

Yellow Submarine

Dennis Raymond

1968

“Once upon a time, or maybe twice, there was an earthly paradise called Pepperland, which existed 80,000 leagues beneath the sea...”

And so it was, a land of brilliant color and elegant people and Ming music, with words such as “love” and “know” and “yes” dotted about the landscape.

But Pepperland had enemies, the Blue Meanies, who hated music and bombarded Pepperland with rockets and Apple Bonkers and Hidden Persuaders and Snapping Turtle Turks—and an evil flying Blue Glove.

They drove out the music and the color and left only the gray, tearful people in silence.

But one Pepperlander did escape, a man named Old Fred, by taking off in the enshrined Yellow Submarine to find help.

And thus begins the odyssey of Old Fred, his Submarine, the Beatles, and assorted friends and fiends, culminating in the triumphant reconquest of Pepperland by music and love and John, Paul, George, and Ringo.

To say that *The Yellow Submarine* is the best animated feature film since *Fantasia* or *Snow White* is to give Walt Disney credit he doesn't deserve. Future generations will realize what Disney gave to the world in technique was more than offset by the severe limitations he forced upon the art of animation.

To see *The Yellow Submarine* is to recognize at once the extremely limited scope of Disney's animation, with all his painfully detailed and realistic characters who just might as well be photographs. Submarine, if nothing else, is a liberation of the imaginative powers of animation.

So everyone's running around shouting that *The Yellow Submarine* is some kind of breakthrough in animation technique. Well, it may appear so to those whose diet begins and ends with Disney.

But in fact there is no achievement in this film that hasn't been done better at one time or another by any number of animators including Jordan Belson, Yoji Kurt, Bruno Bozzeto, Walerian Borwczyk, and Jan Svankmater (all of whom were represented in the Kinetic Art film series earlier this year at the Art Institute).

But it's the composite grandeur and elegance of Heinz Eldermann's breathtaking imagery that lifts this film to such exhilarating heights. Two or three scenes are a bit overdone and become rather tiresome, and a lot of the dialogue should go, but this is more than compensated for by the richness of the images. The “Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds” number, patterned after the extravagant Busby Berkeley musicals, is pure visual alchemy.

No, *The Yellow Submarine* is not a great movie, as I'm sure some will claim. And I doubt that it will become a perennial classic like some of the Disney products. It's just too dated. But it really is a nice movie to have, to see, and to remember.

I haven't had so much fun at a film since *Bonnie & Clyde*. *The Yellow Submarine* is a paean to truth, happiness, beauty, music, grass, color, and love triumphant. I say go see it, straight or stoned, and have a ball.

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