

Walt Disney World's 'SpectroMagic' Lights Nights in Magic Kingdom

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. — Combine the energy of seven lightning bolts, the electrical power of a fleet of 2,000 highway trucks and a sprinkling of pixie-dust. Then turn down the lights in Magic Kingdom. It's showtime for the Walt Disney World nighttime wonder "SpectroMagic."

Designed as a moving gallery for audiences along a darkened parade route, the show uses a techno-workshop full of lighting effects to re-create pixies and peacocks, sea horses and flying horses, flower gardens and fountains — all the whimsical creatures and environments of Disney's worlds of wonder and fantasy.

Some "SpectroMagic" highlights:

- The Genie from Disney's "Aladdin" is the eccentric conductor of an orchestra producing a rainbow of music notes that flow into the air.
- Practical Pig, poised before the magical world of Disney's characters (a parade segment more than 100 feet in length and featuring castle towers, a carousel, a bejeweled coach and other dreamlands), flicks a paint brush to change the colors of the characters' world into silvery white.
- Chernabog, memorable for his role as the monstrous demon figure in "Fantasia," is portrayed in dark and eerie colors as he dramatically spreads his wings to a 38-foot span.
- The Three Good Fairies in Sleeping Beauty's garden create the sparkle of day among the flowers and insects...and magically transform the scene to the mystery of night.

"SpectroMagic" borrows from the prismatic holographic industry, military lighting developments, electro-luminescent and fiber-optic technologies, and tosses in light-spreading thermoplastics, clouds of underlit liquid-nitrogen smoke and good old-fashioned twinkle lights. The visual spectacle is choreographed to music produced for the show and presented over an array of 204 speakers with 72,000 watts of power.

It is the Disney entertainment wizards' 21st century show to rival the charm and splendor of the "Main Street Electrical Parade," which ended an encore engagement in March 2001. "SpectroMagic" is presented on select evenings at Magic Kingdom.

Mickey Mouse in glistening lights with "a confetti of light" sparkling in the air around him heralds the 20-minute production. Dressed in an amber and purple grand magician's cape, he plays the role of a light-controller capable of altering colors, brilliance and types of lighting effects.

The title float, proclaiming "SpectroMagic" in flowing fiber optics, is surrounded by SpectroMen atop spinning, darting whirlyballs. The effect is a ball of energy, alive with blue and purple mini-lights and twinkle lights. SpectroMen are robed in rope lights (points of light inside transparent ropes), mini-lights, fiber optics and twinkle lights. Electro-luminescent panels make dragonfly wings as bright as day and costumes enchanting.

Project lighting designer John Haupt is aglow as he talks about the "SpectroMagic" "confetti of light effect" that uses xenon flashlights and mirror balls. "It produces six-million-beam candlepower," he says. "With a normal flashlight, you MIGHT have 125 candlepower. It is so brilliant you may actually see little beams of light glancing through the air — thousands of them — like when sun rays come through the clouds." The effect showers the night with color at the beginning and end of "SpectroMagic."

Banks of deep-cycle batteries — 75 tons of them — provide the awesome power to light and move "SpectroMagic"

through Magic Kingdom. The battery supply is equivalent to that of a fleet of 2,000 trucks.

Approximately 100 miles of fiber-optic cables and threads become conduits for shimmering lights that create everything from the strands of "hair" on King Triton's beard . . . to giant, four-foot hibiscus blooms and three-foot daisy petals.

Some 600,000 miniature lights chase in wild patterns, moving in perfect concert with sound effects and music. Goofy's xylophone keys dance with light at his touch. Mickey's cape transforms in a 24-step cascade of color sweeping from shoulder height to the base of the float and upward to 17 feet above his head. It's a "first" for a float, accomplished through a custom computer.

In fact, "SpectroMagic" is a marvel of the computer age. For lighting alone, approximately 30 mini-computers are utilized. Audio is stored digitally on state-of-the-art micro-chips. A sequence of electronic triggers activates the visual effects and audio effects, and electronic cross-references synchronize the show.

And with all those batteries, "SpectroMagic" just keeps on going . . . and going . . . and going — at night in Magic Kingdom.