Messmer, Otto (August 16, 1892–October 28. 1983)

Otto Messmer was a pioneering animator whose Felix the Cat was the first internationally famous cartoon character. Messmer was born in New Jersey and went to art school before beginning newspaper cartooning. After working with several animation companies, he hooked up with Pat Sullivan (1887–1933) to produce cartoons featuring Charlie Chaplin (1889–1977). It was their work animating Chaplin that laid part of the foundation for the creation of Felix in 1919, a black cat whose independence, resourcefulness, and physicality resembled that of the Tramp. The Felix series, with two films produced a month, were a great success, and Felix himself became one of the first mass merchandized characters. His attraction was due not only to the anarchic gags, as Messmer took advantage of the medium to allow Felix to morph parts of his body to extricate himself from situations, but also to a character that was both visually abstract, and thus easily appropriable, and psychologically concrete, always shown thinking. Audiences young and old could identify with a character who was both adult and child, animal and human. Sullivan’s decision not to quickly move to sound meant the end of their cinematic version of Felix (he would be resuscitated later in film and television), leaving Messmer to focus subsequently only on the comic strip version of the character. Felix, however, had already been a significant influence on subsequent characters such as Mickey Mouse.

Further reading:

Crafton, D. (1982) *Before Mickey: The Animated Film, 1898-1928*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Canemaker, J. (1996) *Felix: The Twisted Tale of the World's Most Famous Cat*, New York: Da Capo Press.

List of works:

*Feline Follies* (1919)

*The Adventures of Felix* (1919)

*Felix in Hollywood* (1923)

*Felix Finds Out* (1924)

*Eats Are West* (1925)

*Felix Dines and Pines* (1927)

*Non-Stop Fright* (1927)

*Felix Woos Whoopee* (1930)

Paratextual materials:

Felix cartoons are essentially public domain:

Feline Follies:

https://archive.org/details/FelixTheCat-FelineFollies1919

Felix in Hollywood:

https://archive.org/details/FelixTheCat-FelixInHollywood1923

Felix Finds Out

[**https://archive.org/details/FELIXTHECATFELIXFINDSOUT**](https://archive.org/details/FELIXTHECATFELIXFINDSOUT)

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