

‘Moana’ is Walt Disney Pictures at its Breezy Best

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on November 23, 2016 - 2:28pm

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Rating: **4.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – “Moana” is a solid example of the time honored Disney musical. It is exactly the sort of sun drenched warm weather beacon we residents of cold weather climes can enjoy as the holiday season approaches, and it a refreshing change from another spin of Mele Kalikimaka.

In many ways “Moana” is more fun than this season’s other relentlessly upbeat musical “Trolls.” It goes without saying that a Disney film is going to look terrific, but Moana’s blue waters, beautifully lush landscapes, and splashes of inventive flights of fancy are so inviting I wanted to just dive right in without giving your eye socket a cavity. There are catchy songs courtesy of “Hamilton” creator Lin-Manuel Miranda, an appealingly spunky heroine and the Rock. And...this just might be my daughter’s favorite movie of the year.



Maui and the Title Character Ready for Adventure in ‘Moana’

Photo credit: Walt Disney Pictures

The story centers on Moana (voice of Auli'i Cravalho), a slightly new spin on the old Disney princess. She's the plucky daughter of the chief, destined to rule, but who stubbornly wants to go her own way, and that way is out on the ocean. Her overprotective father forbids her from exploring the great waters beyond the reef of their island. It turns out that a demigod named Maui (Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson) stole the heart of the island goddess, and now a blackness is taking over the ocean, and will continue until the heart is replaced. So when the blackness begins to infect her own island, Moana must defy her father's orders and set out on her own to find Maui and get him to replace the heart.

This leads to an appealing road trip type comedy complete with the silly Disney sidekick, in this case a bulging eyed and not-too-bright chicken. Maui and Moana sail across the oceans to first find Maui's missing magical fishhook which gives him shape-shifting powers, and then to return the heart to the island goddess.

They are an entertaining pair, with The Rock skewering his own tough guy persona and letting his charisma fly off the screen. He also gets one of the film's best songs in the catchy character-introducing tune "You're Welcome." For my money this was one of the highlights, topped only by an appealing sojourn into the depths ruled by a giant bottom feeding turtle voiced by Flight of the Conchords Jemaine Clement, with a witty and catchy song to match.



Sailing the Deep Blue Sea in 'Moana'

Photo credit: Walt Disney Pictures

The best of the new Disney musicals have found connections to the golden age of "The Lion King" and "The Little Mermaid," and "Moana" continues that tradition. It's directed by Ron Clements, who was responsible for both "The Little Mermaid" and "Aladdin." And Lin-Manuel Miranda's songs are catchy and distinctive, while giving off that same feel and spirit that we've come to expect from the best of Disney's musical numbers.

For little ones, Moana does have a couple of intense characters that may scare younger viewers. There's a particularly scary lava monster, and that giant turtle Tamatoa – who both frankly creeped my twins out. But "Moana" is a film that taps into the sweet spot of the best of Pixar, it's something kids and adults can both watch and enjoy together.

"Moana" opens everywhere on November 23rd in 3D and regular screenings. See local listings for 3D theaters and show times. Featuring the voices of Auli'i Cravalho, Dwayne Johnson, Rachel House, Temuera Morrison, Jemaine Clement, Nicole Scherzinger and Alan Tudyk. Screenplay by Jared Bush. Directed by Ron Clement and John Musker. Co-directed by Don Hall and Chris Williams. Rated "PG-13"



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By [SPIKE WALTERS](#) [21]

Contributor

HollywoodChicago.com

spike@hollywoodchicago.com [20]

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