‘UglyDolls’ is Animated Fun For Kids and Everyone Else

Submitted by PatrickMcD [1] on May 3, 2019 - 10:03am

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – The animation formula, for entertaining both kids and adults, is to never make the story too serious, and “UglyDolls” gets it right. The obvious moral lesson of “accepting yourself” is covered with great animating, memorable characters, peppy songs, and a sly sense of humor. In essence, made for the whole family.

And what a voice cast, a virtual here and now! Kelly Clarkson, Janelle Monáe, Nick Jonas and Pitbull step from the 400 Awards Shows they do every year, and connect right through their characters. They do add a transitional modernity to the celebrity voiceovers, Steve Carell can’t live forever. The fabric of the animation is literal fabric, as the UglyDoll world is constructed as a cloth-like material world. The morality of the story is easy to surmise, but still important … even in a place called the Institute of Perfection … there is room for the imperfect, and it takes the UglyDolls to tear down the wall. This is a bright and breezy 90 minutes at the flickers.

Moxy (voice of Kelly Clarkson) is an optimistic “UglyDoll” that lives in Uglyville, dreaming of being adopted by a child in the “Big World.” This fact is well known to the townsfolk, especially Moxy’s friends Mayor Ox (Blake Shelton), Ugly Dog (Pitbull), the Baker (Wanda Sykes) and Babo (Gabriel Iglesias). They’d love to help her, but they don’t believe that the Big World exists.



All That Jazz-Hands: The Cast of ‘UglyDolls’
Photo credit: STX Entertainment

After getting a shift in attitude, Moxy and her gang decides to risk going backwards in a tunnel where they all came from (shades of Freud). They end up at the Institute of Perfection, where dolls are trained to live with their adopters. When Moxy enthusiastically joins in, she is rebuffed by the perfect leader Lou (Nick Jonas) and helped by a another perfect member, Mandy (Janelle Monáe). Together they will all learn the lessons that need teaching.

You can pretty much guess what happens next, but the trail to get there has some fun elements to it. The animators bring a great energy to the overall concept, as the contrast between Uglyville and the Institute of Perfection are two different worlds that fit within the style of the entire movie. Some sly wit includes crowd noises, a funny running gag is that the crowds say random things at the end a big cheer or boo (yes, I heard “Freebird!”). The level of humor and atmosphere was a reminder of Dreamworks Studio’s animated “Trolls.”

And like “Trolls,” it’s a musical! The songs are actually all pretty good, and I was not familiar with Janelle Monáe, it was a pleasant surprise to hear her silky smooth chops. There were Broadway style songs (“Today’s the Day”), pleasant pop (“Couldn’t Be Better) and songs-as-lessons (“Girl in the Mirror”), and they were all delivered through some solid modern pop stars. Be wary of the repeat mode on this soundtrack during long road trips.



Two Worlds Clash in ‘UglyDolls’
Photo credit: STX Entertainment

Animated films have become formulaic, especially in the underdog-overcoming-all genre, but kids need to learn that lesson in each generation I suppose. It’s surprising there is any power lust in the twenty and thirtysomething generations, given that most of their pop culture lessons involve respecting the underdog’s need to overcome the odds. For example, Lou in this film is a perfect representation of closed minded party-over-country “leaders,” and he gets a comeuppance. Yes I know, we create art because we can’t get it right in real life.

So it’s a nice start in the summer movie season for animated films with “UglyDolls,” and the manufacturing/marketing folks can expect a run on merchandise, until the kids get distracted with the new cartoon epic. The new golden age of animation does take its toll on the parental pocketbook, despite the hummable tunes.

‘UglyDolls’ opens everywhere on May 3rd. Featuring the voices of Kelly Clarkson, Janelle Monáe, Nick Jonas, Blake Shelton, Ice-T, Pitbull, Wanda Sykes, Jane Lynch and Gabriel Iglesias. Written by Allison Peck. Directed by Kelly Asbury. Rated “PG”

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By PATRICK McDONALD [20]
Editor and Film Writer
HollywoodChicago.com
pat@hollywoodchicago.com [19]

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