

Funnyman Fred Newman on His Unique Mickey Mouse Club Experience

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Fred Newman talks about life after the Mickey Mouse Club and the upcoming 30th-year reunion.

(Newswire.net -- May 16, 2019) -- *The Mouseketeers are finally coming home for a grand reunion to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the show's debut episode and the 90th birthday of Mickey Mouse himself. Featuring cast from all seven seasons of the Mickey Mouse Club, #MMC30 is organized and produced by alumni Dale Godboldo, who is behind the Always In The Club Foundation, and Chasen Hampton in support of Give Kids The World Village, and onePULSE Foundation. Hosted by Joey Fatone, the event is happening on May 18-19 at Walt Disney World® Resort in Orlando, FL.*

I recently had the pleasure of sitting down for a series of interviews with some of the Mickey Mouse Club cast who are going to be part of the event. One of whom is none other than acclaimed funnyman, Fred Newman, who hosted MMC in its first six seasons. Known for being an accomplished sound and voice impersonator, as well as comedian, Fred is best known for his work on the Nickelodeon series DOUG. He also wrote the award-winning book, Mouth Sounds.

Tell us the story of how you came to join the MMC.

I did a show called Livewire on Nickelodeon very early on. I was horrible, and I did about 200 hours of show, no commercials—just 200 hours of interviewing. It was a really well-produced show and I learned a lot. That show had just ended and I did some things for a local public radio show and the same producer of that show invited me to audition for the Mickey Mouse Club. And I think there's weren't a lot of people that had worked with young people. That show is a New York-based show, a serious talk show—we would have Malcolm Forbes and Isaac Asimov and all sorts of people that would come on and talk. But teenagers, if I may be honest, is that adults wouldn't put up with anything, but teenagers, if they'd go like, "You, on the air," they would just go there. I don't believe that and so I came in with just these are adults. They just have a lot more options than adults and they're way more intense because they've got all these options open and that's the way I walked into the show and just did what I did. I was really lucky. I've done the other show because I felt so relaxed and just loved the Mouseketeers, but I love all the kids on the show. Everyone was extraordinary. I mean there were normal kids, too, but they were really talented. Everybody had their own lives. Sort of like the magnificent, the amazing superheroes of dance or singing or whatever. They all came in with that, and it was an amazing group.

What was one of the most important lessons that you got from that experience that helped you get to where you are today?

I think it was really about listening. I mean just learning. They all had literally and figuratively different voices, came from different areas, and you know, some were from really stable homes, some from not so stable homes. They all came in to work with those people where you just couldn't coast. You had to bring your A game just to a simple rehearsal or read-through because these kids were so intense. I was like the weird uncle and nothing will make you feel older or younger at the same time like working with teenagers.

I will do an impression, but I probably shouldn't do this. This is an impression of the Mickey Mouse Club kids because I forgot what it was like to be in the middle of puberty and the sap is rising and it's just there. Everything had a light. That's when she said everything had this thing on it. And that was of course not what the show was about, but that's underneath that. So it reminded me, it really made me feel so youthful. And then, you know, my knees are going. I was somewhere right around 40 when I did the show, so it was the best gift ever to work with people as they weren't my kids. They were just co-equals. And so we just hung around. I mean, it wasn't like I was an adult, really. It was home. It was great.

Tell us what you're doing as an entrepreneur or business person today.

That was such a heavily produced show and beautifully produced. I mean, huge staff—like 150 people made that show to do a live, daily variety show. No one had ever done that. And it was really expensive and really difficult to do with was this huge army that would be doing music videos and that's for two weeks out and they were doing sketches tomorrow and this shoot today. It was just a crazy show.

What made me pull back is I wanted to do live work to pull the cameras away, and I moved more towards live performing my own lectures and comedy and my own performing a lot of own characters, a lot of writing. But while I was on Mickey Mouse Club, I did the series Doug on Nickelodeon. [sings] Do do do do do do do do do—that was me. I did it with Dan Sawyer who I met there. He was the musical director of the show and he did all the music for the videos and all that. Amazing guy and we just got along really well. We started working together and do cartoon series, composing together.

Then I did a Prairie Home Companion. It was a live two-hour show for about 17 years with Garrison Keillor and they moved over with Chris Thile, still on the show. I left there in October of this past year, but I did maybe two years, two and a half years, with him but the 17 years, I think, with Garrison, live every Saturday night and that to do a live show—comedy, voices, sounds—it an amazing thing to have an audience react to you like that. And Mickey Mouse Club wasn't that done-before live show but much more produced. I'm dyslexic and an odd child. The older I've gotten, the more I realized I tapped into my 10-year-old [self] and that it was heavily influenced by Mickey Mouse Club and working with kids. I want to get back to that again. And so I remember doing a sketch called Why? Because I'm an Adult. I remember doing that and that's what I wanted to do. I just wanted to play and I did that with more of my career. I worked a little bit more, did some more. Actually, Disney bought Doug and the series, aired on Saturday mornings. We did another series after the Nickelodeon version. So I think it had a big influence on me. What would you call it? An inflection point in my career because of the kids. The power of those kids.

