Twenty years later, it's still the 'Best of Both Worlds'

Miley Cyrus is back as Hannah Montana in 'Hannah Montana 20th Anniversary Special'

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The moment we've been waiting for is here. The "Hannah Montana 20th Anniversary special" has officially dropped on Disney+.

After a fan account dropped a "teaser" in 2025, many people were fooled into thinking that actress and singer Miley Cyrus was making a comeback as the iconic character Hannah Montana. Hopes and dreams (including mine) were crushed when it was realized that it was just a fan account and not Cyrus herself.

Well, that disappointment didn't last long as Cyrus finally announced on Feb. 17 that a 20th anniversary was happening.

If you've been living under a rock for the past 20 years, "Hannah Montana" was a Disney Channel show that aired from 2006 to 2011. It followed a young teen girl, Miley Stewart (Miley Cyrus), living a secret double life: one as a normal girl and one as her famous popstar alter ego, Hannah Montana.

Cyrus's real-life father, "Achy Breaky Heart" singer Billy Ray Cyrus, played her on-screen father, Robby Ray Stewart. And her godmother, "9-5" singer Dolly Parton, played Aunt Dolly.

"Hannah Montana" was my childhood. I'm talking: "Hannah Montana" themed birthday party, having the DVD of the 3D concert on repeat and "Hannah Montana: The Movie" being the first movie I ever saw in theatres.

The 20th anniversary special started perfectly. Miley is driving on the road, traveling with her hand on her makeup case. "But that's just a makeup case, isn't it a little tedious?" No, it's an amazing attention to detail because that makeup case was the same makeup case I, and many other kids, yearned for. The aesthetic perfection of that makeup case is unparalleled.

The beginning of the special replicates the start of the 2009 movie, where Hannah is running around the stadium with that same case, with fans cheering and "Best of Both Worlds" opening the show.

The older me was watching the older her in the same scene that the younger me had watched the younger her in. I felt like a little girl again, getting goosebumps when she reenacted going up the elevator under the stage to start performing.

Of course, when we hit the first transition, we hear that magical "Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah," and we were brought back to the set of the house. If you're a fan, you'll know exactly what those lyrics sound like.

First thing she did was go to the fridge, where she found "sweet niblets," "hand moisturiser" (ketchup) and a pie — all subtle jokes from the original series.

She then brought out the host of the event, "Call her Daddy," podcaster Alex Cooper. I have to admit, Cooper was an unexpected choice. But honestly, who else was going to do it? If you think about it, she honestly makes the most sense. She was a young teenager when the show was airing, making her the perfect demographic. Meaning, she's a fan just like us. In fact, Miley herself called Cooper a "super fan."

I know her being the host rubbed some people the wrong way, but it was actually pretty heartwarming to see someone who genuinely loved the show doing this interview, rather than an older journalist who may not have been inspired or impacted as much.

