

Inside The Magic Mirror:  
A Look at Disney's Pre-  
Disneyland TV Specials

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On Christmas Day 1950, an estimated 22 million<sup>1</sup> Americans welcomed Walt Disney into their homes for the first time, courtesy of NBC and Coca-Cola. Within four years, these same viewers would have the opportunity to do so again on a weekly basis with the premiere of *Disneyland*, Walt Disney Productions' first sustaining television series, broadcast on ABC. While *Disneyland* would be used to promote and finance Disney's new passion project, the Disneyland Amusement Park in Anaheim, California, this first holiday special -- the titular head of the company's debut on network television -- was entitled "One Hour in Wonderland," and was marketed as an hour-long promo for the studio's upcoming release of *Alice In Wonderland*, which had been in development since the '30s and was finally slated to open in July 1951.

However, despite the favorable critical and commercial response to this broadcast, Disney appeared publicly cautious about his entrance into the new medium, offering nothing of significance between December 1950 and *Disneyland*'s premiere in October 1954 except for a second follow-up special on Christmas Day 1951. A study

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<sup>1</sup> "Alice In Merchandiseland." *BoxOffice*, 20 Jan. 1951, pp. 4-5.

of these two pre-series productions reveals a learning curve with regard to Disney's use of television to his benefit -- not his discovery of its clear and inherent promotional capabilities, but his growing understanding of what these powers could (and could not) mean to him creatively -- and illustrates how these seemingly cautious endeavors were born from the medium's own gradual development, along with both the present financial and artistic fortunes of the company itself.

The possibilities of this new medium were already on Walt Disney's mind in 1936, when his refusal to relinquish domestic television rights to United Artists ultimately led the company to a new distributor. Although still in its infancy, television was even recognized in the studio's official handbook in 1938, with promises that it would offer "a vast field of entertainment."<sup>2</sup> The rush to television slowed during the Second World War, although the studio did collaborate briefly in 1944 with RCA for an unproduced educational film entitled "The World in Your Living

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<sup>2</sup> *An Introduction to the Walt Disney Studio*. Walt Disney Studios, 1938.

<sup>3</sup> Cotter, Bill. "The Early Days and Disney's Specials." *The Wonderful World of Disney Television*, Hyperion, 1997, p. 3.

Room," which was designed to highlight television's forthcoming capabilities.<sup>3</sup> Then, once the war had ended in late 1945 and national interests turned back to the domestic realm, Disney applied to the FCC for a station license, intending to build a broadcast center right on the studio lot.<sup>4</sup> But Roy withdrew the application -- weary of the potential costs and insistent that they wait for further technological innovations, like color.

This did not halt Walt's excitement though, for after a visit to New York -- the hub of network television -- Disney commissioned a formal report on the medium from the research firm, C.J. LaRoche and Company. By then, there was already talk of a sustaining series consisting of old shorts.<sup>5</sup> Although that show did not come to fruition, Walt was buoyed by the findings in the report,<sup>6</sup> which also made two recommendations to the studio: Disney should retain ownership of its product (something that was already his instinctual position with UA in the

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<sup>4</sup> Gabler, Neal. "City On A Hill." *Walt Disney: The Triumph of the American Imagination*, Vintage Books, 2006, p. 521.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p. 522

<sup>6</sup> *Television for Walt Disney Productions*. C.J. LaRoche and Company, 1950, *Television for Walt Disney Productions*.

mid-30's) and maintain production quality by filming its shows -- not using low-quality kinescopes, which were live broadcasts filmed through a monitor during transmission, intended to be shown later on stations not yet affiliated or even connected with the network.

