

Sprightly Bear Tale ‘Paddington’ is Good Fun

Submitted by [NickHC](#) [1] on January 16, 2015 - 12:37pm

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – It may prove hard to recall an era of talking creatures in live-action movies before the napalm hellfire of “Alvin and the Chipmunks” or “The Smurfs.” But, lest we forget, “Babe” has more Academy Awards than “The Master.” Arriving at the coy and wise time of the film year where expectations are either golden or underneath the barrel, talking bear Paddington arrives stateside as a well-behaved throwback to brighter days for a simple genre, with an efficient sense of humor and a few globes of vision, too.

Voiced with clear-eyed wonder by Ben Wishaw, cheery children’s book icon Paddington is a Peruvian bear with both a refined English vernacular and ravenousness for orange marmalade, attributes learned from British artifacts left by visiting explorer Montgomery Clyde. When Paddington’s home is destroyed in an earthquake, the young bear stows away to foggy London to meet the revered adventurer.

“Paddington” is less the story of a talking bear finding home than it is an orphan binding a family together. When wandering a London station after his arrival, the pitifully amicable bear catches the eye of the Brown family, a classic, disjointed domestic quintet. Appealing to the charity of matriarch Mrs. Brown (Sally Hawkins, with pinches of sugar) Paddington comes home with the family despite the paranoia of buzzkill dad Henry Brown (a scene-stealing Hugh Bonneville, the Charles Grodin to Paddington’s “Beethoven”). The kin are split on the hospitality issue; the awe-filled Jonathan (Samuel Joslin) is stoked for a wacky new comrade, while angst-filled teen Judy (Madeleine Harris) only see Paddington’s unintentional weirdness as something to embarrass her in front of new friends.

Paddington’s presence causes a stir in the Brown’s neighborhood, upsetting their crotchety neighbor Mr. Curry (Peter Capaldi, his cantankerous nature matched with canted angles). The bear’s unexpected arrival also sets off Eurotrash taxidermist Millicent (Nicole Kidman), who has been in search of the bear for years, and wants to put him in a museum.



'Paddington'

Photo credit: The Weinstein Company

With Paddington serving as attitudinal time capsule of a past era of humanity, the well-behaved film has an enticing energy from its ruthlessly positive tourist, as he unknowingly takes on a metropolis overrun with security cameras and a buzz-killing sense of vulnerability. Decades after his literary introduction, he stands as a pleasant mascot to an era in which people are so isolated that they think nothing of a talking bear in a train station.

As "Paddington" proves to be a disarmingly charming movie, it has Bonneville, Hawkins, Capaldi and Kidman in particular to thank. Amiable as Paddington may be, the title marmalade addict is strongest as a bonding element for its human cast, who spin the tale into a neatly cartoonish adventure with some sizable laughs.

London becomes a vivid, central surprise to "Paddington's" delight as the film nestles into its bygone sub-genre. Compartmentalized, saturated colors and playful sight gags (involving signs as much as architecture) give the city personality. Characters are handled with similar finesse, like when the family's life is introduced in a flowing overview of a dollhouse, accompanied by narration. As director Paul King ("The Mighty Boosh" leans more towards the expressiveness of "The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou" than "Beverly Hills Chihuahua," "Paddington" asserts an uncommon visual standard, composing bits of wonder that boost its memorability more than its ear wax gag.



‘Paddington’
Photo credit: The Weinstein Company

Owning a warm heart and a spright sense of humor, “Paddington” is a refreshing face for family fare, and provides further proof that sub-genre juggernauts like “The Smurfs” have a low worth that can be discerned by viewers of all ages. Audiences do recognize good fun when they see it; “Paddington” can be as bright as a candy store, but without the danger of brain rot.

“Paddington” opens everywhere on January 16th. Starring Sally Hawkins, Hugh Bonneville, Nicole Kidman, Peter Capaldi, Julie Walters, Samuel Joslin, Madeleine Harris, and Jim Broadbent. Featuring the voice talent of Ben Whishaw. Written by Paul King and Hamish McColl, adapted from the character created by Michael Bond. Directed by King. Rated “PG”



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Source URL (retrieved on Apr 23 2024 - 10:31am):
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