

# Globe Review

Tanyas take  
old sounds,  
make them  
new

DISC OF THE WEEK, I

THE GLOBE AND MAIL ■ CANADA'S NATIONAL NEWSPAPER ■ GLO

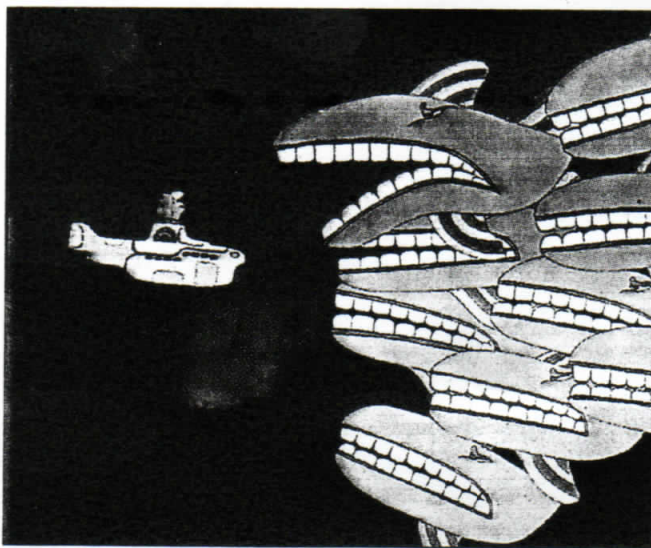
## How the Yellow Submarine wa

'Sky of blue and sea of green,' sang the Beatles. But the making of the film based on the song was far from idyllic, **MICHAEL POSNER** writes. A recent book tells the tale

TORONTO

For aficionados of animated films, the 1968 feature *Yellow Submarine* has managed to achieve an almost iconic status, at once popular with critics and the paying public. It plays (and may well have been meant to play) like a psychedelic drug trip — a piece of visual stream of consciousness, orchestrating a classic struggle between good (the denizens of Pepperland) versus evil (the Blue Meanies), preaching a feel-good, love-is-all-you-need message and infused, of course, with the lush harmonies of Lennon and McCartney, from whose rich musical imagination it sprang.

What may be less well known is that the film was very nearly a major disaster, its successful completion something of a miracle. Produced on a minuscule budget of \$1-million U.S. (of which Beatles manager Brian Epstein — dead before the film's release — took \$200,000 off the top for the lads), and patched together over 11 frenetic months of hard day's nights, it was marred by its very own epic battle between Blue Meanies (the American producers) and the life-affirming, mostly Eu-



Scenes from the 1968 animated classic *Yellow Submarine*: A cinematic miracle considering

ropean artists. The latter were an assembly of designers and craftsmen determined to make the film different from and better than the insipid, Disney-inspired cartooning into which animation had by that time descended.

And though the script had more than three dozen incarnations and passed through 40 different typewriters — including those of British poet Roger McGough,

American sentimentalist Erich Segal and the original writer Lee Minoff — the final script was only created after the film was finished.

The most comprehensive account I've seen of this contentious backstory is told in the pages of Dr. Robert Hieronimus's *Inside the Yellow Submarine — The Making of the Beatles Animated Classic* (published in 2002 by Krause). Adopting the oral-history format

that allows various present their o events, however c onimus — who wi row evening at the Board of Canada ronto — spent a working on the b winding road inde A muralist, ra and environmental timore-based Hie



## All of Canada's a kitchen party

ATLANTIC SCENE, R5

REVIEW · R5

BEANDMAIL.COM ■ THURSDAY, MARCH 6, 2003

# as nearly lost at sea



the odds against it ever being made.

participants to  
n version of  
nfling, Hier-  
lecture tomor-  
National Film  
offices in To-  
most 30 years  
ok, a long and  
d.  
o broadcaster  
crusader, Bal-  
nimus identi-

fies two principal heroes in the *Yellow Submarine* saga: Czech-born artist Heinz Edelmann, among the 20th century's most influential graphic designers, and George Dunning, the National Film Board-trained Canadian who directed the film.

"Without them, the film would never have been made," Hieronimus said in a recent interview. "Edelmann was an absolute ge-

nius. He had originally said 'I'll give you two months of my life,' but in the ensuing chaos he ended up staying for the entire 11 months. But Dunning was equally critical. You see, the Beatles did not want to be involved because they hated the TV cartoon [ABC-TV's *The Beatles*] and they didn't want a feature done by the same people. But Dunning had a different idea."

Tom Halley, another Canadian who worked as a unit director on the project, agrees. Although American producer Al Brodax was later dismissive of Dunning's contribution, Halley insists "the film would not have been made without George."

A student of the work of Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell, Hieronimus began his exploration of *Yellow Submarine* by examining what he perceived as its mythological underpinnings. That approach then segued into the oral history. But in 1997, when he had 250 pages and a publishing contract, he was forced to rethink the entire enterprise.

"I went to London to meet the creators and thought I had reached the end. And we were sitting in an Italian tavern and after about the 12th bottle of wine, one of them turns to me and says, 'There's something I didn't tell you, Bob.' And that something was everything. The film almost died.

See SUBMARINE on page R5

## Unsinkable Yellow Submarine

SUBMARINE from page R1

It wasn't completed and certain parts had to be kidnapped. My heart just plunged."

About three quarters of the way through, apparently, Brodax figured out that the animators were trying to make a real piece of art — not just the commercial pap he had intended to produce.

"So Al sends a cease and desist order and says he's coming over from the U.S. and we Americans are taking it over," Hieronimus recalls. "You're over budget, et cetera, and I'm not going to pay you. Well, that's a pretty stupid thing to do to artists, who have a temperament. So one night, they snuck into the London studio and the vault where a third of the finished work and a third of the finished [animation] cells were and collected all this stuff and effectively kidnapped the film." In the end, Dunning's company retained creative control but never realized any profits from the film.

Armed with this plot revision, Hieronimus went back to work and produced a manuscript of 840 pages (since cut to about 400).

Animator Halley says the making of the film demonstrates what scientists have only recently discovered: Out of apparent chaos, design can somehow emerge.

Given its volatile ingredients — the clash of egos, the absurd budgets, the crush of time, the lack of a coherent, agreed-upon script, the Beatles' lack of interest, and other destabilizing factors — the *Yellow Submarine* should have sunk beneath the cinematic waves. Instead, as Hieronimus recounts, it has found a treasured place in the annals of animation.