Although select stations around the country had commercial licenses in the early 1940s, it was not until 1946 that the coaxial cable allowed stations to regularly connect with one another -- thus forming the first networks. These initial network connections were small and only based on the East Coast, from where most of the regularly scheduled programs were produced, live. Yet, the 1949-'50 season was already exhibiting signs of change with programs like CBS' *The Ed Wynn Show*,<sup>7</sup> a variety series produced in Los Angeles and broadcast live on the West Coast (with the East Coast and all other stations seeing episodes later via kinescope -- a reverse of the standard), and the first TV adaptation of the radio hit, *The Life Of Riley*,<sup>8</sup> a situation comedy

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<sup>7</sup> Brooks, Tim, and Earle Marsh. *The Complete Directory to Prime Time Network and Cable TV Shows, 1946-Present*. Ballantine Books, 2007, p. 410.

<sup>8</sup> Brooks, Tim, and Earle Marsh. *The Complete Directory to Prime Time Network and Cable TV Shows, 1946-Present*. Ballantine Books, 2007, p. 790.

that briefly starred Jackie Gleason and was notably, for the era, shot on film -- meaning that all the affiliated NBC stations could run the program on the same scheduled night and time.

Meanwhile, TV continued to make its way into more and more American homes. At the end of 1946, there were only an estimated number of 44,000 sets across the country -- about 0.1% homes had one -- with just 18 stations in operation.<sup>9</sup> At the end of 1950 -- when *One Hour In Wonderland* was broadcast -- those numbers had skyrocketed to 11,660,000 sets, 25.3% of homes, and 107 television stations.<sup>10</sup> All of these developments made TV a more appealing endeavor for Disney in 1950 than it had been earlier.

Of course, the studio itself was also in a very different position in 1950 than in the latter half of the '40s, given the success of *Cinderella*, which went into wide release that February and was the first non-anthology animated feature since 1942's *Bambi*. Although Walt would

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<sup>9</sup> *U.S. Postwar TV Production*, Early Television Museum, 1953, [www.earlytelevision.org/us\\_tv\\_sets.html](http://www.earlytelevision.org/us_tv_sets.html).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

claim at the time of release that "the finished picture is not everything we wanted it to be,"<sup>11</sup> many critics found *Cinderella* a return to form, and indeed, it would earn \$7.9 million in gross rentals<sup>12</sup> (not to mention all the revenue that came from merchandise and music) -- over \$4 million of which was harvested in 1950 alone<sup>13</sup>, making it the best of Disney's box office earners, second only to *Snow White* in 1938.

With a cost of just \$2.2 million,<sup>14</sup> there was no doubt that *Cinderella* was a hit, and it provided an influx of cash -- allowing more resources to be allotted for Disney's now-inevitable exploration of television and ensuring that the figurative greenlight would stay lit for the other animated features in development, *Alice In Wonderland* and *Peter Pan*, the very two films that would be promoted in the upcoming Christmas specials.

The first one, "One Hour in Wonderland," was conceived in the summer of 1950 when Disney began negotiating with

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<sup>11</sup> Walt to William I. Nichols, *This Week*, Nov. 18, 1949, N folder, Walt Disney Corr., 1949-1950, H-Q, A1542, WDA.

<sup>12</sup> Gabler, Neal. "City On A Hill." *Walt Disney: The Triumph of the American Imagination*, Vintage Books, 2006, p. 497.

<sup>13</sup> "Top-Grosses of 1950." *Variety*, 3 Jan. 1951, p. 58.

<sup>14</sup> Gabler, Neal. "City On A Hill." *Walt Disney: The Triumph of the American Imagination*, Vintage Books, 2006, p. 497.

Coca-Cola for what would become the studio's first official television endeavor -- a Christmas Day broadcast mixing together newly recorded live-action scenes, cartoon shorts, and a clip from *Alice In Wonderland*, which was scheduled to be released the following summer. For Roy, the goal of this broadcast was two-fold: to give the film a tremendous send-off (launching a publicity campaign that would go until the following July) and "find out a lot about television that we don't know now."<sup>15</sup>

Coca-Cola would pay approximately \$125,000 for the broadcast and sold the hour to NBC, which promised to program the special on at least 62 stations from 4-5PM on Christmas Day.<sup>16</sup> Press agent Bill Walsh was appointed by Walt as producer, while ventriloquist Edger Bergen, with Charlie McCarthy, was enlisted to host the program. Bergen was then headlining the Coca-Cola radio show for CBS and had just made his own television debut the month prior (in a Thanksgiving Day broadcast)<sup>17</sup>, and in keeping

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<sup>15</sup> Memo, Roy to Walt, Re: Television, Aug. 30, 1950, Roy Disney Folder, Walt Disney Corr., Inter-Office, 1945-1952, A-L, A1635, WDA.

