

Copy Cat Live Action ‘The Lion King’ Seems Unnecessary

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on July 19, 2019 - 11:15am

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Rating: **3.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – The latest tendency of Walt Disney Pictures to make live action remakes of their classic cartoons should have stopped at “Jungle Book” and “Beauty and the Beast.” The last three, “Dumbo,” “Aladdin” and now “The Lion King” subtract from their source cartoons, and the King is downright weird.

But there is a caveat ... it is “The Lion King” and it is beloved. The characters and the songs are still there, and those who are being introduced to the story and songs will get the lion’s share of hopefulness. But the cartoon is much better and more suited to this fable of the Circle of Life. This remake is distracting. By making the animals look like real life, it gave me an underlying element of uneasiness, as if stealing from nature is the crime of this version. The animals can’t be manipulated too much, and so have a dead-faced lack of external emotions. This Africa doesn’t exist as well, as much as the film wanted to “Disneynature” it. The result is a unsettling two hour plus comparative literature assignment, with this film being the inferior version.

The story is pretty much the same. Simba (voice of JD McClary young, Donald Glover older) is born as a prince to Lion King Mufasa (James Earl Jones, reprising from the cartoon). He has a jealous uncle Scar (Chiwetel Ejiofor) who thinks he should be king, so he sets up a situation that kills Mufasa and exiles Simba.



King Mufasa Roars Again in Live Action 'The Lion King'
Photo credit: Walt Disney Pictures

In his exile he meets Pumbaa (Seth Rogen) and Timon (Billy Eichner), who teach him the philosophy of “Hakuna Matata” (no worries) and the three form a triumvirate to survive. But Simba’s childhood friend Nala (Beyoncé) seeks him out to save their kingdom, which is slowly being destroyed by Scar’s rule. In the Circle of Life, will Simba meet the challenge to reclaim the kingdom?

The songs are all there ... including “Circle of Life,” “I Just Can’t Wait to Be King,” “Hakuna Matata” and “Can You Feel the Love Tonight,” all written by Elton John and Tim Rice from the original film, which is joined by a new song called “Spirit,” performed by Beyoncé and co-written by her. These tunes are always welcome, they’ve become Disney classics. But again, watching realistic animals belting out the tunes was disconcerting at times, especially when director Jon Favreau chose to mimic some iconic scenes from the cartoon.

The most successful voiceover addition was John Oliver, who voiced Zazu, the red-billed bird (hornbill) that was trying to create order out of chaos as the messenger of the king. Somehow the hyper-realism of a twittery bird seemed most appropriate to having a human voice come out of it. The rest of the animals stuck so much to their realistic roots that there was no emotion in their faces, which made the fact that they talked almost surreal and spooky. Timon the meerkat was the exception, but he is comic relief (voiced by Billy Eichner, AKA “Billy on the Street,” who displayed some nice singing pipes ... if it was him). I don’t know the attention span of the average target kid audience at this Lion King, but it could be difficult given the length and the strange realism.



Timon, Simba and Pumbaa Together Again in ‘The Lion King’

Photo credit: Walt Disney Pictures

I think the film will be a Rorschach test for most people. There will be the now grown up fans of the 1994 cartoon, bringing their kids to share in the fun (and most likely they’ve already seen the cartoon version on overdrive). They will either dig the photo realistic rendering of the characters or see something eerily unlikely, as I did. In the end, it is “The Lion King,” and like this year’s “Aladdin” and “Dumbo” there are elements to grasp that can make it enjoyable, and it seems we can’t fight Disney’s intense cash grab motivation to make all their classics into live action. So if you are curious, get thee to the theater and bring the kids.

With live action, maybe the songs should have been, “I Can’t Wait to Grow a Realistic Mane,” “Can You Feel the Uneasiness in My Dead-Eyed Face” or my favorite, the “Circle of Creepily Live Animals.” No worries, baby.

“The Lion King” opens everywhere on July 19th, in IMAX, RPX and regular screening. Featuring the voices of Donald Glover, Seth Rogen, Billy Eichner, Chitwetel Ejiofor, Alfre Woodard, John Oliver, Beyoncé and James Earl Jones. Screenplay by Jeff Nathanson. Directed by Jon Favreau. Rated “PG”



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