

# Bambi (1942)

Not rated. V-4; L -0; S/N -2.

Running time: 1 hour

*For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:  
a time to be born, and a time to die;  
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;  
a time to kill, and a time to heal;  
a time to break down, and a time to build up;  
a time to weep, and a time to laugh;  
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;  
Ecclesiastes 3:1-4*

The new 2-disk Diamond Edition of Bambi gives a new generation of children the opportunity of seeing Walt Disney's classic, as well as the opportunity for adults to talk with children about love and loss, the thrill of discovery, and even, if the children are old enough, about sex and procreation. Its release also gives me the enjoyable opportunity of writing about a classic that has justly won the hearts of millions of us who treasure great films. Although I watched the classic almost 40 years ago with my then young children, it is my first viewing of the film when I was a child myself that I remember the most. The shock and the sorrow of the fawn losing his mother to the guns of the hunters was almost too much, even though the earlier visit to the meadow where Mother warned Bambi to stay in hiding while she made sure it was safe was intended to prepare us for the coming tragedy. Interestingly, except for the arrival of Bambi's father with the sad news that his mother cannot be with him anymore, the loss is quickly left behind, the story jumping from that dreadful winter day to the arrival of spring and new discoveries for Bambi, no longer a small helpless fawn. It was the film's way of saying that loss is painful, but life does go on, with its many good things that make it worth the pain

of loss, even as the jaded writer stated in Ecclesiastes. Thinking back to my own loss—of a happy home—when my parents divorced just a few years later (at a time when no other family in our neighborhood had suffered such a scandal), I wonder if the film might have helped prepare me for that stressful period. Divorce is not as painful as death is to its survivors, but its pain lingers just as long, indeed was repeated over and over each time I spent a weekend with my father and had to say good-bye.

It doesn't take a critical eye to see that film animation has come a long way from the flat hand-drawn animation of 1940s, and yet Walt Disney 's attention to detail (especially to faces and eyes), the excellent music, and above all, a story that touches the heart deeply, makes this a classic that no amount of advance in technical wizardry can render obsolete. (Although the film did represent a step forward with the invention and use of the multi-plane camera.) I was as caught up in the story still, and especially impressed now by what I did not appreciate in my first and second viewings—the theme of discovery that runs throughout the film.

This theme starts at the beginning as the camera pans through the beautiful forest for at least a couple of minutes, providing viewers with the time to appreciate the untouched beauty of nature. We hear a chorus humming the melody of the title song. After a minute or so, we hear the chirps of birds and see one in flight. As it lands in front of a hole high up in a tree we see that it is an owl, or rather Friend Owl, now sleepy (children are spared the knowledge that he is returning from a night of hunting prey). Above him a squirrel is waking up, his tail having served as a blanket for a drowsy chipmunk that is not quite ready to wake up. A mother bird brings a cluster of cherries to her three little ones, and two pull at the stem in opposite directions, wanting the fruit for themselves, but the third eats them instead. A tiny mouse emerges from its nest and washes its face with a drop of water

hanging from a leaf. A little rabbit comes out of its hole, yawns, and scratches its back on a twig. The film is filled with such little vignettes revealing something about the creatures inhabiting the forest or provoking a chuckle.

Then we see a bluebird chirping notes that are taken up by the soundtrack orchestra, summoning the animal families out of their homes to go and see something. There is a thumping at the base of Friend Owl's tree, the little rabbit calling "Wake up, wake up!" Thumper, as we will discover later is his name, informs him that the new Prince is born. Friend Owl joins the stream of other animals rushing to the place where, five minutes into the film, we catch our first sight of Bambi and his mother. At its conclusion we even see briefly the Father, a majestic antlered buck standing high up on a rock. It is a brilliant introduction to the world of the film, a world Bambi is about to explore in the succeeding vignettes. The following scenes entail Bambi's discoveries—how to stand, walk, jump over a log, the identity of his fellow creatures, of friendship, language, then of danger, the changes that the different seasons bring to the forest, of death and separation, and even what Friend Owl calls "Twitterpation."

Packaged with a BluRay disk, this DVD with its crystal clear imaging that shows the gorgeous colors of the forest's four seasons will become one of the jewels of your collection. And for those relating to children, what a wonderful time for discussing nature and its preservation, of discovery, love, friendship, and death and loss.

## **For Reflection/Discussion**

1. What do you think of the Disney idealized view of the animal kingdom? Akin to that of Edward Hicks' series of paintings based on Isaiah, "The Peaceable Kingdom"? Of course, there are the vicious dogs from which Bambi rescues Feline later on, but whom do they serve? In this Disney world who is

the Enemy—not only the cause of the death of Bambi’s mother, but even of the great fire? (On Imdb’s site under “Bambi” there is a question about whether or not the film is an “anti-hunting” film that you might want to click onto because of the interesting answer in regard both to “Man” and hunting.)