<sup>16</sup> Cotter, Bill. "The Early Days and Disney's Specials." *The Wonderful World of Disney Television*, Hyperion, 1997, p. 4.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

with the general programming philosophy of the time, it was felt that a well-known, recognizable personality would be an easy way to drive viewership.

With both Walt and Roy already cognizant of the inherent functionality of the medium -- promotion -- this first special is but a sixty-minute advertisement for a variety of concerns: the personalities, the sponsor, the cartoons, the medium itself, and, as the title would indicate, the upcoming release of *Alice In Wonderland*. Regarding the personalities, the hook of having Bergen and McCarthy as the hosts necessitated their regular inclusion throughout the hour, and indeed, the program frames them, long-familiar to radio listeners everywhere, as the audience's access point to the Disney studio, a place many were visiting for the first time.

However, when Walt Disney makes his first appearance, about seven minutes in, showing off a model train to a studio Christmas party full of teens (including his daughters, Kathryn Beaumont in Alice garb, and Bobby Driscoll as the dashing young star of the recently released *Treasure Island*), it becomes clear that there's really only one host here -- the man whose name is above

the title in the opening credits. (Incidentally, Bergen, McCarthy, and Mortimer Snerd are credited as "Guest Stars" -- behind all the characters from the animated clips.) So, while there are several uninterrupted segments with Coca-Cola's regular headliners, the show simply doesn't frame them as the primary hosts -- they're just a way to access him: Walt Disney.

As for the sponsor, Coca-Cola is only mentioned at the top of the hour, at the closing, and once in a single minute-long spot as the teens merrily grab a bottle of soda pop on ice. It is less than three minutes total -- a small amount by any era's metrics -- and gives the impression that the sponsor only promoted itself in deference to Disney. In taking such a deal, Coca-Cola was making a trade-off: limited ad time in exchange for the amount of exposure granted via what else the program had to offer.

In this case, the special positions its cartoon library as the primary asset -- listing the included characters right away in the credits as the featured players (opposed to Bergen, McCarthy, and Snerd, who are guests). This should not have been a surprise; using

shorts and previously produced content as the backbone of a television endeavor was long part of Disney's plan -- as indicated by his determination to hold onto those rights, even way back as 1936. And the choice of content for this inaugural offering might as well be a hand-picked list of brand ambassadors, for there are appearances from Mickey, Donald, Goofy, and Pluto, along with Uncle Remus and the animals from the Briar Patch, and Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, whose eponymous picture -- the company's highest grossing at the time -- serves as the special's connective tissue via the Magic Mirror (voiced by Hans Conried), the device used to transition from live-action to animated clips.

Some of these chosen clips, in addition to representing the Disney brand as it then existed, also wink at the medium that Walt and Roy were still trying to figure out. For one, the choice to include a *Snow White* excerpt, though perhaps driven by its initial box office success and the post-*Cinderella* calls for a re-release, makes sense; this was the studio's first feature and therefore marks a fitting opening clip for its inaugural television show.

Other selected entries, meanwhile, find thematic ties to TV and its mystifying ways -- like the 1937 Mickey, Donald, and Goofy short, *Clock Cleaners*, which deals with the problems born from mechanics and technology, and the Pluto short, *Bone Trouble*, from 1940, which has fun playing with ideas of reflected images and how truth can be distorted. Together, these two shorts indicate a fear about this new medium that Disney was still trying to evaluate, while simultaneously endorsing it via the Magic Mirror, which presents the clips much like the viewers' sets at home would, and therefore posits this new technology as being as synonymously magical as Disney's. In this way, the show aims to sculpt a legitimate connection between the brand and the medium.

