

Famous Films

Celebrating Walt Disney's Very First Classic Animated Film And The Woman Who Helped Bring The Heroine To Life

(NAPSA)—Little girls and their families around the world have loved Walt Disney's "Snow White" for nearly 80 years—ever since Walt brought his groundbreaking version of the Grimms' Fairy Tale to the screen in 1937. The epic story of love and friendship, which the American Film Institute calls "The Greatest Animated Film Of All Time," tells of living life "happily ever after" and teaches such lessons as real beauty comes from within and never give up hope. Disney's first-ever High Definition version will be available beginning January 19 to launch the new Walt Disney Signature Collection.

One girl who learned the film's lessons firsthand was a young dancer whom Walt Disney auditioned as one of 300 and then ultimately chose to be the "live-action" model for Snow White.



Her name was Marjorie Celeste Belcher, daughter of a Hollywood ballet coach, who later became known as legendary dancer and choreographer Marge Champion.

"Scouts from the studio came to watch my father's class and they narrowed it down to three of us," Champion told CBS News years later. "I was thrilled to finally get the opportunity, but more important for this 14-year-old girl, it was the chance to get out of Hollywood High four days a month," she admitted.

Walt and his animators wanted to make Snow White look as human as possible. So they filmed Marge performing dances and improvising special movements that were then studied and copied in the final animation. The relatively new process was a precursor of digital techniques used



today in movies like "Avatar" and "Pirates of the Caribbean."

"The animators set up a clothesline, from which hung a bunch of ropes representing trees and branches that I had to push aside. My acting came out of instinct because I was not a trained actress. All of that gave them much more of a guide for Snow White's movements." Champion often added ideas on what she thought the character might do to elaborate or extend the action of a particular scene.

At 96, actress/dancer/choreographer Marge Champion remains a living legend from Hollywood's Golden Age of stage, screen, television and Disney Animation. She is probably best known as one-half of the renowned "Marge and Gower Champion" husband-wife dance team that lit up the screen in seven classic musical films, as well as on TV and Broadway. They went on to become the screen's most appealing dance team since Astaire and Rogers.

Marge made her film debut in 1939's "The Story of Vernon and Irene Castle," although it was Ginger Rogers who actually danced with Fred Astaire. Among the many projects she choreographed was "Queen of the Stardust Ballroom," which won her an Emmy® in 1975. In addition to

"Snow White," she modeled for the Blue Fairy in "Pinocchio," Hyacinth Hippo in the "Dance of the Hours" segment of "Fantasia" and Mr. Stork in "Dumbo."

She remembers her Disney days with fondness. "The atmosphere was like a giant high school or college, as far as I was concerned. Mr. Disney, for me, was like a very friendly head principal. Of course, that's a 14-year-old's point of view. I later learned that he was probably one of the most important men in Hollywood, certainly in animation, and probably in the movie industry."

Marge is a Trustee Emeritus of the Williamstown (Mass.) Theatre Festival (near her home in Stockbridge), has taught master classes at the Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, and was a member of the Advisory Board of the Berkshire Theatre Festival. In 1997, Massachusetts honored Marge with its Commonwealth Award, citing her "leadership as a true patron of the arts."

Finally, Ms. Champion has the unique distinction of sharing a star on Hollywood Boulevard Walk of Fame with this favorite character she played. Both she and Snow White each have their own!

To learn more about the title and watch the trailer, visit <http://movies.disney.com/snow-white-and-the-seven-dwarfs>.