

Rating: «« out of 4 stars

Running Time: 89 min.

If you’ve seen the posters and print ads for the new animated family film *Leap!*, there’s something you should know. The advertising, which depicts its lead characters flying through the sky over Paris, suggests a slightly different film from the one you’ll be witnessing.

Yes, there is a character who invents makeshift wings, but flying on the apparatus is a very minor subplot. Instead, this is a story about a poor young girl who attends a famous dance academy (in the rest of the world the film is called, more appropriately, *Ballerina*).

Felicie (Elle Fanning) and her best pal Victor (Nat Wolff) spend their days trying to escape the confines of their country orphanage and make a new life in Paris. Felicie yearns to dance at the Paris Opera Ballet, while the young boy hopes to become an inventor. Soon after arriving, they are separated.

The girl finds work assisting a caretaker named Odette (Carly Rae Jepsen) who cleans for a snobby, wealthy local Regine Le Haut (Julie Khaner) and her spoiled daughter, Camille (Maddie Ziegler). When Felicie accidentally finds a ballet school acceptance letter sent to her rival, she pretends to be Camille in order to make her dreams come true.

The story itself is cute, if a bit routine. In fact, it could easily have been produced with a real cast. There are two big and elaborate sequences involving flight. However, this a simple story without fantastic creatures or embellishments, instead delivering a message about pursuing your dreams and following your heart (luckily for our protagonist, becoming a world class dancer and nailing the Grand Jeté move only involves a couple of weeks worth of training). The movie pokes a bit of fun at class structure as well, but for the most part the tone is low-key and understated.

However, it does feature some pretty animation that highlights Parisian locales of the 1880s (including an under-construction Eiffel Tower). The images are vibrant and pretty; even simple shots of a train chugging along the tracks with smoke rising into the frame look quite nice. There are also a couple of funny moments that incorporate freeze frames as Victor describes his adventures while being lost in the city. There are some funny reactions shots, eccentric students and a tongue-in-cheek, climactic dance-off between Felicie and Camille does earn some laughs; they actually stare each other down menacingly while moving around the space using Pointe technique.

There are definitely some flat moments, though. This is a France/Canada co-production and it seems apparent that it may have been originally written in French. Some of the English-language lines and readings come across a little stiff and awkward; there are also some very forced and incongruous jokes. There is even an out-of-the-blue reference to MC Hammer that is far more bizarre than it is funny. In fact, it’s hard to figure out exactly why anyone would have felt the need to include it.

Overall, there’s no reason for adults to take a chance on *Leap!*; they’ll find it a bit bland and geared to an adolescent audience. Still, this is perfectly acceptable entertainment for little kids and I’m sure those with an interest in ballet will generally enjoy what they see. It’s not particularly memorable, but it is a warm, genial and at times sweet little film.

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By Glenn Kay
For the Sun