However, for as much as those selected clips revolve subliminally around the television, the two most significant excerpts contend with the works themselves, with the aim now of sculpting responses to the art. For instance, the decision to include the "Zip-A-Dee-Doo-Dah" song and ensuing scene from *Song of the South* (1946) begs discussion, if only because, even at the time of release, the film's racially insensitive depictions of Uncle Remus and his characters met with criticism. Among

these voices were Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., from Harlem, who declared that the picture was "an insult to American minorities."<sup>18</sup>

Nevertheless, the film remained one of Walt Disney's favorites, and its presence here in his first television production more than reinforces that personal affinity -- it also represents a more direct attempt to defend the picture again and justify its production by making the case that, as Kathryn Beaumont says, "Uncle Remus was about the most wonderful teller of animal stories that ever lived." In framing the clip with the kids' -- and the mirror's -- reverence for Uncle Remus, Disney attempts to persuade his audience that the work is not offensive. It's an effort to use the intimacy of the television medium, with personal commentary and applied sentiment beamed directly into the homes of the audience, to enact an artistic goal: legitimizing a work that had, for Disney, been challenged by others since (even before) its debut.

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<sup>18</sup> Watts, Steven. *The Magic Kingdom Walt Disney and the American Way of Life*. University of Missouri Press, 2013.

Still, the pièce de résistance, and the named reason for the special's existence in the first place, is the excerpt from the forthcoming *Alice In Wonderland*. If the title does not already indicate the broadcast's intention, then the opening scene between Bergen and McCarthy does, as their dialogue en route to the studio is built around a discussion of the *Alice* story. Then, once at the studio, Disney is seen entertaining a roomful of teens, including the voice actress and live-action model for Alice, Kathryn Beaumont. She spends the entire hour in her costume, personifying the animated character that TV audiences will later get to meet within the broadcast's last ten minutes, when the kids persuade the Magic Mirror to show them a clip from *Alice* and he obliges by offering the "Un-Birthday" scene with Ed Wynn and Jerry Colonna as the Mad Hatter and March Hare, respectively. The special concludes with an announcer encouraging its spectators to look out for the film upon its release in 1951.

A blatant advertisement for the film -- BoxOffice hyperbolically called it "the most extensive single

piece of promotion in motion picture history"<sup>19</sup> -- "One Hour In Wonderland" was just the opening act for a wave of publicity for *Alice*, which for the first time in the studio's history, would use television as a linchpin in its campaign. Following this Christmas special, Kathryn Beaumont and Sterling Holloway (the voice of the Cheshire Cat) appeared on the live March 18, 1951 broadcast of Fred Waring's variety show. In this production, included along with "One Hour in Wonderland" on several DVD and Blu-Ray releases for *Alice In Wonderland*, Walt Disney provided a filmed introduction preceding a 20-minute musical sample of *Alice's* score, performed in-character by Beaumont and Holloway, along with Waring's company.<sup>20</sup>

The film was touted again in an 11-minute filmed documentary piece shown on the June 14, 1951 broadcast of Ford Festival's *The James Melton Show*. Titled "Operation Wonderland," this mini-documentary took viewers into the studio and showed glimpses of *Alice's* production -- with an emphasis on how the animators use

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<sup>19</sup> "Alice In Merchandiseland." *BoxOffice*, 20 Jan. 1951, pp. 4-5.

<sup>20</sup> *The Fred Waring Show*. CBS, 18 Mar. 1951.

live reference models to design and draw the characters.<sup>21</sup>

All three of these TV *Alice* promotions have something major in common: they all go out of their way to humanize both the production of the film and the figures within it -- Alice, especially. Here, then, the use of television to entice viewers about the studio's latest picture seems to have an additional, more artistic function, rooted in Walt Disney's own insecurities about the work. Diane Disney recalls her father saying that "Alice was cold [and] you couldn't get any warmth to her,"<sup>22</sup> and he privately admitted that the whole feature lacked heart. Years later, he offered bolder public appraisals of the film, which he claimed he was "trapped" into making, "against my better judgment."

