

## Tim Burton's Version of 'Dumbo' is Disappointingly Glum

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on March 29, 2019 - 7:03am

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Rating: **2.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – For reasons which remain unexplained, Walt Disney Studios and director Tim Burton have decided to weigh down the sweet story of a flying elephant with a whole pachyderm's worth of pathos. The animated original clocked in as one of Disney's shortest full length animated features. But the live action version drags us through nearly an extra hour's worth of post-World War One misery.

Colin Farrell is a circus trick rider whose service in The Great War has quite nearly cost him an arm and a leg. He returns to the perpetually failing circus he left to find his wife has been killed by a flu epidemic, and his two children have been forced to fend for themselves amongst the circus folk presided over by the ringmaster (Danny DeVito).



The Title Character Takes Flight in 'Dumbo'

*Photo credit: Walt Disney Studios*

It should also be said that DeVito seems to be the only one in the cast that has figured out that any of this should be any fun. There's a playfulness to his charming huckster which is sorely lacking in every single other performance, even from Tim Burton regulars like Michael Keaton and Eva Green. The two children (newcomers Nico Parker and Finley Hobbins) in particular have been directed to say their lines so



flatly they all sound like it's their first day on set at the middle school play.

When the little elephant with the big ears turns into an unexpected superstar, DeVito attracts the attention of Circus Impresario V.A. Vandemere (Michael Keaton). Vandemere is a kind of mix between P.T. Barnum and Walt Disney himself, and may have ulterior motives behind his mystique of magic and wonder. He even has his own amusement park, which looks like a gorgeous Art Deco version of Tomorrowland.

The set design looks great, and the CGI animals are so good it's very hard to tell what's a special effect and what's not. Dumbo and his flying scenes deliver the goods, but nothing in the new live action version adds anything to the story. And the callbacks to the original are particularly mishandled, with the famous pink elephant scene getting recreated with bubbles in a scene that's more stupefying than satisfying.



Danny DeVito, Nico Parker and Colin Farrell in 'Dumbo'  
Photo credit: Walt Disney Studios

The film ends like Burton's latter period films usually do, with a finale of epic destruction and a big top in tatters, but there's a distinct lack of wonder. The emotional heart of the original – which could wrench tears from generations – is gone, replaced by manufactured beats and backstories that add absolutely nothing.

I took my seven-year-old twins to see this and it kept them still for nearly two hours. Dumbo's reunion with his mother still worked for my daughter. But for me this Dumbo is more like Glum-bo.

*"Dumbo" opens everywhere on March 29th, in IMAX, RPX, 3D and regular screenings. See local listings for format, theaters and show times. Featuring Colin Farrell, Michael Keaton, Danny DeVito, Eva Green, Nico Parker, Finley Hobbins and Alan Arkin. Screenplay adapted by Ehren Kruger. Directed by Tim Burton. Rated "PG"*



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