

Movie Review: 'Alvin and the Chipmunks'

by David_Elliott

Not even at Hugh Hefner's mansion has a grown man been awakened in bed and told by a chipmunk, "I had a nightmare. Can I sleep with you?"

'ALVIN AND THE CHIPMUNKS' - The omnivorous Theodore prepares to dive into his favorite - waffles and whipped cream - in the family comedy 'Alvin and the Chipmunks.' CNS Photo courtesy of Rhythm & Hues. RATINGS

4 STARS - Excellent.

3 STARS - Worthy.

2 STARS - Mixed.

1 STAR - Poor.

0 - Forget It (a dog.) It's a high point of "Alvin and the Chipmunks," starring digitally animated Alvin the scamp, smart Simon and adorable Theodore. They're back, out of long TV service for a zippy holiday comedy that goes flat after establishing just how winning the chipsters can still be.

Their tree cut down for Christmas use, the perky furballs land in the swell Hollywood home of aspiring songwriter Dave Seville (Jason Lee, the Nice Goofy Regular Guy who would have been Dean Jones 40 years,

or Steve Guttenberg 20 years ago). Though the chips make an amusing mess of his place, soon they are bonded, and Dave's music dream is realized by composing "The Chipmunk Song (Christmas, Don't Be Late)."

That, of course, was the 1958 smash of Dave Seville and the Chipmunks, Dave being Rostom Sipan Bagdasarian (1919-1972), better known as Ross Bagdasarian. He also wrote Rosemary Clooney's smash "Come On-A My House" and the silly pop tune "The Witch Doctor."

This movie could have been a fitting salute to Bagdasarian. The chipmunk trio, moving among more or less live actors, are still enjoyable. Kids get a laugh from their mischief, such as the poop gag and the toy mania and the way Theodore keeps angling for a cuddle.

An adult mind soon wonders about all the product plugs. And the nearly complete waste of ace comic actor Jane Lynch, as the camera keeps ogling a smiling, generic blond (Cameron Richardson). And the plot, which plops into mediocrity.

That pivots on Dave's music producer, acted by David Cross like a bald, witless, obnoxious variant on Al Franken. Fierce to be edgy even though he doesn't even know the meaning of "choreographer," Cross swamps the little trio's falsetto charm in a gaudy rap mix and exhausts them on a long tour.

Why do some of these slick corporate movies come with an internalized, almost Marxist critique? In the film, which is purely a corporate spinoff product, the preening villain is a showbiz huckster so drillingly offensive that even little chipmunks finally see through his game.

It's a free-fall into total plastic. Kids deserve better. Alvin, Simon and Theodore deserve better. But 'tis the season to take what you get.

A 20th Century Fox release. Director: Tim Hill. Writers: Jon Vitti, Will McRobb, Chris Viscardi. Cast: Jason Lee, David Cross, Justin Long, Jane Lynch, Cameron Richardson. Running time: 1 hour, 24 minutes. Rated PG. 2 stars.

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