

It Was All Started by a Mouse: Walt, Trains, and Mickey & Minnie Through the Years

From their first appearance aboard a black-and-white steamboat ... to their latest adventure searching for the perfect picnic spot, Mickey Mouse and Minnie Mouse are cultural icons spanning generations and nations. In celebration of Mickey & Minnie's Runaway Railway at Disney's Hollywood Studios in Florida, here is a look back at some of the finest moments for these true originals, and the man who created them. It's a good reminder that, as Walt Disney said, "It was all started by a mouse."

Iconic On-Screen Moments

Walt Disney arrived in Hollywood in August 1923 and founded Disney Brothers Cartoon Studio in October of that year. Just five years later, Mickey Mouse debuted on the silver screen and went on to appear in a series of 130 animated short films from 1928 to 1953, with four additional shorts released between 1983 and 2013. Since 1955, he has been a frequent presence on television, too. Following are some notable highlights of Mickey's onscreen career:

- "Steamboat Willie" (1928) - The first Mickey Mouse cartoon released (although it was the third Mickey cartoon made) was also the first animated short with synchronized sound. Mickey is a mischievous deckhand on a riverboat under the command of the tyrannical Captain Pete; Minnie is a tardy passenger who joins Mickey in music-making.
- "The Karnival Kid" (1929) - The first cartoon where Mickey speaks ("Hot dogs! Hot dogs!"). He also famously tips his ears to Minnie, foreshadowing the Mickey and Minnie ear headwear popular today.
- "The Chain Gang" (1930) - The first appearance of a dog who would quickly develop into canine sidekick Pluto.
- "The Moose Hunt" (1931) - Pluto officially appears as Mickey's dog.
- "Mickey's Revue" (1932) - The first appearance of Goofy, as "Dippy Dawg."
- "Parade of the Award Nominees" (1932) - Mickey's first color cartoon appearance, this two-minute short was only shown at the Nov. 18, 1932, Academy Awards banquet and was never intended for the public. As such, it was not seen again until the 2001 DVD release "Walt Disney Treasures: Mickey Mouse in Living Color."
- "Orphan's Benefit" (1934) - The first appearance of Donald Duck in a Mickey cartoon.
- "The Band Concert" (1935) - The first "Mickey Mouse" short in Technicolor. The film provided the thematic inspiration for Silly Symphony Swings at Disney California Adventure at Disneyland Resort.
- "Fantasia" (1940) - Walt's legendary animated musical originated as an ambitious short film based on the "symphonic poem" by French composer Paul Dukas, which was based on Goethe's 1797 poem of the same name. The short was proving so expensive that Walt expanded it into a "concert feature," marking Mickey's first feature film appearance and the debut of theatrical stereophonic sound in cinemas.

- “The Simple Things” (1953) – Released April 18, 1953, this short was the final regular entry in the “Mickey Mouse” theatrical cartoon series.
- “The Mickey Mouse Club” (1955-1959) Mickey was the heart of this daily hour-long TV variety series for children. The famous Mickey ears were a costume staple of the cast, and Mickey’s cartoons were often aired on the show. “Mickey Mouse Club March” by show host Jimmie Dodd opened and closed every show.
- “Mickey’s Christmas Carol” (1983) – An adaptation of Charles Dickens’ “A Christmas Carol,” this was the first original “Mickey Mouse” theatrical cartoon produced in more than 30 years.
- “Prince and the Pauper” (1990) – This animated featurette was inspired by the Mark Twain story of the same name. It was Disney’s final use of the traditional ink-and-paint and camera processes before they were replaced by digital equivalents.
- “Runaway Brain” (1995) – Mickey’s first big-screen film since 1990 was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Animated Short Film.
- “Fantasia 2000” (1999) – Mickey’s memorable turn as “The Sorcerer’s Apprentice” was the one segment from the original “Fantasia” that returned for this sequel, along with a new interstitial appearance.
- “Mickey Mouse Clubhouse” (2006-2016) – Disney’s first computer-animated series starring Mickey, this show also featured Minnie, Goofy, Donald, Pluto and Daisy, who all joined Mickey in a vivid, interactive world that invited young viewers to help solve challenges and overcome obstacles. Guided by a specific curriculum, the learning-focused, song- and fun-filled series was designed to introduce problem-solving and early mathematics skills in an entertaining way.
- “Mickey Mouse” Cartoon Shorts (2013-present) – This Emmy Award-winning hit series of shorts presents Mickey, Minnie and pals in a broad range of humorous situations that showcase their pluck and rambunctiousness, along with their long-beloved charm and good heartedness.
- “Mickey and the Roadster Racers”/“Mickey Mouse Mixed-Up Adventures” (2017-present) – Mickey, Minnie and their friends go on zany adventures all around Hot Dog Hills in fun locales including the racetrack, Mickey’s new gadget-filled house, and the Mixed-Up Motor Lab at Mickey’s Garage. Minnie and Daisy also run a successful business solving problems for anyone in need of a helping hand.

