

Movie Review: 'Meet the Robinsons'

by David_Elliott

Many of the digitally shot movies, even those high on effects, are not filmed for serious depth of field. They look pancaked. And so the 3-D effects of a cartoon movie like "Meet the Robinsons" really stand out. And up, enjoyably.

'MEET THE ROBINSONS' - Lewis and Wilbur are hot on the track of the mysterious Bowler Hat Guy in the animated family film 'Meet the Robinsons.' CNS Photo courtesy of Disney. This Disney release animated in the Pixar mode uses 3-D very smartly, without constantly hurling stuff at us (but isn't it fine to be splattered with flying peanut butter and jelly?). The plastic glasses - not those old paper cheapies - are collectibly cool, too. And the big screen advances into your lap with cantilevered confidence.

Drawn by many computerized hands, and drawn by numerous writers from a novel by William Joyce, Stephen J. Anderson's film probably would have made Walt smile. Basically it's a hip chip off "The Swiss Family Robinson," which daddy Walt filmed in 1960 as a long, sturdy adventure starring Dorothy McGuire and John Mills.

Little Lewis, without parents, will only find his Robinson family by going into the future, having been orphaned. Certainly he won't have to meet the Fokkers in this very G-rated show, short on violence, devoid of sex, unprovoking even by 1960 standards.

The small, gutsy element is that Lewis, with his glasses and lab-jived spike hair, is what tends to be called a "science fair geek." He's a kid inventor with a picture of Nikola Tesla (or young Roy Disney?) on his wall. His time machine to recover his lost mother proves to be his way forward to the Robinsonian future, in a candy-taffy sort of Disney World.

Nice to have a movie about a brainy kid, and nice to have comic touches like the sci-fair adult geek voiced by Laurie Metcalf. Star voices like Angela Bassett and Tom Selleck (who gets a funny visual salute) don't hog attention in a picture-keen 'toon often giddily inventive, cute, charming, even wry.

The score, mostly by Danny Elfman, is uninspired. The story tends to jitter and jumble, rushing gizmos and gewgaws into view. There is the old Disney sense of trying to stretch a short cartoon to feature length, relying on wowziness to defeat weariness (and this movie is not for the antsy, diapered set).

RATINGS

4 STARS - Excellent.

3 STARS - Worthy.

2 STARS - Mixed.

1 STAR - Poor.

0 - Forget It (a dog) What's most Disney is the time framing, the sense of an Eternal '50s. The future visited and partly invented by Lewis is like those Life spreads about world's fairs happily projecting "the American century" into a glass and chrome dream of "better living through chemistry." But, hey, even now we are only

in 51 A.D. (after Disneyland's opening).

The flying, futuristic bowler hat tips a brim to Rene Magritte. Salutes to other masters can be found. But it remains a Walt world, just a little more surreal.

A Buena Vista Pictures release. Director: Stephen J. Anderson. Writers: Jon Bernstein, Robert L. Baird, etc. Voice cast: Angela Bassett, Daniel Hansen, Laurie Metcalf, Adam West, Tom Selleck. Running time: 1 hour, 23 minutes. Rated G. 3 stars.

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