

Muppets Still Know How to Entertain in 'Muppets Most Wanted'

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on March 21, 2014 - 7:34am

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Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – There is a comfort, like a favorite drink in a childhood mug, about Jim Henson's legendary Muppets and their standard of entertainment and humor. It's brilliant that Walt Disney Studios continues to understand what makes them work, producing their latest, "Muppets Most Wanted."

After their successful reboot from three years ago, The Muppets gather together again with naturally an opening number that delightfully skewers the "sequel" – and rightly jokes it's actually the seventh film. Using the old mistaken identity gag – Kermit the Frog is exchanged for a Russian evil frog – The Muppets go on another fun-filled romp with the usual celebrity cameos. The joy of the film is that the main human stars – Ricky Gervais, Tina Fey and Ty Burrell (of "Modern Family") – communicate through their characters that they are lucky as hell to be famous enough to co-star with The Muppets. This is a breezy and funny night at the movies, which gratefully has become The Muppets trademark.

After the events of the last movie, Kermit the Frog (voice of Steve Whitmire) is willing to keep the Muppet gang together for another run of shows. Enter Dominic Badguy ("Bad-gee, it's French"), portrayed by Ricky Gervais, who volunteers to be the crew's tour manager. He is actually working undercover for Constantine the Frog, the number one criminal in the world and a twin lookalike for Kermit.



Dominic Badguy (Ricky Gervais) and The Muppets in 'Muppets Most Wanted'

Photo credit: Walt Disney Pictures

Constantine busts out of a Russian prison in Siberia, and Dominic manages to get Kermit arrested and thrown into that jail as Constantine. The warden is a Muppet-obsessed captor named Nadya (Tina Fey), so her aim is to keep the real frog. Meanwhile The Muppet gang keeps touring Europe, and the theaters always end up near places that Constantine and Dominic can rob. Suspicions are aroused by Inspector Jean Pierre Napoleon (Ty Burrell) and a confused Miss Piggy (Eric Jacobson).

All right, so the story is over-plotted, but it is a reminder of the early Muppet adventure movies like "The Great Muppet Caper" and so on – and tightly written by Nicholas Stoller and director James Bobin. The point is to start the funny and corny joke factory, and part of the fun is the hit-and-miss nature of the gags – that's why casting Ricky Gervais is perfect, he is the king of this-is-not-supposed-to-be-funny-but-is genre of humor. Going around the world, to Russia, Berlin ("the joke capital of the world"), Spain, and Dublin, also broadened the potential for funny bits (Christoph Waltz does the waltz).

The breakout in the principal cast is Ty Burrell, best known as the kooky dad on TV's "Modern Family." A couple weeks after his triumph as the voice of Mr. Peabody, he portrays a French Interpol Inspector right out of the Pink-Panther-Clouseau playbook, but with Burrell's comic mark. The Inspector's running gag is how Europeans have different workplace rules – "lunchtime, see you in two hours" – constantly frustrating his CIA companion, Sam the Eagle.

The prison setting produces some great laughs, especially with cameos from Ray Liotta and Jemaine Clement ("Flight of the Concorde") as fellow prisoners. It's an old timey cold war take-off, with Tina Fey doing her best Natasha impression. The prisoners could break out into song and dance at any moment, most effective with a talent show that includes the opening song from the musical, "A Chorus Line." It's stupid amusement, a Muppet calling card.



Nadya (Tina Fey) Runs the Prison in 'Muppets Most Wanted'
Photo credit: Walt Disney Pictures

And then there are The Muppets themselves. The transition is complete from the first Henson team of voice talent, to the new generation, and they haven't lost a step. There is even an inside joke with the Russian frog Constantine looking at old Henson-era Kermit and trying to get the voice right ("nailed it!"). The comfort of the rest of the gang, which has influenced the culture for over two generations, is that they keep using their absurdity for hearty and familiar laughs.

Even though there was a bit of a backlash when old Walt Disney Studios bought out the Muppet concept, it's refreshing to note that there is nothing to worry about the mouse-ification of Kermit and company, a relief to the admirers of The Muppets – which includes the lovers, the dreamers and me.

"Muppets Most Wanted" opens everywhere on March 21st. Featuring the voices of Steve Whitmire, Eric Jacobson and Matt Vogel, and human talents of Ricky Gervais, Tina Fey, Ty Burrell, Jemaine Clement, Lady Gaga, Tony Bennett, Céline Dion, Zach Galifianakis, Salma Hayek, Christoph Waltz, Josh Groban and Ray Liotta. Written by James Bobin and Nicholas Stoller. Directed by James Bobin. Rated "PG"



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