

## ‘Frankenweenie’ is Visually Rich, But Lacks Monstrosity

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on October 5, 2012 - 2:08pm

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Rating: **3.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – The immersion that is possible in modern animated films is so rich now that it is practically reality. “Frankenweenie,” the newest puppetry-style film from director Tim Burton, is heroically painted onto the screen’s canvas, but the limp retelling of the Frankenstein movie myth doesn’t live up to the visual tone.

Burton and screenplay writer John August fashion kid and animal characters that are reminiscent of the Universal Studios Frankenstein movies of the 1930s, and put them into the same situations – with variations for other monster movie tributes. Besides the poignant beginning regarding a boy and his dog, the rich look of the film and a strangely drawn science teacher, the story relies more on a kid crew that sounds and acts like Igor, Boris Karloff and of course the hero child Victor Frankenstein. They don’t do anything new, sharp or particularly funny, so essentially “Frankenweenie” ends up being a nice but predictable homage.

The setting is the America of the past, probably the late 1960s to early ‘70s. Victor Frankenstein (voice of Charlie Tahan) is a boy science nerd, with few friends, besides his loyal dog Sparky. Victor’s life changes when Sparky is killed in an accident, and he is further isolated in his life. But conditions are about to improve, as the new science teacher Mr. Rzykruski (Martin Landau), shows the class how extreme electricity can reanimate dead tissue.



Victor Frankenstein (voice of Charlie Tahan) and Sparky from ‘Frankenweenie’

*Photo credit: Walt Disney Pictures*

Young Victor takes this to heart, and sets up an attic laboratory. He digs up Sparky and puts him through the treatment. The pooch is alive,

once again. Victor now must hide his experiment from his mother and father (Martin Short and Catherine O’Hara) and his nosy classmate ‘E’ Gore (Atticus Shaffer), who can’t keep a secret. When the word of the miracle emerges, the townsfolk will gather pitchforks and torches to bring down this menace of science.

Burton is an obvious fan of the black and white monster epics of Universal Studios. The look of the film is in glorious monotoes, which emphasize the hazy dreamlike nature of the past schooldays. The puppet art looks a bit like the Rankin Bass Christmas TV shows (“Santa Claus is Coming to Town”) of the era, especially in a direct tribute to the “Mr. Burgermeister” character. All of this characterization is seamlessly presented in the optional 3D, and the eye candy is rich in detail.

The movie does start out with a fine tribute to the connection between boy and dog. Sparky is a realistic dog, his movements finely mirrors an actual canine. It is fun just to watch him romp in the yard, which makes the reality of the accident all the more emotional. Victor is also an amateur filmmaker, and it is apparent that Tim Burton lies within the character, as he shows off a clever 8mm monster movie, starring Sparky. Remember watching home movies via a projector? Remember driving a Ford Frick?

In the short narrative (87 minutes), the story falls back on the honorable theft of the Universal Studios 1930s Frankenstein classics. It’s an easy, almost lazy, way of referencing the obvious, and the overall product suffers for it. This is a fine children’s film, a great way to introduce the monster classics of old, but at the same time it does nothing to advance originality. The filmmakers rely on the visuals so much for the satire, that they allow no sharp wit or slyness in the script.



Science!: Mr Rzykusky (Martin Landau) in ‘Frankenweenie’  
Photo credit: Walt Disney Pictures

It is a blast to reunite two of SCTV’s finest, Martin Short and Catherine O’Hara, for many of the odd voices. Martin Landau, who won an Oscar playing Bela Lugosi in Tim Burton’s “Ed Wood,” is great as the voice of the science teacher. It’s funny just to see the character talk, it’s so weirdly drawn. And speaking of reunions, Winona Ryder works with Burton for the first time since “Edward Scissorhands,” and her “Elsa Van Helsing” character is a reminder of her great Lydia Deetz character from the Burton classic “Beetlejuice.”

It’s Halloween month, and “Frankenweenie” is a both a trick and treat for the season. It’s stupid to have a autumnal wish when it comes to cinematic expression, but nonetheless I wish this had been a better overall movie. It’s time to get into my Ford Frick, drive to the video store and rent the original Frankenstein films. D’oh, out of business!

*“Frankenweenie” opens everywhere on October 5th. See local listings for 3D show times. Featuring the voices of Martin Short, Catherine O’Hara, Winona Ryder, Martin Landau, Charlie Tahan and Atticus Shaffer. Screenplay by John August, story and characters by Tim Burton. Directed by Tim Burton. Rated “PG”*



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By [PATRICK McDONALD](#) [15]  
Senior Staff Writer  
HollywoodChicago.com  
[pat@hollywoodchicago.com](mailto:pat@hollywoodchicago.com) [14]

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