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The tale of Nippleless Nippleby, Alcorn, Keith, 1992
Feet, MacMullen, Lauren,
Diagnosis, Koutský, Pavel,
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all them cartoons for a cause. Although the majority of this year's short films in the Fourth Animation Celebration are primarily for entertainment value, it is a small selection of commissioned storyboards that make the annual festival worthy of its film stock.

The festival kicks off today and will be shown through July 16 at the U.C. Theater, Berkeley, as well as the Castro Theater in San Francisco.

Unlike past animation festivals, this year's selection actually has a few themes: One is the aforementioned storyboards — 10- to 30-second spots — which address global issues, from racism to AIDS and the environment.

The other is a collection of three short cartoons that pay homage to Frederick Bean "Tex" Avery, the cartoonist who helped give us Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck.

But it is "World Problems? World Solutions!" the collection of storyboards, that stand out in this presentation of 18 films. Commissioned by MTV to run as public service announcements, these shorts move fast, but are quite effective. The images will remain long after audiences have left the theater.

The animation styles are innovative and eye-catching, necessities given the short amount of time each artist had to work with. Pixillation, cel images, stop motion, graphite on paper and mixed

media grab the viewer's attention from the opening frames and serve to drive the messages home.

Most notable is Paul Koutsky's "Diagnosis," a stop-motion work on AIDS. Koutsky uses a globe hooked to various medical paraphernalia to illustrate that the disease could destroy the entire planet and not just a particular demographic.

Lauren MacMullen's "Feet" borrows from the early days of the Disney animation style to present a piece in which cows admonish the human race to get out of their cars and walk. Mike de Seve's "House of Cards" illustrates how through racial equality even the seemingly flimsiest of projects can withstand the most adverse of conditions. And Bob Sabiston's "Trees" is an amusing cel work in which trees strike back against those who use too much newsprint.

As with past animation festivals, this year's 'toons are a healthy international mix. Entries come from Germany, Bulgaria, the Netherlands, Czechoslovakia, Italy, England, Armenia, Cuba and, of course, the United States. Many were picked from the recent Los Angeles International Competition, the only cartoon contest in the United States.

This year's most true-to-life entry has to be Zlatin Radev's "Canfilm," from Bulgaria. In "Canfilm," tin cans with little eyes on their lids live in a society whose ever-changing government could very well parallel that of Romania, Yugoslavia or any other Eastern bloc nation.

Although the metaphors are sometimes hard to follow, Radev's 18-minute, stop-motion feature presents a society that is truly frightening. Police constantly attack those who speak out, fascist rallies abound, and there is a Nazi death camp scene in which empty cans of cher-

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ries are marched through an assembly line and stuffed with stewed tomatoes.

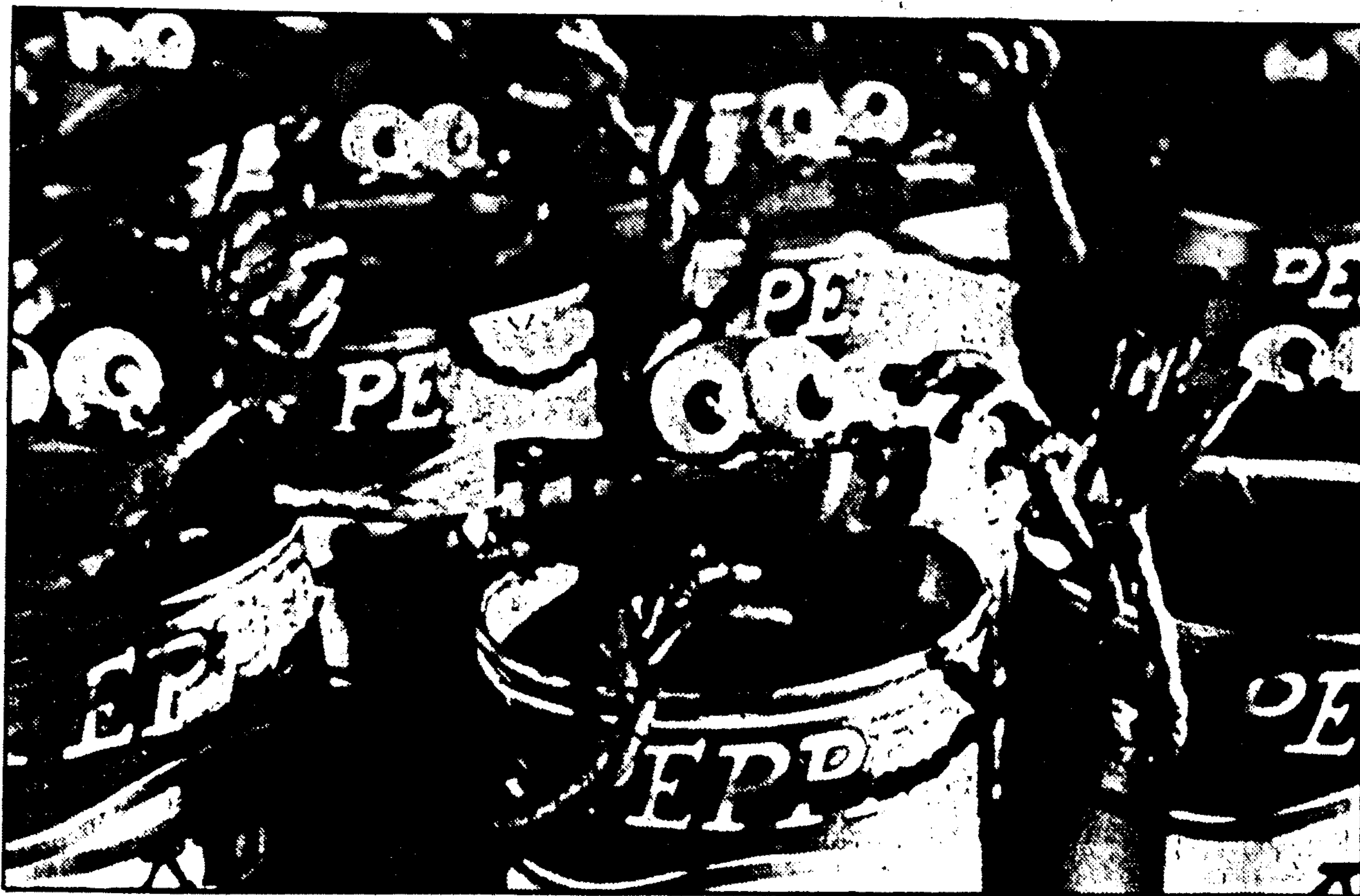
Political messages also can be found in the celebration's opening "Madcap," a montage of scribbles intercut with messages that snipe at the Bush administration's influence on NEA funding and censorship of the arts.

