Charlotte's tender entanglement

Review by Larry Kubert

Every now and then it's good to escape from the seriousness of the *Sounders* and the *Godfathers*, grab a little kid by the hand and go to a movie-cartoon like *Charlotte's Web*.

Based on E.B. White's childrens classic, *Charlotte's Web* is a tender tale of friendship, life and death. The flim delivers these adult themes to the youthful and not-so-youthful audience in a discreet manner.

The story is structured around a runt white pig named Wilbur, who is afraid of being raised for slaughter. Wilbur's best friend is Charlotte, a spider, who decides to save Wilbur from the chopping block.

Charlotte accomplishes this by weaving into her web, phrases about Wilbur such as "some pig," "terrific" and "radiant" until at last Wilbur is saved. In the end, Charlotte dies, leaving behind her egg sac, which Wilbur cares for until it hatches in the spring.

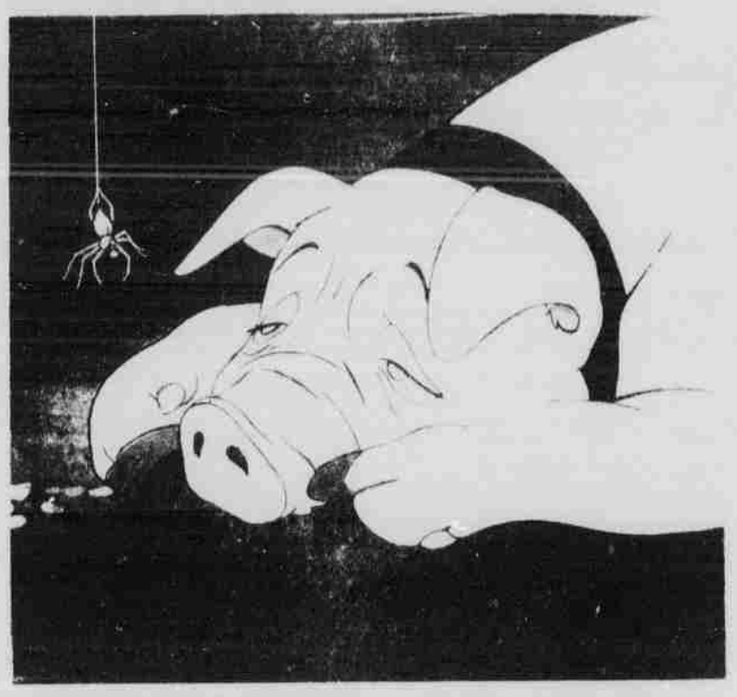
The Hanna-Barbera production has added several songs which heighten the youth appeal.

Perhaps not so suprisingly, the adults in the audience enjoy escaping into the never-never land, populated by talking pigs, spiders, geese and sheep, almost more than the children.

Debbie Reynolds handles the voice of Charlotte, with Henry Gibson as Wilbur. Delightful Paul Lynde speaks as Templeton the rat, whose favorite phrase in the cartoon is a snide "What's in it for me?"

The animation is well handled and, although it may not be in Walt Disney style, it more than suffices.

The marvelous thing about *Charlotte's Web* is it's ability to span the age differences of the audience. For the youth, it's a joyful and educational tale about animals. For older children it's a chance to shed adult fears and inhibitions and return to an earlier life when things were simpler and easier.



Charlotte the spider (voice of Debbie Reynolds) . . . consoles Wilbur the pig (Henry Gibson) in Charlotte's Web.

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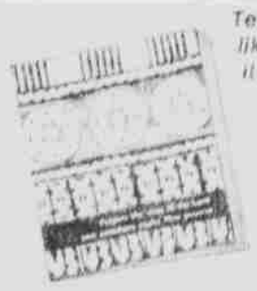

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