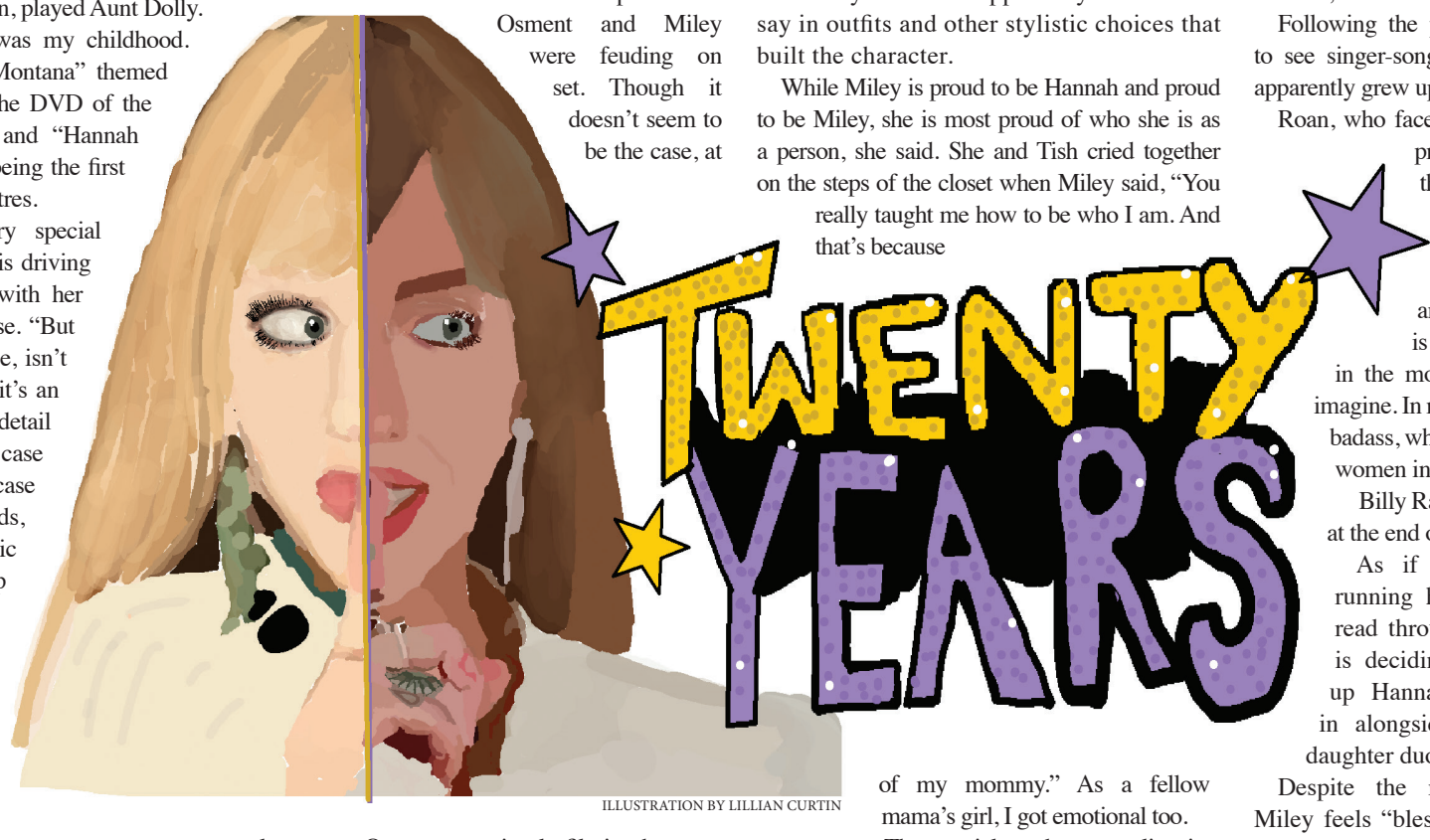
Cooper began by interviewing Miley, taking it all the way back to the original audition. That's when we get a look inside the beginning of not just Hannah Montana, but also Miley Cyrus.

Her mom, Tish, brought in her old cheerleading uniform from when she was a little girl, before fame. Then, she brought out former Disney Channels Worldwide President Gary Marsh.

"I had this nutty ambition that we could turn a fictional pop star into a real-life superstar," he said. That's exactly what he did.

Missing from the anniversary were Oliver (Mitchell Musso) and Lilly (Emily Osment), but Cyrus did say that she had a crush on Musso and found a teammate in Osment.

Those of us Hannah Montana fans remember when rumors spread that Osment and Miley were feuding on set. Though it doesn't seem to be the case, at least now. Osment was simply filming her own show, "George and Mandy's First Marriage," a spinoff of "Young Sheldon," which is a "Big Bang Theory" spinoff. It's unknown why Musso didn't appear.



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Cooper's questions were great, but I will say, it felt like we were moving really quickly. Like rapid-fire questions, instead of a normal-paced sit-down interview.

For example, while most interviews would bounce off of what she said in a previous response, it just felt like Cooper was listing questions. However, I understand, to a certain extent, that there was a lot to cover in a limited time.

We went from talking about the "Hoedown Throwdown" (which Miley still knows by heart) to talking about fashion really quickly — too quickly.

Good news, though: 20 years later, we have an answer to one of the biggest questions. "Jake or Jesse?" The answer is Jake, according to Miley.

Also, regarding her love life, she confirmed she dated "The Suite Life of Zack and Cody" star Dylan Sprouse, back when they were teenagers.

"Like, it was a two-for-one. Bring the brother. Hello," she said.

I mentioned earlier the makeup case that I envied; the same goes for the rest of Miley's closet in the show. When I saw her walk-in closet that resembled a mall for the first time, I was in awe.