Mickey, Minnie and Music

Throughout history, Mickey, Minnie and music have been inseparable. In honor of “Nothing Can Stop Us Now,” the new original song featured in Mickey & Minnie’s Runaway Railway, here are some high notes in these true originals’ melodious career:

- The 1928 release of “Steamboat Willie” was revolutionary not only for its technical innovation in sound, but for bringing Mickey forever together with music. The short featured a musical score arranged by Wilfred Jackson and Bert Lewis, and included “Steamboat Bill,” a 1911 song by Arthur Collins, and the 19th century American folk song “Turkey in the Straw.”
- Written by Walt Disney and Carl Stalling, “Minnie’s Yoo-Hoo” in the 1929 short “Mickey’s Follies” became a pop hit. It was used as the theme song for the first movie-theater based “Mickey Mouse Clubs” in the 1930s, and was also the first Disney song to be released on sheet music, in 1930.
- “The Mickey Mouse Club” (1955) – Music was the foundation of this innovative children’s variety show. Disney standards, folk songs and dozens of original compositions were used; many of them were released as sheet music and on records. “Fun with Music” was the show’s theme every Monday.
- Mickey Mouse Revue (1971) – On Oct. 1, 1971, the Mickey Mouse Revue opened along with the rest of Magic Kingdom Park at Walt Disney World Resort in Florida. In the ambitious *Audio-Animatronics*

proscenium show, Mickey served as the orchestra conductor of beloved Disney characters in a musical concert of songs from classic Disney films. The attraction was relocated to Tokyo Disneyland for the park's grand opening on April 15, 1983, and played there until 2009.

- “Mickey Mouse Disco” (1979) – Mickey’s musicality certainly kept up with the times, and in 1979, this album released by Disneyland Records included disco versions of Disney songs – and Disney versions of disco hits! “Mickey Mouse Disco” was re-released on CD in 1995, and is currently available via digital music services.
- An animated musical 3D experience, Mickey’s PhilharMagic opened inside Magic Kingdom Park at Walt Disney World in 2003. Audience members entering the concert hall wear 3D opera glasses and take a seat in front of a 150-foot-wide, 180-degree wraparound screen. When Donald dons Mickey’s Sorcerer’s Hat and decides to try his hand at conducting the concert, he’s suddenly plunged into a 3D dream world of classic Disney animated musical sequences. Mickey’s PhilharMagic has subsequently opened in Hong Kong Disneyland, Tokyo Disneyland, Disneyland Park in Paris, and Disney California Adventure.
- Music plays an important role in the latest ongoing series of “Mickey Mouse” cartoon shorts that debuted in 2013, featuring the work of British composer Christopher Willis, who also wrote “Nothing Can Stop Us Now” for Mickey & Minnie’s Runaway Railway.

A Brief History of Disney Railways

In the October 1965 issue of Railroad Magazine, Walt traced his rail fascination to his youth: “I suppose I’ve always been in love with trains, as a small boy living on a farm near Marceline, Mo., ... at a time when railroads loomed large in the scheme of things and steam engines were formidable and exciting.” Throughout his personal life and professional career, Walt ensured trains have always been a part of Disney culture – a tradition that continues with the debut of Mickey & Minnie’s Runaway Railway.

- Walt was a railroad “news butcher” as a teenager. “In 1916, when I was 15,” Walt remembered, “... I looked around for some way to earn money until high school reopened in the fall. My brother, Roy, who had been employed by the Fred Harvey system as a news butcher on Santa Fe trains – selling magazines, peanuts, candy, apples, soft drinks, cigars and so on – suggested that I apply for a similar job.”
- Walt arrived in Hollywood in August 1923 on the California Limited line of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad.
- In “Mickey’s Choo-Choo” (1929), Mickey is the engineer of an eccentric railway train and Minnie is his musical passenger in the 11th “Mickey Mouse” short.
- Walt’s therapeutic hobby of miniature making led to an interest in model trains, and in 1949 resulted in the Carolwood Pacific Railroad (CPRR), a 7 1/4-inch gauge rideable miniature railroad in the backyard of his home in the Holmby Hills (on Carolwood Avenue) neighborhood of Los Angeles. The 1:8-scale live steam locomotive, the Lilly Belle, was named after Walt’s wife, Lillian. It was this miniature that inspired Walt to put full-size trains in his theme parks.
- Steam trains are found at every Disney “castle park” around the world, with the exception of Shanghai Disneyland.
- Debuting just 15 days after Disneyland opened in 1955, the Casey Jr. Circus Train brought a second rail-themed attraction to the park. Casey Jr. was modeled after the anthropomorphic train in the 1941 Disney film Dumbo, and takes guests in fanciful cars through the miniature world of Storybook Land.

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