said Hanna, a genial man whose favorite companions are his coworkers. "I was sort of a flunky holding up that stick with the numbers on it, and they were setting floor elevations. I was the stick boy. That job lasted about four or five months, right in the



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