

'Disney on Ice' skater reflects on a lifetime of dreams and stories

BY ALICE GERARD

Mario Castro has been an athlete, a soldier, and an actor in his native Brazil. And, for the past 27 years, he has performed as a skater with "Disney on Ice."

Castro said he has always followed his dreams, which have shifted like the sands.

"One of my dreams was to be a professional actor, working in a TV station in a soap opera. I love those. For us, in Brazil, soap operas are major entertainment. At 7 p.m., you're having dinner with the family, and you're watching the soap opera," Castro said.

When Castro joined the Brazilian Army, his dreams changed: "I never thought that I could be in the Army. I ended up by staying there for six years. I became a sergeant."

In the Army, Castro was part of a competition team.

"I was in sports for a long time in my life," he said. "When I left the Army (at the age of 28), I was looking for a different sport."

It was then that he discovered ice skating.

"I started, just for fun, but we didn't have any coaches to teach us some moves. Basically, we were watching competitions with Brian Boitano, Kristi Yamaguchi and Kurt Browning. You're looking at them on TV. How are the moves? Using VHS, you go slowly to see the moves frame by frame," Castro said.

In the early 1990s, Castro decided to spend a year learning English in the U.S.

"When I was there, I saw 'Disney on Ice,'" he said. "The first show that I saw (in 1992) was 'Beauty and the Beast.' I was so in love. I asked for an audition, and, two days later, I had an audition."



Mario Castro stars in "Disney on Ice."

He related that the auditioners at "Disney on Ice" enjoyed Castro's artistic presentation. He was an experienced actor, having performed in movies and a few television shows.

"But I didn't have the technique," he said. "They told me to come back in two years. I don't think so. Two years is a long time. They advised me, 'Please get a coach and come back. Learn all the basic stuff for skating.' That's what I did."

Living in Miami, Castro worked with a coach, and, when "Disney on Ice" returned the following year with a presentation of "Aladdin on Ice," he said he was ready for his second audition: "Two months later, they called me. I started in 1994. Actually, my first show was 'Beauty and the Beast.'"

Castro has been with "Disney on Ice" ever since. Nothing, not even lockdowns and COVID-19, has stopped him from achieving his dream to perform, as a skater and as an actor.



"Disney on Ice" images by Feld Entertainment/courtesy of PinckneyHugoGroup.

"In May, it's going to be 27 years (with 'Disney on Ice'), except for two years, when I went back home. It was when we stopped the show," he said. "Actually, the show, during COVID time, was stopped for 10 months. I was unable to come back to the States for my original show. At that time, I was living in a city called Gramado. It is one of the most interesting cities in Brazil, next to Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo. There are so many places there that will give (a person) a chance to be an actor. I was able to be in a winter park, and I had an experience as a character there."

Castro found one of his best opportunities to perform at a pizza place in Gramado.

"Every night, we have a show with the characters," he said. "I was able to be one of the char-

acters in the show. I created and directed some of the shows in the pizza place. I never stopped working."

During the lockdown, Castro related, he taught classes online. Afterward, he taught at different venues: "I taught a character class for skaters at the park and at different places. It was interesting."

"I did some extra work in some movies in Brazil. Then I was with some local TV shows, like games. Conduct the games and everything. The other thing that was helping me a lot was, because being a professional actor, I was able to direct and create some stuff. It was really good, because it was a part of my growing up as an artist, as an actor."

Castro returned to the U.S. after travel restrictions were lifted, and

he threw himself into performing with "Disney on Ice" again, starting with "Disney on Ice Presents Let's Celebrate" in January 2022.

This year's production is titled "Disney On Ice Presents Into The Magic."

"It's my second show after coming back from the COVID time," Castro related.

The performance features a variety of Disney characters, including Mickey and Minnie Mouse, Maui from "Moana," Belle from "Beauty and the Beast," Anna and Elsa from "Frozen," as well as Rapunzel, Flynn (from "Tangled") and Cinderella, who experience drama and adventure in a colorful seascape.

"It's an amazing story," Castro related. "It's exciting because we've had some parts of the

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