

Title:

Simpsons: The Movie

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817

Summary:

A movie review about the just released simpsons movie!

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Article Body:

When it comes to The Simpsons, longevity is an asset few can ignore. 18 years old and counting, the TV series has carved its niche into pop culture. Most of today's high school students hadn't been born when The Simpsons debuted as filler on Tracey Ullman's variety show. It's no longer as fresh, as acerbic, and as popular as it once was, but could one expect anything else from a show that has turned out about 400 twenty-two minute episodes? It is a little odd that it has taken so long for The Simpsons to make the transition from the small screen to the big one; there has been talk about a movie since the mid-'90s. While nothing in this motion picture quite matches the television series at its early best, this is more of a throwback than a throw-away. It's wittier and more energetic than anything that has appeared on FOX in quite a few years.

The film's irreverence is at full throttle from the opening moments when Homer Simpson (voice of Dan Castellaneta) wonders aloud why anyone would be stupid enough to pay money to see something in a theater they can see for free on TV. Later, there's a none-too-subtle jab at FOX's aggressive style of self-promotion. The primary satirical targets are religion (an easy mark), environmentalists (also easy), and government stupidity (even easier). The Simpsons Movie does not go after hot button issues nor does it tie itself to a time and place by addressing current events. One senses that the filmmakers want their production to feel as fresh and timely in 2015 as in 2007.

For the most part, The Simpsons Movie is a series of rolling jokes. It's a little like Airplane in a sense - if something flops, the wait for the next gag isn't long. The film is heavy on comedy and parody and light on emotion, although there is a nice little arc in which Homer has an epiphany about the importance of family. That's about as serious as The Simpsons has ever gotten and it's certainly not going to bring tears to the eyes of many movie goers.

People will flock to this picture because they want to enjoy the humor, and it delivers. I laughed aloud a number of times, and smiled and chuckled even more frequently.

There is a plot, although it's not going to be mistaken for Shakespeare. It is, however, surprisingly coherent when one considers that there are nearly a dozen credited screenwriters. When the government discovers that the levels of toxicity in Springfield's lake have reached critical levels (courtesy of a silo of "pig crap" dumped there by Homer), they quarantine the entire community. Homer and his family - wife Marge (Julie Kavner), son Bart (Nancy Cartwright), and daughters Lisa (Yeardley Smith) and Maggie - escape from Springfield and head to Alaska, where they decide to start anew. But when word reaches them that the government intends to do more than merely isolate their hometown, they take action.

Long-time fans of The Simpsons will be pleased to note that many of the series' recurring secondary characters have bit parts. They are well enough integrated that their inclusion won't bother Simpsons newbies. (Are there such people?) Harry Shearer and Hank Azaria do their usual yeoman's work as back-up vocalists. Star power comes from President Arnold Schwarzenegger (voice provided by Shearer) and Tom Hanks (voice provided by Tom Hanks). Hanks' participation is nothing new; over the years, the series has become a magnet for big-name cameos. You know you've arrived once you've appeared on The Simpsons.

Visually, not a lot has been done to "improve" the characters for the big screen. There are times when the animation is a little crisper and there is occasional evidence of CGI (such as during the Frankenstein-inspired scene with an angry mob), but no major tweaking has been accomplished. Fans of the series will feel at home; the theme song even makes an appearance or two. The producers of the TV program are the driving forces behind the motion picture and they have ascertained that nothing is done to disappoint the core audience.

If half the people who have ever enjoyed an episode of The Simpsons come to see the movie, this will be a huge hit. Fox is counting on big numbers; their marketing department is in overdrive. The film's PG-13 rating is a little misleading. With the exception of a little coarse language and a peep at Bart's underdeveloped cartoon genitals (shown as part of a hilariously over-the-top naked skateboarding sequence), there's nothing in the movie that couldn't be shown on TV. This isn't like South Park which, freed from the constraints of a more restrictive medium, pulled out all the stops. The Simpsons is interested in being a family film, although this is one of those rare animated occasions when adults are the primary audience. I, for one, couldn't be happier.