

In the late 80s, Warner Brothers approached Steven Spielberg to work on a version of Looney Tunes except they were kids now, as was the style at the time. This would eventually become the massively successful Tiny Toon Adventures. Looney Tunes and by proxy the Tiny Toons were always made to be rebellious in nature, intentionally going against the grain of the more wholesome Disney output, like an episode about swearing [S1 E4 *Test Stress*] and a long time banned episode on drinking beer [S2 E3 *Elephant Issues*]. This was massively appealing to young teens. In fact one episode was even written by three teenage fans of the show.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20070331202436/http://ew.com/ew/article/0,,313220,00.html>
[S2 E8 "*Buster and Babs Go Hawaiian*"]

So after having something tiny, toony and a little looney, the follow-up Spielberg collaboration was something totally insaney.

Tiny Toons had a lot of meta humour that constantly broke the fourth wall, but Animaniacs pushed it way further, now having the characters literally named the Warner Brothers, with their sister named after the dot. There was something about this uncontrollable rebellious energy that was thrilling to watch. But it also had another trick in it's slacks - music.

<https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/hulu-s-animaniacs-has-plenty-original-s-references-li-ttle-its-ncna1248464>

Being effectively a spiritual successor of the Looney Tunes, Richard Stone composed the music in Looney Tunes style, specifically that of Carl Stalling. Stalling began his career composing for silent movies. Because, you know, they were silent, they'd have an organ player in the cinema with you, like someone with a massive mobile phone. This led him to working on the earliest Mickey Mouse shorts. Here instead of the music being made first and the film getting synchronised to it, he would create music that followed the action on the screen, leading to the term "Mickey Mousing".

And we hear it when a character walks on tip toes or falls from a great height. These might feel cliché now, but they were invented by Stalling.

In the 1930s, Stalling moved over to Warner Bros, applying his breakneck fast paced musical narrative style to the Looney Tunes. But now he had a major advantage, full access to the Warner Bros. library of music. This meant he could now add quotations, basically working in references to other songs within the score itself. For example if there was a scene set on a conveyer belt or a chase, Stalling would frequently reference the song "Powerhouse" by Raymond Scott. Which also gets used for this toy shop chase sequence [Animaniacs S1 E50 *Toy Shop Terror*].

This musical quotation tradition continues in Animaniacs, like this variation of "As Time Goes By" in this Casablanca parody. Also the character Hello Nurse, or her real name "Heloise Nerz?" Really? Ok. The theme song for Hello Nurse [Ep1] is clearly riffing on the theme song for Jessica Rabbit.

<https://twitter.com/tomruegger/status/1282209112650969093?s=21>

By recontextualising music with specific moments in cartoons, it creates a permanent imagery or feeling that the song will always be synonymous with. Like if I said Toccata in D minor by Bach, what image springs to mind? How about now? And this is still a phenomenon to this day, like Tik Tok memes.

<https://www.dailymotion.com/video/xjri6w>

<https://walkerhomeschoolblog.wordpress.com/2013/06/28/carl-w-stalling-and-a-corny-concerto/>

<http://rarebit.org/?people=carl-w-stalling>

https://getd.libs.uga.edu/pdfs/miller_paul_200605_ma.pdf

<https://www.awn.com/mag/issue2.1/articles/goldmark2.1.html>

<https://slate.com/culture/2003/12/the-man-behind-the-looney-tunes.html>

But that's just about the score, what about the actual songs?

NOEL [compare to The First Noel]

Animaniacs was conceived to be a variety show, not only with a cast of characters like a sketch show, but also musical numbers. Often taking traditional, classical or folk songs and either writing or rewriting the lyrics.

Wakko's America [compare to Turkey In The Straw]

This infuses the songs with a kinda false nostalgia, they're familiar sounding despite being effectively brand new. After all, canonically, the Warners were supposedly created in the 1930s mimicking the black and white characters like Felix The Cat, Oswald The Rabbit and even Mickey The Mouse. The show's very premise operates on a fictional nostalgia so it's fitting that the songs do the same.

The Ballad Of Magellan [compare to Git Along, Little Doggies]

So who was responsible for this abundance of musical numbers in Animaniacs?

THE GOVERNMENT!