2. How do the filmmakers show Bambi’s series of discoveries about his world?

3. In the case of Thumper, who is obviously a big influence on the little rabbit even though we don’t see him?

4. In the majestic sequence of the leaping bucks, what is shown of how children in their play learn from their elders?

5. What do you think of the song at the beginning and then repeated at the end of the film? The lyrics: “Love is a song that never ends/One simple theme repeating/Like the voice of a heavenly choir/Love’s sweet music flows on.” How do we see these words lived out in the film? Compare them to Paul’s in 1 Cor. 13, or to the hymns “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling” and “Our God, Our Help in Ages past.”

6. The following section is merely a guide for those who might want to discuss the film with children. Such a discussion should not be too formal lest it become overly didactic (meaning “boring”), but it is best to use questions than just to tell children what a scene means. In keeping with a major theme of the film, it is better to help children discover the meaning themselves.

For children:

a. What did you like in the movie? Or, what will you remember for a long time? What parts did you think were beautiful?

b. Was there something that you did not like in the movie? Were you scared at times? How did you feel when Bambi’s mother was shot? We are not animals living in a forest, but there are still dangers—what are some of them? (More on this in Question 6.)

c. Who was there to help Bambi? And later on, who helped Bambi get away from the fire? Do you have a friend who has lost a mother or a father? Who is taking care of them?

d. Who are Bambi's friends? Are any of them like your friends? Why do you think it is important to have friends? How have your friends helped you, and you helped them?

e. How do we see Bambi grow, and how does growing always mean learning something new? What new things does Bambi learn? What new thing did you learn yesterday; and today? How is learning fun? Who teaches us? Not just schoolteachers, is it? Who has taught you important things: parents; sister, brother, or other relative; friends; even a store clerk or a stranger?

f. How does Bambi learn that there is danger in the world? What dangers have you been taught about? Maybe: don't touch something that is hot? Look both ways before crossing the street? Not to accept candy from or get into the car of a stranger? What are the reasons for these?

g. When Bambi is with Feline sleeping at night, why does he wake up? What was the music like as he got up and went to find out what bothered him? What does his father say is the danger? How does "Man" become a danger not just by hunting the animals, but also to the whole forest? How did you feel during this part of the film?

h. During Bambi's rescue of Feline from the mean dogs, what could have happened to him? How does loving someone sometimes mean putting ourselves in danger?

i. How do we see in the film that even when bad or sad things happen to us, we can still be okay? What do you think Bambi learns from losing his mother or from being wounded himself?

j. How did you feel at the end of the film? What apparently has happened to Bambi and Feline, Thumper, and Flower? Do you think this is what "twitterpated" means? Why is this a story you might want to see again?

## DVD Bonus Features

The Blu-Ray disk has several times more Bonus Features than the DVD, included a deleted song and scenes, even an interactive family game. Not having a Blu-Ray player, I can only report on my good experience with the regular DVD additions.

“DineyPedia: Bambi’s Forest Friends” is a short documentary that brings a little reality to children after watching the film with its idealized view of the animal world. Using nature photography intercut with clips from the film, they will learn about deer, rabbits, skunks and owls. I write “a little” because each section is brief, and although they are told the diets of the first three (and will even be introduced to the word herbivorous” and “omnivorous”) the animal diet of owls is not mentioned.

“Backstage Disney: Inside Walt’s Story Meetings” was almost as enjoyable for this writer as the main film. The producers have gone through the Disney archives, which include even the stenographic notes of Disney’s frequent meetings with his animators and writers. Their selections give us a fascinating peek into the creative process of producing the film. Actors read the parts of Walt Disney and his associates as they discuss in detail each character and how they will be portrayed, and also every minute detail of the action. We learn that real deer were brought into the studio and placed in a penned area filled with hay and grass so that the animators could sketch from life how a deer moves. Walt says that he wants more realism than the animals in Snow White. They even brought in a noted Italian nature artist to help, and when they had achieved the desired realism in their drawings, they brought in another artist adept at painting babies to help with the faces of the animals—they didn’t want total realism, but desired somewhat human touches so that each animal would have a distinct personality.

Using photographs of Walt Disney and his animators and writers, the film shows their sketches and story boards, sometimes on the full screen and a small screen insert showing the finished result in the film, and at other times the finished scene filling the screen with other inserts. Film clips of the artists drawing and of the animal models are also inserted at many places, as well as various animators and Disney historians making their comments. We even see the actual stenographic note pages and the musical score and orchestra at other times. One of the surprises is the statement that they wanted to make a longer film, but there was a Hollywood strike in which the animators joined. Thus Disney was forced to use just what they had already created. Makes you wonder what the film might have become had the Disney crew stayed intact and carried out the original plans. This is one of the most creative "Making of the Movie" features that I have ever seen, providing an almost intimate glimpse into the complicated process leading to a finished work of art. At a little over 1 hour and 35 minutes, the feature is longer than the film it describes, but there is not one minute in it that I would like to see cut. This alone is worth the price of this set.