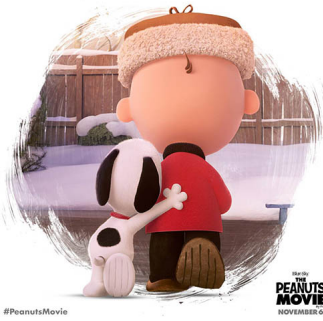


'The Peanuts Movie' – charming despite a few missteps

Written by By Glenn Kay

Friday, 06 November 2015 05:04



Rating: <<<< *out of 4 stars*

Running Time: 92 min.

It's been 65 years since cartoonist Charles Shultz created *Peanuts*, a newspaper strip detailing the trials of downtrodden school-kid Charlie Brown. Over the decades, a few classic TV specials and theatrical features have been produced, making the property a beloved institution.

The Peanuts Movie

takes on the daunting task of updating the material to please both children and their parents. While there are a few minor missteps in the latest translation, much of it remains charming.

The plot follows our anxiety-ridden protagonist as he struggles to earn the attention of a neighbor and new student known as the "Red-Headed Girl." Unfortunately, Charlie has difficulty mustering up the courage to speak with her. And of course, his attempts to impress the object of his affections often result in failure and embarrassment. Luckily, his pet dog Snoopy has plenty of ideas to help his master gain the attention of the girl.

This new movie features slick computer-generated animation. However, taking a cue from the 60s and 70s television specials, the feature possesses a jagged-looking technique, emulating the style and movement of the older TV work. It's still an impressive-looking movie and the different visual approach actually helps distinguish it from other animated efforts. This method also allows for some good-natured sight gags - one can't help but laugh as modern computer technology is employed to recreate the children's clunky and awkwardly drawn dance moves from the old classics.

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The characters are still very close to their original incarnations and there's a real attempt to maintain the low-key (and occasionally melancholy) sense of humor. Charlie takes amusingly blunt and biting verbal lashings more than a few times from his school chums. The insults even come after the character has attempted to do the right thing and displayed a sense of self-sacrifice in the process. It results in an important message that acts of heroism aren't always recognized by others.

However, it's the Snoopy sequences that really stand out as both the most comedic and visually interesting. Viewers travel into the canine's fantasy world and take part in his WWI battles with the Red Baron. There are some impressive shots following Snoopy's flying doghouse-plane as it soars over France. They also allow for some effective gags as the narrative cuts from fantasy back to Snoopy bizarrely acting out his adventures in the real world.

Still, there are a few problems that the *Peanuts* purist in me couldn't help but notice. While the message about being a "good person" is certainly welcome, the finale feels sanitized. Events are tied up in an overly clean and upbeat manner. And given some of the themes, Charlie is rewarded far more than anticipated. One of the charms of this sad-sack character is the strange existential crisis he seems to be experiencing on a daily basis, and that element is muted in this film.

Additionally, Linus is pushed to the periphery, only popping up now and again to deliver philosophical words of wisdom. These interactions between the boys were often the highlights of previous specials. The absence of Linus robs the movie of more humorous introspection. Finally, a couple of modern, anachronistic pop tunes are awkwardly wedged into the package (that seem to have no other purpose than to sell the soundtrack).

But these are minor qualms. Sure, *The Peanuts Movie* isn't quite as good as classic episodes. But it is a very effective update that generally works better than expected. And this effort is a definite improvement over the specials that have come in the last 20 years featuring the characters. At the very least, viewers won't be walking out of the theater muttering, "Good grief!" And that is an accomplishment in and of itself.