So obviously having gone through the Disney experience, the Mickey Mouse Club Journey, and then your continuation as an entertainer and we can call you an entrepreneur, right? A performer for the entirety of your career.

I have a multi-hundred-dollar corporation called Talking Dog Productions. They will make the bed is the entrepreneurial part. I want to think that is a career. I'm me, but that's a career and that was a corporate thing.

**What would you say to an aspiring entrepreneur to become successful in today's age of tech and media?
Please share tips.**

Well, being dyslexic, I'm very easily distracted. I had to get off all social media. I just had to strip that out. I went to business school at one point years before and you asked what I did earlier. I worked with Newsweek magazine. From business to Newsweek magazine. I worked there for two years, did a little stand-up on the side, and while I was doing standup, I realized it—I did these voices and sounds. I did this. He said, "How'd you do that? How do you make that sound?" And I did a book about that. This actually relates to the number.

I've gotten off topic. What was that? Oh, what I'd learned from business school that I took with me was 20% of the best corporations in America spent 20% of their profits on R&D, research and development. So I did that one day a week—the equivalent of one day a week. I worked on things that I wasn't going to get paid for. Even if has worked on Mickey Mouse Club, I spent the equivalent of several-hours-a-day's work. It could be reading, could be learning something and doing a Banjo Song—but doing something that's research. And so when somebody says, "Can you?" and I go, "Yeah, I've got it right here." And that saved me in this, especially now with new media and things are changing daily as we know. And that spinning time, just noodling, that's not wasted time. Just spend time thinking about stuff and just enjoy following whatever, that little bit, since I just try to try that, and that will end up leading you and you'll have the answer at the future if you do that. If you're just chasing it all the time, you just reacted.

That is what I learned from business school that pulls through when you mentioned entrepreneur. I guess that's the entrepreneurial part. I haven't been fascinated with the financial part of it, but it is with the ideation part of it and that part of it, I spend now probably an hour a day. I'm doing a lot of painting now, but also paying on touchpads and using all this technology, and all this came out of just noodling awhile ago in that pool. I can do this and I can try this. And that's my time where ideas hit because I'm not thinking about if I sit down and just try to do it. I can't muscle it out. But I allow my mind meditation, really. But that's part of my R&D.

Why is it important for you to participate in the MMC reunion event? Why would someone want to attend as a

guest?

You know, I've always gone back to high school reunions or college or any kind of reunions because to go back and reconnect to a former self is particularly like going back and watching or reading a book again. As a kid, we do To Kill a Mockingbird but as an adult, It's a totally different book. To see a movie you saw as a kid—as an adult, it's totally different. Even more so when the people that I loved on that show. When Chasen [Hampton] called me up and I heard his voice, just hearing that, it was like, it all came back. And I think if you watch the show and if these kids affected you in the show, affected you at that really prime age—you know, sort of nine to 15, if you're right in that age—that's the inflection point right there, at that point then you need to be a part of this because you'll see yourself and reminds you what you were like back then. It's really hard to remember that, but these people captured my imagination and I'm guessing a lot of viewers, too.

Outside the world of Disney and the MMC, who is the one person you'd like to meet someday? You never know who might be seeing this!

Probably some scientist. I've never met Neil Degrasse Tyson. I would like to meet him, but it's gotta be more like taking a walk. I get to just have a rambling conversation. I'm working on some kids books about quantum theory, quantum work. I've been doing performances with orchestras where I tell a story and do the sounds with the orchestra. Some of the music I've composed, the others are not. I'm trying to do that about the universe. That's probably that's the first thing that comes to mind. If you ask me in 10 minutes, something else would come. There's some great artists I'd like to meet. I wish I had a definitive answer.

There's more people to know. You know, like when you see Game of Thrones or whatever you're watching on television, you get to know these characters so well in a way that two hours in a movie is not the same. And I think when you have a series, like you'd see these kids day in and day out doing different things, you really got to know them and that's a rare thing to do up. I, I would say, a lot of kids I just can't wait to see them because I can't imagine where they are now and it's just gonna be so exciting to see.

Mickey Mouse Club Reunion #MMC30

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