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How Disney Movies Are Becoming More Immersive

Jenna Tsui · Wednesday, February 19th, 2020

Disney is bringing its movies into a whole new universe. For years, fans have dreamed of being able to take part in the magical worlds of Disney movies, and they might have the chance soon. The company has always excelled at making immersive films, but they're now taking that experience to the next level.

In a recent story, *The Hollywood Reporter* announced news of a deal between Disney and the entertainment company Secret Cinema. The agreement will see Secret Cinema adapt several of Disney's most iconic titles into new, interactive experiences. The companies are still discussing which films they'll choose for the project.

The Walt Disney name is already synonymous with immersion. The company has brought their movies to life with performances and theme parks around the world, but this project is something entirely different. It has the potential to blur the lines between cinema and theater as well as between audience and performer.

Disney's History of Innovation

Disney is no stranger to innovation in film. The studio has been a pioneer of movie technology since it released the first full-color cartoon in 1932. Since then, it's made landmark after landmark with record-setting films and other attractions, like its various theme parks and Disney on Ice.

In more recent years, Disney has continued to dominate the entertainment industry with acquisitions and partnerships. The company now has a hand in virtually every field of entertainment. It has a stake in sports with ESPN, in edutainment with National Geographic and even in international hotels with the Shanghai Disney Resort.

While it made its name in older forms of television and movies, Disney continues to stay relevant in the streaming era. The recent release of Disney Plus allows audiences to access a library of classics and blockbusters on-demand. With this Secret Cinema agreement, Disney will continue putting new spins on its iconic properties.

A True Multimedia Experience

Secret Cinema is a London-based entertainment company specializing in interactive, immersive experiences. It brings audiences into a movie's world by combining a wide array of different techniques. The process does what 3D and 4D presentations attempt to do, but stretches beyond the

kinds of media generally associated with films.

Typically, a movie will only involve two senses — sight and hearing. While these two mediums can have an impressive effect on audiences by themselves, theaters have tried to engage the senses further for decades. 3D and 4D cinema have grown out of this desire.

You've probably seen a 3D movie and may have experienced a 4D presentation as well, but Secret Cinema mixes even more mediums than these. On top of seeing the movie itself, audiences get to take part in an interactive live-action performance set in the film's landscape. Through this show, audience members become a part of the film, taking on their own characters and narratives.

Audience Participation

Apart from the elaborate sets constructed around the theaters, what sets Secret Cinema apart from other moviegoing experiences is the audience participation. When you buy a ticket to a show, you also receive an assigned character and a suggested wardrobe. You are no longer just a viewer, but a participant in the production.

Instead of watching a historical film from your couch, you take on a role from that moment of history. You'd have a costume, character and storyline that all tie into the story and world of the movie.

By having the audience participate in the production, Secret Cinema brings these movies to life. Instead of relying on technology to make films more immersive, the experience has its audience get physically involved in it in real time.

This experience may not attract many people with worlds from less accessible small or indie films, but Disney's massive blockbusters seem like a perfect match. Secret Cinema knows this firsthand, having adapted "Star Wars" movies in the past. The company has also produced experiences from popular films such as "Shawshank Redemption" and "Alien."

The Future of Immersive Cinema

The companies hope to premiere their first show later this year in London. The agreement also specifies that they will eventually mount productions in other cities like Los Angeles and New York. If the popularity of Disney Land parks is any indicator, Disney could see considerable success in working with Secret Cinema.

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