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Walt's daughter delighted by Disney school kids

UPTOWN | Students pay tribute to legend's life and work

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BY [ROSALIND ROSSI](#) Education Reporter

Although Walt Disney was born in Chicago, it really wasn't his kind of town, his oldest daughter confided Friday.

But Walt Disney Magnet in Chicago's Uptown neighborhood definitely would have been her dad's kind of school, Diane Disney Miller declared after viewing a 1½-hour multimedia tribute to her father by Disney kindergarten through eighth-graders.

"I love seeing my dad's name on this school," Miller said. "He'd be so flattered by it."

Miller sat spellbound Friday as Disney kids combined old and new to trace her dad's life and legendary contributions to the world of animation and entertainment.

Kindergartners sporting Mickey Mouse ears sang "The Mickey Mouse March." A first-grade Cinderella and Prince Charming led their peers in the Cinderella waltz.

But students also showed off their high-tech skills, honed by tools from the school's animation studio and digital music lab that Miller has supported with at least \$700,000 in contributions over the last half-dozen years.

Eighth-graders played their animated riff on "Fantasia," featuring swirling planets, shooting stars and Tinkerbell landing in an enchanted forest where dewdrops sparkled on a spider's web before transforming into butterflies. Just like the creators of the original "Fantasia," the "Walt Disney Magnet Fantasia 2010" animators said the music -- written in the school's digital music lab -- came first and inspired their animation.

In several show segments, a pack of third-graders posing as reporters ran across the stage yelling, "Mr. Disney! Mr. Disney!" then stopped in front of a huge screen bearing an image of Disney himself. The reporters called out a question, and a film clip of Disney gave them a response.

The production was not glitch-free. One "reporter" ran so quickly across the stage, he ran out of one of his shoes, which sat in the middle of the stage until he quietly retrieved it.

And when the first film clip of Disney took several minutes to appear, the tuxedo-clad emcee -- seventh-grader Bailey Giltner -- quickly emerged from the wings to the sound of student-written music and saved the day. Announced Bailey without missing a beat: "Excuse us for a moment. We're having slight technical difficulties. In the meantime, please enjoy the music."

Disney's daughter loved it.

"What they presented -- it was amazing," Miller told Principal Kathleen Hagstrom afterward. "And the technical [glitches] were saved by the poise of the participants."

Born in 1901, Walter Elias Disney spent the first four years of his life in Chicago until his father became "a little alarmed at the crime" and moved the family to a farm in Marceline, Mo., for four years --the most "idyllic" time of the animator's life, Miller said. The family eventually moved back to Chicago, where 16-year-old Walt attended McKinley High School and drew cartoons for the school magazine.

The genius behind Walt Disney Productions, Disneyland and Disneyworld dropped out of McKinley, considered Chicago "too big," and became "very critical of education," his daughter said.

"He believed education should be fun. You should have to work hard at it, but it should be fun."

If Walt Disney were to tour Disney Magnet today, "He'd say 'This is what I meant,' " Miller said.

"When I walk in this school, I am so proud of it. I wish this could happen in every city in the country."

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