Offering nothing more than entertainment is Corky Quakenbush's "A Smaller World: Big Baby," which pokes fun at the "thirtysomething"/"Sisters"-type soaps by using Barbie dolls and stop-motion animation.

When a whiny couple discovers that they can't have kids — basically because neither one is anatomically correct — they call a stork delivery service ("30-minute delivery or your baby is free"), only to be presented with an infant six times larger than they are. The absurd ways that they try to raise the child and the resolution they come up with recall the kind of play only a preschooler could conceive.

"The Tale of Nippoless Nippleby" is a risqué cartoon reminiscent of Ralph Bakshi ("Fritz the Cat"). As his name suggests, Nippoless is a woodland creature born without nipples. Yet in true Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer style, Nippoless has another anatomical attribute that comes to the rescue of those who once teased him. Hint: He keeps it behind a fig leaf.

What makes this film so intriguing are the cute little buggy



Zlaten Radev's poignant 'Can Film' speaks volumes on the effect of tyranny on this tin-can society.

creatures who only look innocent. Then there is the ogre, who hangs out at a strip joint known as Teats R Us.

A collection of three shorts that pay tribute to Tex Avery are hit and miss. Terry Thoren, producer of the Animation Celebration, challenged 10 different animators to come up with works that Avery might produce if he were still alive.

He settled on three but could have pared that down to two, for Paul de Nooijer of the Netherlands seems to have missed the

mark. His "RRRINGG!" uses sight gags reminiscent of the Avery style — i.e., an oddly proportioned set and props — but the mixed styles of animation are so static that it impedes any sense of flow. Also, the project lacks a story and the conclusion is just too confusing.

Better is John Schnall's "Unsavory Avery," in which a Jacques Brel-like wolf croons while a woman in the audience goes through the usual Avery contortions. Not only do her eyes shoot out of their sockets, but

her skull and brain do, too. Her heart beats madly until it explodes and her breasts burst like balloons.

But closest to the Avery style is "Pre-Hysterical Daze," by Gavrilo Gnatovich. Using cel animation and a storyline similar to the infighting between Daffy Duck and Bugs Bunny, a group of cavemen take on dinosaurs and vice versa. Yet, both are at the mercy of the film editor, who has a knack for breaking into the action during the most climactic scenes.

Along the way the characters fight to stay on frame, constantly crashing into the imaginary fourth wall — their snouts squishing against the glass. They also hurl rocks and spears at an audience member — silhouetted in the foreground — who keeps getting out of his seat.

If you ever saw the Warner Bros. cartoon "Duck Amuck," in which Daffy is at the mercy of Bugs the animator, then you have a good idea of what "Daze" is all about.

Other cartoons of note are: "Office Space," by Mike Judge, in which a nerdy office worker broods over the loss of his stapler, even threatening to burn the building down.

Two entries come from the former Soviet Union. What distinguishes these 'toons is the fact that, unlike their predecessors, these shorts concentrate on fun rather than making the "grand statement," which often doesn't translate.

"The Song of Wolfgang the Intrepid — The Glorious Destroyer of Dragons" recalls "Bambi Meets Godzilla," in which a bold knight sets out to slay a dragon, only to be flambeed. A similar short, "The Hunter," features an inept African warrior disguised as a lion, who quickly becomes the hunted.

The Fourth Animation Celebration kicks off tonight at the U.C. Theater, 2036 University Ave., Berkeley. Showtimes 5:30, 7:30, 9:30 nightly; with weekend and holiday matinees at 1:30 and 3:30 p.m. Tickets \$6. Call 843-6267. The celebration also plays at the Castro Theater, Castro at Market Street, San Francisco. Call (415) 621-6120 for times.