Deeming it a "terrible disappointment," he told another reporter that he "just didn't feel a thing, but we were forcing ourselves to do it."<sup>23</sup> It's interesting to note

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<sup>21</sup> *Operation Wonderland*. Walt Disney Studios, 1951.

<sup>22</sup> Gabler, Neal. "City On A Hill." *Walt Disney: The Triumph of the American Imagination*, Vintage Books, 2006, p. 505.

<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Peter Bart, "The Golden Stuff of Disney Dreams," *NYT*, Dec. 5, 1965, sec. 2.

that Walt's lack of enthusiasm wasn't reserved for this film though -- even *Cinderella*, already by now a smash hit, left him ambivalent.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, his sentiments regarding *Alice* were more extreme, given the pressures he'd felt to make it and the success of their last feature, which restored the high expectations placed upon the studio's animated output. In this regard, the decision to use *Alice* as the first Disney picture with a heavy push from television wasn't just born from the technology's own proliferation and progression, or even the studio's financial post-*Cinderella* success, but from what Walt viewed as a creative necessity: to convince others, and himself, that *Alice In Wonderland* had a figurative heart.

Was he successful? Trendex estimates that "One Hour In Wonderland" was viewed by a minimum of 22 million viewers on approximately 47.6% of the country's total sets, and that 92.6% of all households watching television at the time were tuned into Walt Disney's special.<sup>25</sup> (In contrast, *Cinderella* played to an estimated 20 million

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<sup>24</sup> Gabler, Neal. "City On A Hill." *Walt Disney: The Triumph of the American Imagination*, Vintage Books, 2006, p. 496.

<sup>25</sup> "Alice In Merchandiseland." *BoxOffice*, 20 Jan. 1951, pp. 4-5.

patrons in its first release.<sup>26</sup>) Additionally, critical reception was fantastic, with Jack Gould of *The New York Times* offering an appraisal indicative of the whole response: "one of the most engaging and charming programs of the year."<sup>27</sup>

With such a tremendous reception on both ends, it seemed inevitable that Disney would be back on television again, and behind closed doors, the idea of a sustaining series finally became a real possibility. In March 1951, Disney met with executives to talk about a weekly half-hour show,<sup>28</sup> and the studio began exploring small-scale commercials for television through a controlled subsidiary, Hurrell Productions, Inc., which was also investigating the idea of "producing serialized dramatic and comedy shows on film for TV."<sup>29</sup> Negotiations opened up with ABC and various sponsors, but by the summer they had just as quickly fizzled.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Gould, Jack. "Walt Disney Brings His Treasure Chest of Cartoon Entertainers to N.B.C. for Sparkling Holiday Fare." *The New York Times*, 26 Dec. 1950, p. 24.

<sup>28</sup> Gabler, Neal. "City On A Hill." *Walt Disney: The Triumph of the American Imagination*, Vintage Books, 2006, p. 523.

<sup>29</sup> Barrier, J. Michael. "Caprices and Spurts of Childishness." *The Animated Man: a Life of Walt Disney*. University of California Press, 2007, p. 273

Un-coincidentally, it was late summer that *Alice In Wonderland* went into its wide domestic release and earned reviews like such from *The New York Times'* Bosley Crowther: "Watching this picture is something like nibbling those wafers that Alice eats."<sup>30</sup> *Variety* hit right at Disney's prior concerns: "[I]t has not been able to add any real heart or warmth, ingredients . . . which have always been an integral part of previous Disney feature cartoons."<sup>31</sup> These sentiments appear to have been reflected in the box office returns, too, for while *Cinderella* had ended 1950 with earnings of approximately \$4.15 million (on a cost of only \$2.2 million), *Alice* finished 1951 with \$2.4 million,<sup>32</sup> losing money on its estimated \$3 million investment.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, while the special TV promotion for *Alice In Wonderland* had been a commercial and critical success for the studio and made a powerful case for Disney's continued involvement in the medium, the very feature

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<sup>30</sup> Crowther, Bosley. "Disney's Cartoon Adaptation of 'Alice in Wonderland' Arrives at Criterion." *The New York Times*, 30 Jul. 1951, p. 12.

