

On ‘Alvin and the Chipmunks’: Alviiiiiiiiiiiiiiiin? More Like Ouuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuch!

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CHICAGO – Thanks to live action and computer-generated animation, we’ve brought to life “Underdog,” “Transformers,” “The Adventures of Rocky & Bullwinkle” and both “Scooby-Doo” and “Garfield” twice.



Jason Lee in “Alvin and the Chipmunks”.

Photo credit: IMDb

Hollywood has decided to continually take popular Saturday-morning cartoons and remake them into awkward and unsettling major motion pictures that leave viewers wondering where the charm from these lovable characters went.

With “Alvin and the Chipmunks,” it’s as if the capitalistic ventures of entertainment and the development of new technology have joined forces to ruin my childhood memories. With Tim Hill – the director of “Garfield: A Tale of Two Kitties” – at the helm, you know it’s in trouble.

Alvin and his two brothers (Theodore and Simon) are high-pitched, fast-talking chipmunks who live with a middle-aged bachelor named David Seville (Jason Lee).

The trio – voiced by Justin Long, Matthew Gray Gubler and Jesse McCartney – are mischievous and the source of stress to Seville who treats them like surrogate sons. When it is discovered that the chipmunks have pop-star talent, Seville acts as their manager.



Justin Long plays the voice of Alvin in "Alvin and the Chipmunks".

Photo credit: IMDb

Music producer Ian (David Cross) stops at nothing to exploit the boys. He even goes so far as to try lip syncing after touring hurts their voices.

The idea that Lee ("Clerks II," "Dogma") would take the role is curious. After hiding behind the voice of summer flop "Underdog," money seems the only explanation as to why he would take a similar family friendly role so soon and even go as far to shave his bread and butter: his iconic "My Name Is Earl" mustache.

He seems bored and uninterested as he chases around computer-animated rodents. Even the trademark "Alvvvvvvvvvvvvvvv!" yell seems half-hearted.

At the same time, Cross as Ian seems overreaching and irritating. Cross – who has in his standup act chastised actors for choosing to be in bad movies – has given up his right to judge. Between "Alvin and the Chipmunks" and a guest-starring role on "Law & Order" in 2006, Cross is clearly just trying to cash a paycheck.



"Alvin and the Chipmunks".

Photo credit: IMDb

That's not to say any of the actors in the film seemed to sign on for artistic reasons. What seems ironic is that the character Ian is supposed to be a villain exemplifying a greedy and self-serving music industry.

The movie doesn't seem self-aware that it is a 90-minute commercial for the soundtrack and countless other merchandizing and marketing tie-ins. These aren't your daddy's chipmunks. The pop icons sing with microphone headsets and do everything from speed metal to hip-hop.

I wonder if Ross Bagdasarian Sr. (who voiced the original hits "Witch Doctor" and "The Christmas Song") would be proud of the new direction. There isn't any musical number that comes close to "Girls of Rock & Roll" from 1987's "The Chipmunk Adventure".

I hope I imagined the freestyling during "Witch Doctor". The most insulting factor is they try to update the characters with slang like "sup playa" and "yo DJ". This sort of dialogue is offensive to a select group of people: humans with IQs over 38.

Obviously having just rolled out to get the family business during the holidays, Alvin still manages to feel uninspired. The cute and endearing moments in the picture are far and few between. A novelty act created decades ago suddenly really feels like it has been overplayed within the film's first 20 minutes.



“Alvin and the Chipmunks” opened on Dec. 14, 2007.

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