

Interview: 'Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory' Star Peter Ostrum as Charlie

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CHICAGO – One of the great children's films is "Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory," released in 1971. As the movie celebrates its 40th Anniversary with a lavish new Blu-ray package, the main child star of film, Peter Ostrum (Charlie Bucket), made an appearance at the 2011 Chicago Wizard World Comic Con.

Peter Ostrum as Charlie Bucket was the focus character in the film, finding the "Golden Ticket" that led him through the magical chocolate factory of Willy Wonka (Gene Wilder). He was 13 years old during the filming, and famously never acted again. He appeared at the Chicago Comic Con with fellow cast members Michael Bollner (Augustus Gloop), Denise Nickerson (Violet), Julie Dawn Cole (Veruca Salt) and Paris Themmen (Mike Teevee).



Peter Ostrum as Charlie Bucket in 'Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory'
Photo Credit: Warner Home Video

HollywoodChicago.com was there, and got a quick interview with the now grown-up Charlie Bucket. Ostrum spoke of the film that still lives on in pure imagination.

HollywoodChicago: When did you first realize that the small, strange film that you made as a kid was becoming a beloved classic?

Peter Ostrum: It came about the 25th anniversary when I finally realized that, wow, people were still watching the film and cares about what happened to all of us.

HollywoodChicago: But didn't you see it build up steam during the 1970s on television and later on home video?

Ostrum: When it first opened at the box office, it had poor to lukewarm reviews at best, and died a quiet death then. It was really TV showings and home video that really launched its resurfacing, and then DVD gave it another revival. Now we're getting to the point where the generation that first saw it was showing it to their children, and now I think we're on the grandchildren. [laughs]



The Kids of Willy Wonka, L-R: Peter Ostrum, Michael Bollner (Augustus), Denise Nickerson (Violet), Julie Dawn Cole (Veruca) and Paris Themmen (Mike Teevee) at the Chicago Wizard World Comic Con, August 2011
Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Foto for HollywoodChicago.com

HollywoodChicago: You worked primarily in the film with the great character actor Jack Albertson. Had you realized he had a long film career to that point, and how did you get along with him?

Ostrum: I did realize he'd had a long career, and Jack was easy going, and was a real mentor to me on that set. Nobody really was difficult to work with on that film.

HollywoodChicago: What is the hardest part of remembering that brief moment in your childhood when they ask you to do DVD commentary or the retrospectives?



The Kids Pose with Willy Wonka (Gene Wilder)
Photo credit: Warner Home Video

Ostrum: It was only five months in my life, but I was older, going from 12 years old to 13. I remembered a lot because they didn't really embellish the basic story of Willy Wonka, and it's embedded because it's part of who I am now. It's like watching a home movie, but it's my kids who aren't impressed anymore. [laughs]

HollywoodChicago: So you were asked to sing in the film. Do you still sing as an adult today?

Ostrum: No. And when I originally did the film, they said I wouldn't have to sing, they would use someone else's voice. In the end they didn't, and Charlie wasn't a polished singer. [laughs]

HollywoodChicago: If you could go back in time, what advice would you give your younger self about doing the film or life in general?

Ostrum: Wow. You know, I love what I do now, I'm a veterinarian. Being in the film industry as a child was hard, and I couldn't keep it going.

But in the end leaving was the right decision. I’d tell him to keep all his opportunities open, and when new experiences knock, open up the door and follow through. I don’t have any regrets at all.

“Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory” was released in a deluxe 40th Anniversary Blu-ray package by Warner Home Video on October 18th, 2011. Featuring Peter Ostrum, Gene Wilder, Michael Bollner, Denise Nickerson, Julie Dawn Cole and Paris Themmen. Directed by Mel Stuart. Rated “G.” The next Chicago Wizard World Comic Con is scheduled for August 9-12, 2012. [Click here](#) [14] for details on locations and ticket information.



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