

## A Whole New World of Alan Menken Debuts at Segerstrom

By Joel Covey - Entertainment Editor October 1, 2016



The unparalleled Disney Legend and eight-time Oscar-winner ALAN MENKEN performed Friday at Segerstrom Center for the Arts the World Premiere of his new one-man-show *A Whole New World of Alan Menken*. This unprecedented event featured Menken performing his immediately recognizable infamous Disney classics along with other countless hits while sharing some very personal stories and comical anecdotes. The performance took the audience along a historical journey through his epic career. From *The Little Mermaid*, *Aladdin*, and *Beauty and the Beast* to *The Little Shop of Horrors*, *Galavant*, and several Disney and non-Disney Broadway shows, Alan Menken has had a very cherished career that's not showing any signs of stopping!

While there is no word whether or not this near-test of a show will make its way elsewhere or even continue, it's these level of memorable shows that makes Segerstrom Center of the Arts such a local treasure for Orange County. Performing in the Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall, the Spanish granite and a silver leak ceiling with warm wood accented walls provide a glistening backdrop for the show. While many are aware of the grand Segerstrom Hall, its worth checking out [SCFTA.org](http://SCFTA.org) for a calendar of events coming to the other several theaters The Center has to offer.

Alan Menken was such a delight to watch even with his nervousness being rather apparent, though he noted this himself. The performance opened with him explaining that this was his first time doing anything like this and half-joked that he wasn't sure if it may actually be his first and only show. Reading through several prompters on stage, it was clear that much of the stories were being read as I am sure he didn't want to leave anything out. However, I am excited if the show ever continues as it could benefit from some polished organic story telling in order to create an even more intimate feeling and setting.

*A Whole New World with Alan Menken* is more of a personal telling of his career opposed to a big-time production we have come to see with live concerts of famous composers or movie scores that have become increasing popular. I hope the show can continue with some added guest appearances and slower renditions. As you can imagine, there are musical numbers a plenty that Menken would want to play for audiences, but this format seemed to have forced him to play all songs at a rapid pace to cram in as much as possible. Fortunately, several of the more serious tunes were slowed to be enjoyed as originally intended such as "Santa Fe" from *Newsies* or "Tale as Old as Time" from *Beauty and the Beast*.



The show was separated into two Acts with the first highlighting Alan's collaborations with his former music partner and lyricists Howard Ashman who passed away from complications with AIDS. It was evident that much of the show is dedicated to the talent and friendship he provided Alan during the breakout years of their career. Following a somber end to the first Act, the second visits some of Menken's more recent Disney career after the "Disney Decade" of the 90s and bigger ventures onto Broadway.

The well-decorated and honored song writer has been thrilled with some of his favorite works coming back into the lime light lately. More recently the Disney's original early 90s flop, *Newsies*, has grown a cult following that created an opportunity for *Newsies* to be revisited and brought to stage. This newer stage adaptation has won him a Tony and Drama Desk awards for his score of *Newsies*. He joked that once it served him a Razzie for the worst song "High Times, Hard Times" from the movie version to now receiving a Tony for the same show. Menken loves that what he calls his little children, his songs, have been receiving second and third chances with new productions hitting the stage.

Alan Menken has won more Academy Awards than any other living individual, including eight Oscars with four for Best Score and four for Best Song; 11 Grammy® Awards (including Song of the Year for "A Whole New World"); seven Golden Globes; London's Evening Standard Award; the Olivier Award; the Outer Critics Circle Award and the Drama Desk Award.

With this being said, it's obvious that it was a privilege being able to see Alan Menken live performing such classics as a medley of songs from *The Little Mermaid* to one of my favorites from *Newsies*, "Santa Fe", to the powerful Quasimodo solo "Out There" from *Hunchback of Norte Dame*, to the highlight of the night... an all-new song from Disney's new live action adaptation of *Beauty and the Beast* that has never been played for any audience.



The man may just want to continue these performances as he received thunderous applause after each and every song. It's incredible the number of memorable and impactful songs he has written over the past 40 years, but it's even more impressive the legacy he has already left behind for so many generations just since first Disney film, *The Little Mermaid*.

These songs from the many Disney animated films Alan Menken has provided his hand to weren't just written for the younger audience, they also resonate for the parents. Not only has this eliminated a generational gap of who has nostalgia for these songs, but also will continue on for generations to come as parents introduce these movies

to their kids. While Alan Menken continues to produce new scores and songs for television, movies, and musical stage productions like "A Bronx Tale", he has already left such an impact on everyone one way or another. I look forward to continue to be lost in his music and taken to whole new worlds for many years to come.

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