Miley and her mom Tish, went into the closet together and saw iconic looks from the first episode to the opening number from the movie. Then, they talked about the wigs.

Oh my God. The wigs. Two things made Hannah Montana: Miley Cyrus and a blonde wig. That's it.

"We do not take our inches as a joke," she said, referring to the shorter wig that she didn't like. They both preferred the longer wigs for the character.

Watching these mother-daughter moments was so sweet. Especially because for all four seasons, we saw her with her dad on screen. Actually, in the show, Robby Ray is a single dad because Miley's mother had died. Now, we get a chance to see this iconic duo.

Tish is adorable, to say the least. She kept a memory book and apparently had a lot of say in outfits and other stylistic choices that built the character.

While Miley is proud to be Hannah and proud to be Miley, she is most proud of who she is as a person, she said. She and Tish cried together on the steps of the closet when Miley said, "You really taught me how to be who I am. And that's because of my mommy." As a fellow mama's girl, I got emotional too.

The special made me realize just how big a part Tish played in the show. Billy Ray got a lot of the credit, simply because we saw his face on screen, but Tish practically made Hannah.

Billy Ray and Tish divorced after nearly 30 years together in 2022, with drama following, so I'm not surprised we didn't see them together.

Cooper then switched gears and asked how singer-songwriter Taylor Swift ended up in the movie.

It was the beginning of her career, and they were looking for someone to "sing in a barn," Miley said. Swift wrote songs like "Crazier," which she sang in the movie, and the ending song, "You'll Always Find Your Way Back Home."

Swift wasn't the only star who was brought up. Former Disney child star Selena Gomez popped in. Not only did Gomez star on her own show during the same time, "Wizards of Waverly Place," but she was also a guest star on "Hannah Montana" as Mikayla Sneech in 2007.

Despite having her own character, there was also the iconic "Wizards on Deck with Hannah Montana" crossover between "Wizards of Waverly Place," "Hannah Montana" and "Suite Life on Deck."

While chatting, she told Gomez that she'd be performing "This is the Life," which was the first song she sang as Hannah.

And boy, did she perform it. Tears were running down my face as I listened to her perform that song, with the audience singing along.

As if I thought I couldn't get more emotional, she started singing "The Climb." I was an absolute goner.

Nostalgia has never hit me harder in my life. But the vibe was different.

This wasn't the young girl trying to find herself anymore and convincing herself through the lyrics. This was a woman who had figured it out and learned the lesson. The meaning of the song was exemplified right in front of us.

There are times when celebrities do tributes like this, and don't put energy into it because they're doing it for the fans and the paycheck. Miley transformed into Hannah while she was singing these songs, with just as much passion as she did 20 years ago. It felt like she was doing it for herself, too.

Following the performance, I was shocked to see singer-songwriter Chappell Roan, who apparently grew up watching Hannah Montana.

Roan, who faces a lot of pushback with the press, credits Miley with taking the brunt of it during her "Can't Be Tamed" era. I remember being a kid during this time period and constantly hearing "What is going on with that girl?" in the most judgmental tone you can imagine. In reality, I just thought she was a badass, which is probably what the older women in my family feared.

Billy Ray finally made an appearance at the end of the special.

As if emotions weren't already running high, Billy Ray and Miley read through the scene where Miley is deciding whether or not to give up Hannah, with the scene edited in alongside the present-day father-daughter duo.

Despite the rumoured familial drama, Miley feels "blessed to have so much love" within her family. Now that she's engaged to former "The Regrettes" drummer Maxx Morando, she's taking the next step into her womanhood, she said.

After the interview wrapped up, Miley left the set of the house with a recreation of the iconic meme of her blowing a kiss through the window.

She turned off the lights, grabbed the wig, and for the first time since 2011, we got a brand new song by Hannah Montana. With videos of her younger self playing, Miley debuted "Younger You."

I can't put into words the feelings that this special gave me. I've never felt nostalgia so intense.

I get it might seem parasocial, but you have to remember that this isn't just another random influencer like today. When you're a little kid, and you watch the coolest girl ever on your TV for years in your earliest memories, there is a special place in your heart for your very first idol. Watching her now, older and wiser, felt like a hug from a big sister.

I guess you really will always find your way back home.