

Elton John Bio ‘Rocketman’ Doesn’t Deliver

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on May 31, 2019 - 10:31am

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Rating: **2.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – As a wee lad, one of the first records I bought was Elton John’s Greatest Hits. The album was magnificent, each song expressing the very emotion it sought to deliver. With that basis in mind, I approached John’s biopic “Rocketman” with a hope of deliverance. It felt flatter than a pancake under a steam roller.

Everything was off. The casting of Taron Egerton as the title character, although he gave it the old college try, never felt like Elton. The use of John’s music as fantasy elements (as if it were a movie musical) would have been fine if the film had followed through with that particular magic. The part time use was jarring, and the numbers had a “Mamma Mia” (not a compliment) quality to them ... director Dexter Fletcher (“Eddie the Eagle”) bit off more than we could digest. And finally, the focus on EJ’s numbing drug use. Gosh, I’d never seen that in a rock biography before (/snark), and yes it happened, but it was boring. Where was the fun? Elton John is frigging fun! In “Rocketman,” he seems like a marketing scheme for a movie rather than a human.

Reggie Dwight, AKA Elton John (Taron Egerton) was born in England right after World War II, right in time to grow up in the teeth of the rock and roll movement. With little encouragement from his mother (Bryce Dallas Howard) or absent father (Stanley Mackintosh), he embarked on a piano journey, first through the Royal Academy of Music, and then through his early pop combo Bluesology.



The Troubadour: Taron Egerton as Elton John in 'Rocketman'

Photo credit: Paramount Pictures

Looking to free himself in the Swingin' London of the 1960s, the newly dubbed Elton John serendipitously found lyricist Bernie Taupin (Jamie Bell) through a music agency, and the two embarked on a 10-year hits making period unprecedented in its popularity. But the rock star life battered Elton personally, in his semi-closeted state as a gay man, and the availability of self medication. It was spinning out of control.

Much as the movie spun out of control. The story framing device is addiction therapy sessions, for chrissakes! Elton has been pretty darn open about his excessive drug use, was this what he really wanted to focus on in his biography? There is lots of Freudian implications as well, the absent father and distant mother, I'm very glad he had tons of money to get the proper help. If I sound slightly cynical, this seems to be the template for rock biographies. I would think the production could have gone a different way with that theme ... it all felt the same, and boring.

The musical theatricality of the numbers were a mixed bag, at best. Many of the other characters sing the songs back to Reg or Elton, and badly. Do I want to hear a screechy kid sing "Rocket Man," while a stoned Elton floats symbolically in a pool? Nope! There was an attempt in the film to give credit (and credit is due, no doubt) to lyricist Bernie Taupin as E's spirit partner. But do I want to see Bernie score in Los Angeles with a hippie gal in the early 1970s? Nope!



Bernie Taupin (Jamie Bell) with Elton and Too Much Hair in 'Rocketman'

Photo credit: Paramount Pictures

There were some moments in the film. When the musical numbers worked, there was freedom in it ("Saturday Night's Alright for Fighting" was electric). It is also said that this is the first mainstream film with a gay sex scene ... good on Elton in orientation, but it was also as chaste as church. And there is one glorious moment at The Troubadour in Los Angeles – Elton's first major U.S. show – that if it was only matched by the rest of the film, it would have worked. That was true magic. That was Elton.

As I wrote this review, I had the Greatest Hits album blaring in my headphones, reminding me what the love and passion of Elton John (and yes, Bernie) was all about ... "electric blues, a mohair suit, you know I read it in a magazine." Goodbye Yellow Brick Road, indeed.

"Rocketman" opens everywhere on May 31th. Featuring Taron Egerton, Jamie Bell, Bryce Dallas Howard, Gemma Jones and Steven Mackintosh. Written by Lee Hall. Directed by Dexter Fletcher. Rated "R." No offense to this production, but here is Elton John's life story in two minutes and 20 seconds, and it feels so much more like him. [Click here.](#) [19]



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