

‘Imagine That’: Eddie Murphy’s Family Fare Predictable as Sunrise

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on June 12, 2009 - 2:22pm

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Rating: **2.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Nobody expects an actor to maintain the ambitions of their early career. The manic energy of Eddie Murphy from “Raw” or “48 Hours” is as gone as an ‘80s hairdo. But the numbing sameness of family-friendly Eddie is a direction that is stultifying, and does no favors for him or the audience.

“Imagine That” is actually based on an intriguing premise – that the imaginary friends of Eddie’s daughter (a sweet Yara Shahidi) can also predict the market trends of her father’s investment company.

Murphy plays Evan, the overstressed yuppie of moviedom, living in Denver and raising his daughter Olivia as a divorced Dad. We presume that his workaholic ways split his marriage and makes the relationship with his daughter non-existent, because that is how all high-flying executives who need a comeuppance are portrayed in these types of movie scenarios.



Eddie Murphy in ‘Imagine That’
Photo credit: © Paramount Pictures

Evan's main rival at the investment firm is Johnny Whitefeather (Thomas Haden Church), a Native American Indian who wows investors with his spiritual recitations on monetary futures (I wish I were kidding about this). Evan is pushed against the wall with this competition, at the same time dealing with Olivia's need for attention and her security blanket.

The last straw nearly comes when Olivia draws on some important papers with crayon and glitter, that leads to a breakdown rant from Evan in an investor's meeting. But everything predicted about the companies on those magically illustrated papers comes true, which Olivia explains comes from her imaginary princess friends. Evan in turn begins to spend more time with his daughter, getting life lessons along with fabulous market tips.

The narrative pressure to go back and forth from being a somewhat dishwater satire on adults making money to the touchy-feely relationship between Evan and Olivia does neither side of the story any justice. Between Eddie's penchant for mugging through scenes and the involved explanations of the imaginary world there are long stretches when nothing much happens.



Yara Shahidi and Eddie Murphy in 'Imagine That'
Photo credit: © Paramount Pictures

This is a family movie, however, and reading too much into it is drowned out by the peals of the children's laughter at the attended preview. This genre, while lethally familiar to any adult who has endured the movies of their kid's formative years, is still fresh to a child looking for sense from the hard-charging world of their parents or role models. The movie business cynically knows this, and keeps cranking them out, with Eddie Murphy always eager to come on board.

The direction, by animation veteran Karey Kirkpatrick ("Over the Hedge") is his first shot at live action, and he has a nice touch with scenic shots (around Denver) and camera movement. And while the screenplay, by Ed Solomon and Chris Matheson, has those aforementioned long nothing stretches, it does deliver on the connection between Evan and Olivia.

Sadly, like the Sean Penn film "I Am Sam", the film uses the songs of The Beatles as a touchstone for emotional shortcuts. This filtering of these songs, sung by different artists to sell yet more soundtracks, reduces their essence to background noise and strips them of any intended meaning. I don't want to picture Eddie Murphy making a face while listening to "Here Comes the Sun".

It's just a family movie, I keep repeating to myself.

'Imagine That' opens Friday, June 12, and features Eddie Murphy, Yara Shahidi, Thomas Haden Church, Ronny Cox, Nicole Ari Parker, Vanessa Williams and Martin Sheen. Check local theaters for film and showtimes.



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