

## **‘Encanto’ slowly casts a spell, wins viewers over**

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun  
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Rating: <<<<

out of <<<<<<

Running Time:  
98 minutes

**This animated feature from Disney will be opening at cinemas on Nov. 24. It will then be available for streaming Dec. 24 on Disney+.**

While Pixar has always been considered the gold standard when it comes to animated family features, Walt Disney Animation Studios has also produced its share of fantastic features, including “Wreck-It-Ralph,” “Frozen,” “Zootopia,” and “Moana,” to name but a few. “Encanto” is their latest, a musical/fantasy about finding one’s calling in life. It isn’t the best feature from the studio, but it does build goodwill over its running time and ends up serving as a bright and enjoyable entertainment that will appeal to most young viewers.

The story involves the Madrigals, who possess incredible powers and live in a scenic Colombian village. Heck, even their house possesses magical qualities. When each child reaches a special age, a ceremony is performed by stern, but caring family matriarch Abuela Alma Madrigal (Maria Cecilia Botero) and their unique gift is revealed. Or at least, that has been

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the pattern for all but one.

Sadly, good-natured Mirabel (Stephanie Beatriz) did not receive a special ability on her big day and now spends her time offering advice and kindness to others preparing for their remarkable moment. Mirabel tries to stay positive, but finds it difficult when everyone around her is so special. When she witnesses an ominous omen on the family property, the lead decides to investigate and learns that the Madrigal powers may be weakening.

Surprisingly, the story takes a little bit of time to build momentum. Each individual family member is introduced in a lengthy opening number, but most of the early gags earn chuckles rather than big laughs. It's all very cute, but not exceptionally hilarious or captivating. As the story develops, things do improve significantly.

When Mirabel discovers that some members of her family, including strong women like Luisa (Jessica Darrow) and beautiful, but vain sister Isabela (Diane Guerrero) are having difficulties with their gifts and are actually unhappy with their lot in life, some entertaining events ensue. The Luisa musical number is a real highlight as she complains about the high work standards that she is expected to continually provide for those in the village.

In general, there is a lot of singing and dancing in the movie. Thankfully, most of the music is quite catchy and is often used to display the remarkable talents of various family members. These tunes are written by Lin-Manuel Miranda and several songs make an impression. And of course, as with other animated titles from Disney, the movie looks spectacular.

The green, mountainous village environment is wondrous to behold and just about every frame pops off the screen with vibrant colors.

Additionally, when Mirabel discovers the truth about an uncle named Bruno (John Leguizamo), who disappeared years before because of his disturbing visions of the future, things improve dramatically. Numbers featuring this character are another highlight and he livens up proceedings when secrets begin being revealed about the family. It soon becomes clear that while things seem perfect on the surface, tension within the Madrigals is simmering and literal cracks are appearing under their seemingly beautiful abode. And since all of the characters have remarkable skills, word and panic about what might happen spreads and the

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consequences result in a few big laughs.

As one might expect, this is a Disney picture, so things are always kept light and frothy. Mirabel must help the family address deeper issues in order to save their home and the community. Admittedly, the movie starts off a little slowly and doesn't offer anything overly unique story-wise. However, the characters and their abilities are enjoyable to witness and, as the story progresses, the movie gains energy and comic momentum.

In the end, “Encanto” isn't the best Disney flick ever made, but the tunes, interesting characters and second half complications eventually cast a spell and charm viewers.

Note: A sweet short called “Far from the Tree” will also be playing before the feature in cinemas.

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