

Blu-Ray Review: Disney's 'The Fox and the Hound' Deserves Better Release

Submitted by [mattmovieman](#) [1] on August 12, 2011 - 9:26am

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CHICAGO – As far as kiddie tearjerkers go, “The Fox and the Hound” is one of Disney’s finest. It’s not a great film, and certainly not in the same league as the watershed game-changers that came before or the renaissance masterworks that followed. But it is a tender and bittersweet fable with a message of refreshing complexity. At its heart is a friendship that society has deemed unsustainable, and the film doesn’t shy away from its troubling repercussions.

Based on the novel by Daniel Mannix, this 1981 effort functioned as a crucial turning point in the history of Disney studios, when veteran animators like Wolfgang Reitherman were replaced by a slate of new talent including Ron Clements and John Musker (future co-directors of “The Little Mermaid”). Creative differences intensified between the old guard and the rookies, many of whom found the project to be distressingly bland. This caused the work of several animators (such as Tim Burton, Henry Selick, Don Bluth and Brad Bird) to be left uncredited in the final cut.



Blu-Ray Rating: **3.0/5.0**

As a result, the film is a rather remarkable amalgam of styles that somehow manage to coalesce. Several of the supporting characters project their own distinctive personality while the two titular protagonists are limited by their generic design. While Mannix’s book followed a hound dog in hot pursuit of a fox, the film constructs a poignant backstory between the two characters before they became enemies. Orphaned fox Tod (Keith Coogan) and lonely pup Copper (Corey Feldman) become fast friends in their naïve youth, until the outside world informs them of their antagonistic identities as prey and predator. The early sequences between the two friends are genuinely endearing, and it must be said that the ten-year-old Feldman elicits an adorably infantile howl. But it’s not long before Copper’s master Amos (Jack Albertson, best known as Grandpa Joe in “Willy Wonka”) molds him into a proper hunting dog. A well-staged climax set within the mists of a waterfall leads to a final moment of wordless beauty. No melodramatic score is needed to underline the emotions felt by the characters, whose faces are wonderfully expressive.



Corey Feldman and Keith Coogan voice the young versions of Copper and Tod in Ted Berman, Richard Rich and Art Stevens's 1981 film *The Fox and the Hound*.

Photo credit: Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment

The weakest sequences in the picture are reserved for comic relief provided by two bickering birds. One is short and stout while the other is tall, gangly and played by Paul Winchell, who doesn't even bother to alter his Tigger voice. Two key members of the ensemble stand out as indelible works of their respective designers. Tod's owner, Widow Tweed (sublimely voiced by Jeanette Nolan), has a weathered look and crooked features that aren't conventionally cute. Before he walked off the project to form his own studio, Bluth did a masterful job of creating a character more authentic than the usual Disney caregiver. Her facial expressions during a tragic sequence late in the picture are genuinely wrenching. The other key character is Big Mama (Pearl Bailey), a wise old owl who functions as a mother, mentor, matchmaker and bearer of tough life lessons. In short, she's the "Magical Negro" archetype, which is a trifle disappointing to witness in a film that could easily be read as a metaphor for racial segregation. Yet Bailey's portrayal does not conform to stereotypes, and exudes genuine warmth. Clements attempted to mimic Bailey's physicality in his designs for the owl, and his fluid character movements are instantly recognizable.



The Fox and the Hound was released on Blu-Ray and DVD on August 9, 2011.

Photo credit: Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment

The commemorative 30th anniversary edition of "The Fox and the Hound" is presented in 1080p High Definition (with a 1.85:1 aspect ratio) on a Blu-Ray disc that also features Jim Kammerud's 2006 follow-up, "The Fox and the Hound 2." There are few moneymaking schemes as lazy and unseemly as the direct-to-video sequel to a beloved Disney classic, and this southern fried abomination is among the very worst.

The story is set during Tod and Copper's blissful early years, but instead of further exploring their friendship, the script saddles them with a howler of a plot. Much of the action takes place at a carnival where Copper is recruited to join a group of canine country singers led by Cash (Patrick Swayze) and Dixie (Reba McEntire). The plot thickens when Tod (voiced by Jonah Bobo, the spunky scene stealer from "Crazy, Stupid, Love") reveals that he can't sing and is relegated to serving as a member of the dogs' entourage. The multiple country numbers are so patronizingly mediocre that they will make one long for the original film's pedestrian tunes (sample lyric: "Goodbye leash, I'm a hound dude!"). It's illuminating to observe just how shrill and snarky this picture is in contrast to its vastly more mature predecessor, which wasn't afraid to make its young viewers experience sincere emotion. Not a single frame of this junk aspires to enrich the imaginations of children, or make them feel anything at all. It's as numbing as the Jerry Bruckheimer-produced garbage that Disney is currently selling in theaters.

The remaining extras on this three-disc Blu-Ray/DVD combo pack fare no better. Though the film's tension-filled production would've made for a fascinating documentary, this set merely offers a puny 6-minute featurette that glazes over the conflicts with all-too-brief soundbites. Two members of Disney's original core of animators (dubbed the "Nine Old Men"), Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston, discuss how they could relate to the elderly character of Chief as he found himself being replaced by the pint-sized Copper. Aside from a sing-along track for "When You're the Best of Friends" and an ultra-lame study of unlikely animal friendships (including clips from Disney misfires like "Bolt"), the rest of the extras focus solely on the sequel's awful music. "Hound" may not be top-drawer Disney, but it deserves a much better release.

'The Fox and the Hound' is released by Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment and features the voices of Mickey Rooney, Kurt Russell, Keith Coogan, Corey Feldman, Jack Albertson, Sandy Duncan and Pearl Bailey. It was written by Larry Clemmons, Ted Berman, David Michener, Peter Young, Burny Mattinson, Steve Hulett, Earl Kress and Vance Gerry and directed by Ted Berman, Richard Rich and Art Stevens. It was released on August 9, 2011. It is rated G.

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