

Mickey Mouse's Masterpieces: A Celebration of Walt Disney and the 80th Birthday of Mickey Mouse

by Heidi Bamford, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Lovers of Disney animation history (which you must be too if you are reading this!), hit the mother lode recently with an event that took place in Buffalo, New York. The Shea's Performing Arts Center, the Buffalo International Film Festival and the Walt Disney Company sponsored "Mickey Mouse's Masterpieces: A Celebration of Walt Disney and the 80th Birthday of Mickey Mouse" on April 4th. Originally set for November 2008 (the actual "birth date" of our beloved Mouse), the event had been delayed until now, but was worth the wait!

The program included the documentary feature, "The Man Behind the Mouse: The Ub Iwerks Story," ten original format Disney cartoons from the earliest days of Walt's creative genius (including "Alice's Wild West Show," "Oswald the Rabbit," "Steamboat Willie," and "The Brave Little Tailor"), and the original 1940 release of Fantasia, with detailed background notes and beautiful illustrations in the program booklet. Original cartoon hand drawings of Iwerks from "Plane Crazy" were displayed in the opulent Shea's lobby. Master of Ceremonies was John Culhane, author of Walt Disney's Fantasia. A detailed description of the event can be found on the [festival's web site](#).

I was mesmerized with "The Man Behind the Mouse" documentary. Produced by Leslie Iwerks, it is an award-winning production that looks intimately into the life of her grandfather, Ub Iwerks, who was Walt's friend, business partner, inspiration, and creative source for many of the Disney achievements in animation and film. It is a magnificent and moving story of the lifetime friendship and passion for imagination shared between Ub and Walt. Apparently the documentary has not been widely shown, but there is an accompanying book of the same title available at all Disney Theme Parks and major bookstores - I am off to but my copy after finishing my story here.

This truly wonderful event was a perfect way for me to show my children just why it is I so admire Walt Disney. The poignant story in the documentary, punctuated by the classic cartoons, all taking place in a movie palace that was from this bygone era, beautifully conveyed to us who and what were the people, events, and places that influenced Walt Disney, and how he in turn, with his philosophy and ingenuity influences the world and our family today. I am a 49-year old Mom, who grew up watching Disney go from black and white to color on TV and

who experienced the opening of Walt Disney World in Florida. My two daughters, ages 11 and 12, are growing up in the world of Disney DVDs and iPod movies, music and games. Yet, we all sat in that grand old theater and shared a look at the way Disney animation first appeared - to my parents and grandparents who all enjoyed events like this at Shea's over the years.

[Shea's Performing Arts Center](#) was the perfect place to view these cinematic gems. If you are ever traveling to Buffalo, you should take the time to visit. It is a National Landmark site and once you've been inside, it's easy to see why! The building was constructed in 1925, just when movies were becoming the new fad in entertainment. This magnificent movie palace stands virtually as it was back then, and a description of the physical interior sounds like an ultra rich dessert: marble staircases, ornate plaster and woodwork, gilded decor, massive bronze doors, opulent crystal chandeliers, heavy leaded and paneled glass, and so on! In addition, Shea's is home to one of a handful of surviving Wurlitzer theater organs - still played for many productions and performances!

That day, we were all transported back to the beginnings of Walt Disney, Ub Iwerks, and the many others who struggled through Depression, war, corporate villains and other obstacles to bring millions of families endless opportunities to make and create memories for generation after generation. And, as was mentioned during the event as well as on the front of the program, "I only hope that we never lose sight of one thing - that it was all started by a mouse." (Walter Elias Disney)

About The Author: Heidi Bamford is a first time contributor to PassPorter News. She lives with her family in upstate New York.

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