

THE FATHER OF THE TRICK-FILMS IS AN HEIR OF AN EXILE TO DIARBEEKIR

Dimitar Jarava invented a new paper cinematographic reel,
his grandson has devoted himself to the multimedia

By Dobri Grigorov
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50 years ago in a tumble-down attic at “Lege” street a group of enthusiasts laid the foundations of our cartoon cinema. The engine of this group was the painter Dimitar Todorov-Jarava.

He was born in 1901 in Shoumen, graduated the Sofia art school and later also the department of the decorative arts at the State Academy of Arts. In 1930 he became a painting teacher at the secondary school in Botevgrad, from where he was thrown out two years later because he participated in a pupils’ strike. That same year he won the competition for teacher’s place at the 20th secondary school “P. Slaveikov” in Sofia and he set himself in the capital.

Eight is the magic number in Jarava’s life

In 1938 he got a patent for a unique invention, by which he put the start of the work in the field of the trick films. The document, certifying the invention of a New paper cinematographic reel, is dated March 5th 1938 and is issued by the Ministry of National Economy of Kingdom of Bulgaria.

“ At that time at the cinemas in Bulgaria were shown with great success the films of Walt Disney,” wrote Jarava in his diary. “ The realistic and real movements, recreated with great skill in the plastic grotesque, with the richness at the expressions of the characters really fascinated me and made me think how they were made.”

The idea for replacing the standard film reel with a paper one dawned on Todorov after years of work as an illustrator at the then most popular children magazine “Firefly”. Together with the main editor of the magazine Alexander Spasov they decided to make a revolutionary for that time experiment. At the last pages of each issue they started publishing animation pictures (later known as comics), which told short children stories through the motion of the characters.

After the patent was issued, Spasov informed about the invention his son, who lived in the States. He and his colleagues showed interest and offered to Jarava and his family to come across the ocean. The pre-war situation in Europe and unclear international relations put an end to all the hopes of the painter for working abroad.

After the end of the war

he was offered the post of Minister of Finance

The well-known for his sense of justice Jarava decisively said “No”.

They say that the genetic information is most fully transferred in every second generation. This rule is also valid for the Todorovs. The family story says that Jarava is an exact copy of his grandfather, after whom he is named. The old Todorov was just, irreconcilable and could not keep his tongue behind his teeth. He spent 16 years in exile in Diarbekir (prison area in the former Ottoman Empire). A coincidence in his name and the name of a member of the revolutionary committee doomed him to long hard labour.

Although he had a chance to prove the mistake, the grandfather of the painter kept silence in the interest of the holy cause of his namesake. At his return from Diarbekir the whole village of Jeravna went out to welcome him at the square.

Also Jarava's grandson - Lazar has inherited the family characteristic

After numerous attempts, both in Bulgaria and abroad to achieve success by music, he turned to computers. Today he has to his credit remarkable successes in the field of the multimedia. Almost completed is a CD-ROM, in which the grandson has gathered the whole work of his grandfather, his biography and a part of his personal diary.

In 1948, after an endless correspondence with the committee for cultural issues at the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party, Jarava is assigned the management of the new department of cartoon films at the Cinematography, set up on his insistence. The group of around 10 enthusiasts was put up in an attic at "Lege" street. For 6 years they worked at terrible conditions. The ceiling plaster fell right onto the picture plates; the humidity soaked everywhere and destroyed the already prepared frames. The first black-and-white cartoon "It Serves Him Right" was assembled in a hurry from test frames, on the insistence of some party leaders. After the blessing of Valko Chervenkov the enthusiasm of the group increased and for a relatively short period came into being also the films "It's His Own Fault" and "Wolf and Lamb"- again black-and-white films. In 1953 was produced the first cartoon film in colour- "Woodland Republic". One year later because of the endless humiliation he received from his superiors, Jarava resigned. On his place was appointed Todor Dinov.

After leaving the studio, Jarava devoted himself to the painting. He then had the time to finish the portrait of Lilyana Dimitrova (an activist of the early communist movement- illegal before 1944, who died in a shooting with the police)that he had started 15 years ago. While he provided secret meeting places to his cousin, he began drawing her. After her death, the picture was finished by memory. From then till the end of his life Jarava paints all the time.

But even this creative period was not well-accepted by the Party. "He didn't leave this earth in peace", say his relatives. "His sense of justice could not reconcile up to his very end with the non-recognition and the rejection of his work. And all because he could not keep quiet and told the truth right in the eyes."

In the year 1988 there are the last fatal numbers 8 in Jarava's life. Then the painter leaves this world.

Pictures: Dimitar Jarava in front of one of his pictures

"Jeravna" seen through the eyes of the father of the trick-films