In the 1980s there had been a noticeable decline in educational kid shows [*Captain Kangaroo*] and a rise in shows that were seen as either too violent or basically there to sell toys [*He-Man/My Little Pony*]. This led to the FCC to pass a law called The Children's Television Act in 1990 demanding that tv stations broadcast more children's shows that are educational and informative, otherwise they will lose their license. For many cartoons this led to the tenuous and infamous "we learned something important today" message at the end of every episode [*Sonic Sez*]. This was to crowbar in some life lesson or moral and pretend it was being informative all along. [*GI Joe*]

<https://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/childrens-educational-television>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regulations_on_children%27s_television_programming_in_the_United_States#Children's_Television_Act

Animaniacs parody this specifically with the Wheel Of Morality. [*S1 E47*]

Despite this, the Animaniacs still had to comply in some way to secure a tv spot, so other workarounds involve meeting historic figures [*S1 E2 Einstein*] and music with educational content.

[*The Great Wakkorotti*] Well not all the time.

And there's no better example of this, than Yakko's World.

<https://www.inverse.com/entertainment/animaniacs-2020-songs-hulu-randy-rogel>

<https://genius.com/Rob-paulsen-yakkos-world-lyrics>

<https://www.syfy.com/syfywire/the-animaniacs-song-yakkos-world-just-got-even-more-animated>

<https://decider.com/2020/11/19/animaniacs-yakkos-world/>

[https://animaniacs.fandom.com/wiki/Yakko%27s_World_\(song\)](https://animaniacs.fandom.com/wiki/Yakko%27s_World_(song))

Inspired by his son's geography homework, songwriter Randy Rogel joined the Animaniacs team by pitching a song that lists all [*] the nations of the world in under two minutes to the tune of the Mexican Hat Dance, and it's arguably the show's most famous song outside of the theme tune. Oh wait no, Pinky And The Brain, never mind, **second** most famous song. Under the zany surface, the show was very intelligently written and the songs were as witty as they were catchy. But Yakko's World doesn't have any gags. It's basically just a list of country names, right? Well, there's humour in the scale and comprehensiveness of it, we can't help but be impressed to hear all [*] the countries in rhyme form and we get a kick out of that.

They repeat this trick with other list-style songs like Yakko's Universe.

But Yakko's World is still hugely popular with fans today and the voice actor Rob Paulsen has made it something of a party trick that he's still able to memorise the song to this day.

So maybe the song is educational? To fulfil that promise to the government.

Uuuuuuuuuuuuh-except it's not that either.

The 160ish countries listed have some missing, such as South Africa, Ivory Coast and Wales. Some are named incorrectly, like Trinidad & Tobago is just called Tobago. And at no fault of the song itself, countries have formed or dissolved since the song was written making it outdated, like the USSR, previously covered as just Russia, which had created several independent countries like Kazakhstan [*Borat reference*]. Look there's a lot, there's a big list of them, I'm not gonna read them all, but you get the idea. In a playful nod to the inaccuracies and changes since, an extra verse was added for some more recent live performances to add more nations. It still doesn't quite cover everything, but ah fuck it.

The point is, even without the countries that have changed after the song was aired, this isn't really a true comprehensive collection of countries. And even if it were, it's still just a list of names! So any actual educational benefit is negligible. It kinda feels like a prank, like they're tricking the executives who were insistent on this government ruling and they're getting away with it.

It's just fun. It's another silly gimmick on top of a pile of them. If anything, this is the true rebellious nature of the Animaniacs in full swing because it constantly toes the line with what it can get away with. [*Finger Prints*] And to cap it off, here is a song that appears edutainment on the surface but is just classic irreverence, defiant of government and executive bureaucracy, sticking it to the man and laughing in its face.

As the 90s rolled on, networks drifted away from any non-educational content for kids and coupled with the rise of cable channels like Cartoon Network and Nickelodeon, the Children's Television Act would effectively kill the Saturday Morning cartoon block. Animaniacs became too popular with an older market which angered the advertisers targeting children. Eventually, the expensive to make Animaniacs was cancelled in favour of the cheaper to import Pokemon and after 1999's straight to video movie Wakko's Wish it seemed like all was lost. Until the fake nostalgia became real nostalgia.

<https://www.animenewsnetwork.com/interest/2016-04-13/animaniacs-freakazoid-producer-critiques-pokemon-for-wb-cartoon-decline/.101008>

In 2011, Rob Paulsen began a podcast series called "Talkin' Toons" where he'd interview many of his voice actor and industry friends. Some of these were recorded in front of a live audience, including a performance of Animaniac songs with songwriter Randy Rogel, which then became a tour with the voice cast to create Animaniacs Live in 2016. Coupled with the show's renewed popularity on Netflix, this all led to a revival being commissioned in 2017 becoming the 2020 two-season reboot. Animaniacs got the last laugh and all with the help of a song about a bunch of countries. Now that's funny.

<https://www.indiewire.com/2017/05/animaniacs-reboot-steven-spielberg-amblin-1201817336/>