<sup>31</sup> "Film Reviews: Alice In Wonderland." *Variety*, 4 July 1951, p. 8.

<sup>32</sup> "Top Grossers of 1951." *Variety*, 2 Jan. 1952, p. 70.

<sup>33</sup> Gabler, Neal. "City On A Hill." *Walt Disney: The Triumph of the American Imagination*, Vintage Books, 2006, p. 497.

that it was built to promote did not meet the same success. The lesson here for Disney, then, was that television could definitely give a product visibility (as long suspected), but it certainly could not fix creative problems inherent in a work, no matter how much the medium aimed to direct particular responses. Going forward, if Disney wanted to do more with TV -- and he did -- selling the pictures could no longer be even his surface motivation. He needed a new engine.

It is difficult to say exactly when the idea for an amusement park came into Walt's head, but extensive conversations had occurred by the summer of '51, for Roy was already writing to Walt about how a television series could be used to finance, via a third party, his dreams of an "amusement company."<sup>34</sup> Leveraging his brand and output in exchange for Disneyland financing would indeed prove to be Disney's game plan with television, but with the studio not yet ready for a major deal, another small-scale endeavor was planned: a second special for Christmas Day 1951.

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<sup>34</sup> Gabler, Neal. "City On A Hill." *Walt Disney: The Triumph of the American Imagination*, Vintage Books, 2006, p. 523.

In November, Johnson & Johnson was announced as the sponsor for the hour broadcast, after paying a then-record-setting \$250,000 -- \$150,000 of which went directly to the studio.<sup>35</sup> This time, the special, unofficially titled "The Walt Disney Christmas Show," would be seen from 3-4PM on CBS. Never released on home video, this second offering gives us an idea of what Walt and the studio had learned from the year prior. For starters, the only personality hosting the 1951 special is Walt Disney, who had already proven the year before that the power of his name and what the studio offered was far stronger than anything that could be provided by other well-known Radio-TV personalities.

Additionally, Johnson & Johnson is allocated the same limited amount of screen time as Coca-Cola, but the teens of the earlier show are replaced by a younger crowd more reflective of the sponsor's own brand. This gained points from many critics, who lauded the telecast's "institutional pitch on the role of doctors, nurses, pharmacists and hospitals..."<sup>36</sup> Tying into this theme, CBS,

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<sup>35</sup> Cotter, Bill. "The Early Days and Disney's Specials." *The Wonderful World of Disney Television*, Hyperion, 1997, p. 5.

<sup>36</sup> "Television Reviews: Walt Disney Christmas Show." *Variety*, 26 Dec. 1951, p. 31.

Disney, and Johnson & Johnson arranged to deliver TV sets to children wards all across the country, providing 83 televisions to hospitals that did not yet have receivers, so they could watch the show.<sup>37</sup> This nod to the medium and its continued growth -- by the end of 1951, an estimated 37.1% of all households had a television, up from 25.3% the year before<sup>38</sup> -- replaces the subliminal messages supplied by the cartoon shorts of the 1950 telecast, and offers a more simply optimistic take on what television can do: unite the children of the country -- nay, the world. In fact, the wraparound segments reinforce this idea with the inclusion of children of all different nationalities, who request clips in many different languages. It is a show of global power, doubling down on the strength of the Disney brand -- which transcends the United States of America -- and also suggests, via Johnson & Johnson, a more amiable meeting of the brands: sponsor's and showman's.

The biggest contrast between the two specials, however, is the use of previously produced material, which as

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<sup>37</sup> Columbia Broadcasting System, Incorporated Annual Report. 1951.

