

'Turning Red' misses out on some comedic potential

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

out of «««««

Running Time:
98 minutes

This feature from Pixar Animation Studios and Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures will premiere March 11 on Disney+.

As many readers will know, growing up can be tough, especially for youngsters entering their teens. It's certainly a turbulent time with feelings of stress, anxiety and embarrassment, as well as first crushes. The protagonist of "Turning Red" must not only contend with these issues but also a monumental physical transformation whenever her emotions fly out of control.

This animated family feature doesn't always make the most out of its central concept's comedic potential, but it is still a very cute, warmhearted and likable coming-of-age tale.

Mei Lee (Rosalie Chiang) is a self-assured 13-year-old Torontonians who excels at school. She

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enjoys spending time with her best friends Miriam (Ava Morse), Priya (Maitreyi Ramakrishnan) and Abby (Hyein Park) and obsessing over a boy band quintet (curiously named 4*Town) who are playing a big concert in a few weeks.

Unfortunately, Mei has to hide her growing interest in boys and pop bands from her loving but stern mother Ming Lee (Sandra Oh). Things get even more complicated when Mei finds that extreme feelings can cause her to accidentally transform into a giant red panda.

While she waits for a way to cure herself of this condition, the youngster tries to keep her emotions in check. However, she soon begins appreciating her new wild streak and wonders whether she should accept the beast inside.

To be fair, the wild animal is generally adorable and sweet-natured, if oversized and prone to causing damage around the home and at school. But just as much humor is derived from Mei's normal life.

There is plenty of funny stuff early on involving awkward and, at times, humiliating interactions. One memorable and amusing moment occurs when Mei's mother misinterprets a sketch in her daughter's notebook and then rushes out to aggressively confront the confused subject in public.

More tension arises when Mei discovers that her friends are far better at keeping her content than her over-protective mother. These moments are amusingly delivered and provide a great deal of levity and a message about the relatable struggles between parent and child.

As with other Pixar productions, the animation looks incredible. The movie really does authentically capture the feel of the city of Toronto (right down to a couple of accurately rendered locations).

And as expected, the giant panda makes a striking on screen impression. There are some entertaining sight gags as the massive, red-furred Mei tries to hide her rapid body changes and avoid being seen by others. And there are impressive images as the red panda attempts to

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make it to the big show while being pursued by concerned family members.

One of the movie’s minor issues is that it is very low-key in its approach to Mei’s condition. There are a couple of surprised reactions from people encountering the giant panda, but more gags and tension could have been drawn from unexpected transformations at inopportune moments (as well as the responses of random figures encountering the beast).

Toronto may be a mellow city, but certainly one or two characters could offer some trouble and danger for the protagonist. Instead, most characters are unperturbed by the animal when it is in their presence. Naturally, this reviewer does understand that the panda is a metaphor for the changes a young woman goes through as she becomes an adult and that the story isn’t all about sight gags, but more comedy could have been wrung out of the situation.

Still, the fact that a little more could have been done with a giant red panda letting loose in the big city is only a minor beef and the movie is likable and charming throughout. Overall, “Turning Red” is another appealing effort from Pixar certain to bring smiles to the faces of kids and adults in need of some fun family entertainment.

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