

Fate Doesn't Fail Them Now in 'Happy Feet Two'

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Dancing animated penguins, a tradition dating back to Disney's "Mary Poppins" and brought to further life in the first "Happy Feet" movie, finds more stepping pep in "Happy Feet Two." Robin Williams and Elijah Wood return to lend their vocal talents in this enjoyable sequel.

This is a film that never gets boring. It balances a couple of major stories, including a couple of tiny krills (shrimp-like amoeba in the sea) who are searching for their identities. The scenic elements are spectacular, again upping the ante for atmosphere in the new golden age of animation. Like the first film, there are messages which takes in environmentalism, the collective versus the free will and working together to accomplish a goal. All this and dancing, too!

The film begins with an extended penguin dance sequence, led by the vocal talents of Gloria (voice of Pink). Mumble (Elijah Wood) is back leading the way, and this time he is teaching his son, Erik (Ava Acres). Erik has a hard time picking up the rhythms, and becomes entranced with another tribe of penguins, which includes The Mighty Sven (Hank Azaria) and Preacher Lovelace (Robin Williams). Sven has the magical ability to fly, and Erik rejects his father's dance for this new advocacy.



Dancing Two: Gloria (voice of Pink) and Mumble (Elijah Wood) in 'Happy Feet Two'
Photo credit: Warner Bros. Pictures

Erik briefly runs away to join this tribe, and Mumble follows and retrieves him. While they are away, huge chunks of ice fall, trapping Gloria and the rest of the dancing penguins, which includes the love-struck Ramón (Williams again) and his potential beau Carmen (Sofia Vergara). Eventually joining up to help out Bryan the Beachmaster Elephant Seal (Richard Carter) and a pair of microscopic sea creatures who long to break away from their millions of companions, Bill the Krill (Matt Damon) and Will the Krill (Brad Pitt).

This story takes a while to get into gear, and without having seen the first "Happy Feet," the extended opening sequence might be a bit strange, but this sequel has a heart and that is where it succeeds. All the characters are emotionally sincere, each striving for a particular goal, which requires the adventure of the narrative for all their journeys. This is much more accessible and powerful than the usual pop culture references and everybody-is-a-hero nature of modern animated tales.

Bill the Krill and Will the Krill are great comic relief, and Damon/Pitt are obviously having a great time with the characters. This is where the animation is most precise, the "krills" are tiny sea creature mostly present for their contribution to the food chain. To have the two break out and talk about individuality, among the millions of these floating amoebas, was exceedingly amusing. And with most good morale-of-the-story endings, Bill and Will's lessons yield fruit.

The main cast is game for anything as well, and even the increasingly erratic Robin Williams and Hank Azaria go for character rather than schtick. Pink is an interesting choice to replace the late Brittany Murphy as Gloria. Her songs are epic in this one, allowing for a stage that really sells the tunes. Ava Acres as Erik does some nice scene stealing, the little bird belts out a number that sounds like Andrew Lloyd Webber, but is actually a rewritten aria from the opera Tosca by Puccini. The fact that this is in a kid's movie increases the ambition scale that much more.



Krill Bill (Matt Damon) and Krill Will (Brad Pitt) in 'Happy Feet Two'
Photo credit: Warner Bros. Pictures

The spectacular created scenery, accented in ice, snow and water, is really starting to defy description. It really has to be seen to be truly appreciated. And although there are many references to themes – such as environment and collectivism – it's never in your face, it prefers to again let the narrative speak for itself. The pacing is a bit overlong, but the payoff is right, and sometimes a little deliberation hurts no one.

The new golden age of animation carries on, and what is most interesting about this particular era, is that the competition is fierce and the results are spiraling ever upward. Because in 1991 "Beauty and the Beast" threw down the singing candlestick, there has since been selective animated moments of true art in both story and setting. If you love this stuff, it's a great experience.

"Happy Feet Two" opens everywhere on November 18th. See theater listings for 3D showings. Featuring Robin Williams, Elijah Wood, Sofia Vergara, Pink, Richard Carter, Common, Ava Acres, Hank Azaria, Brad Pitt and Matt Damon. Screenplay by Warren Coleman, Gary Eck, Paul Livingston and George Miller. Directed by George Miller. Rated "PG"



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