<sup>38</sup> *U.S. Postwar TV Production*, Early Television Museum, 1953, [www.earlytelevision.org/us\\_tv\\_sets.html](http://www.earlytelevision.org/us_tv_sets.html).

before, is connected via Hans Conried's Magic Mirror (now assisted by Willoughby, a junior magic mirror voiced by Bill Thompson, who played Smee opposite Conried's Captain Hook in *Peter Pan*). In 1951, the assortment of clips suggests similar calculation -- brand ambassadors like Mickey Mouse, Donald, and Pluto are all accounted for (as is Uncle Remus, whose presence got more critical blowback this year than the year prior<sup>39</sup>) -- but the hour's preference for the familiar over anything new seems to be a reaction to the failure of *Alice In Wonderland*, heavily promoted throughout the previous broadcast. But, naturally, there are other reasons for the clip-heavy structure. First, it was too early to show any footage of the in-production *Peter Pan*, and second, the picture observing the heaviest promotion during the hour was itself tried-and-true: *Snow White*, whose February 1952 re-release had been in the offing since *Cinderella*.

Still, the fact remains, with *Snow White* being a known and beloved quantity -- and already a major part of the Disney catalogue -- the special did not have anything

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<sup>39</sup> "Television Reviews: Walt Disney Christmas Show." *Variety*, 26 Dec. 1951, p. 31.

artistic it needed to defend or prove. And with regard to *Peter Pan*, not even Beaumont and Driscoll dressed as their new characters (Wendy and Peter) for four whole minutes of screen time represents the same creative push evidenced the year prior with *Alice*. Had the latter's reception been different, so might the 1951 special.

As expected, reviewers were similarly positive in their assessments of "The Walt Disney Christmas Show", although many noted that it leaned more heavily on its library than "One Hour in Wonderland" did<sup>40</sup> -- something that Disney surely remembered when it began pitching its own weekly show in 1953 and drafted ideas for series that would include new content,<sup>41</sup> which had to be a part of the studio's television equation in the future.

Nevertheless, the broadcast was considered another success, crystallizing much of what the studio had already intuited about television and what it offered Walt specifically: the chance to promote new product via the strength of his established name and with support

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<sup>40</sup> "Television Reviews: Walt Disney Christmas Show." *Variety*, 26 Dec. 1951, p. 31.

<sup>41</sup> Telotte, J. P. *Disney TV*. Wayne State Univ. Pr., 2004, pp. 28-29.

from all their previously produced content, on which they still maintained ownership. It indicated a greater understanding of the medium, with less subliminal trepidation about how it melded with the company's own brand, and a new implied recognition of the notion that television could not solve or obscure artistic problems.

What television could do, though, was provide revenue - - not just from promotion, but from pure financing. Although this would become clearer in 1953 when plans for Disneyland were in full swing and the studio was negotiating with networks regarding a weekly series, the Johnson & Johnson asking price in 1951 -- double that of the first broadcast with Coca-Cola -- already reveals Disney's understanding of television's great virtue: money. And, incidentally, the only reason that there was no special in 1952 was not due to Walt's disinterest, but rather because no sponsor would agree to pay his (again elevated) asking price.<sup>42</sup>

For the kind of money he needed, Disney would have to offer more than packaged clips, and by 1953, he was ready

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<sup>42</sup> "Viewing TV: Disney's Yule Program Missing This Year." The Oakland Tribune, 17 Dec. 1952, p. 56.

to do so. By working through these two specials and learning lessons on small, controlled efforts, Disney was better prepared to dive head first into the medium in 1954 -- knowing what he could get out of it, and what he could not. And while TV couldn't fix *Alice In Wonderland* for Walt, it was the first animated feature screened on *Disneyland* in November 1954<sup>43</sup> -- a nod, perhaps, to the studio's first television experience.

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<sup>43</sup> Cotter, Bill. "Anthology Series Episode Descriptions." *The Wonderful World of Disney Television*, Hyperion, 1997, p. 78.