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Finding Dory

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Date: July 2016

From: Film Journal International(Vol. 119, Issue 7)

Publisher: Prometheus Global Media LLC

Document Type: Movie review

Length: 626 words

Full Text:

WALT DISNEY/Color/1.85/3D/Dolby Atmos/ 103 Mins./Rated PG

Voice Cast: Ellen DeGeneres, Albert Brooks, Ed O'Neill, Kaitlin Olson, Ty Burrell, Eugene Levy, Diane Keaton, Hayden Rolence, Idris Elba, Dominic West, Bob Peterson, Andrew Stanton, Bill Hader, Kate McKinnon, Torbin Bullock, Sigourney Weaver, Sloan Murray.

Directed by Andrew Stanton.

Co-director: Angus MacLane.

Screenplay: Andrew Stanton, Victoria Strouse.

Story: Andrew Stanton.

Produced by Lindsey Collins.

Executive producer: John Lasseter.

Directors of photography: Jeremy Lasky, Ian Megibben.

Production designer: Steve Pilcher.

Editor: Axel Geddes.

Music: Thomas Newman.

Supervising sound editors: Steve Slanec, Tim Nielsen.

A Walt Disney Pictures presentation of a Pixar Animation Studios production.

Sequel to Finding Nemo sends blue tang Dory on a search for her childhood home. Moving, beautifully animated story finds Pizar in top form.

Sequels can be traps, as the film industry is discovering. Arriving 13 years after Finding Nemo opened in theatres, Finding Dory faces high expectations as well as potential pitfalls. But director Andrew Stanton has found ways to revitalize and expand on the original story, moving the characters ahead by opening up their pasts.

A tense prologue introduces blue tang Dory as a child with her parents Jenny and Charlie (voiced by Diane Keaton and Eugene Levy). Where Finding Nemo played Dory's short-term memory loss for laughs, here it becomes a crucial part of the plot. Dory is separated from her home in a sequence as dark and frightening as the old Disney classics.

Dory quickly catches up to the end of Finding Nemo, reintroducing the favorite characters from that movie: Marlin (Albert Brooks), Nemo (Hayden Rolence) and Mr. Ray (Bob Peterson). Dory (voiced as an adult by Ellen DeGeneres) sets out to find her parents, somewhere near Moro Bay, California. A reluctant Marlin and his more enthusiastic son accompany her, only to see her swept into a research boat from the Marine Life Institute.

Inside the Institute, Dory meets several new characters: Destiny (Kaitlin Olson), a nearsighted whale shark who was her childhood friend (setting up more jokes about Dory "speaking" whale); Bailey (Ty Burrell), a beluga whale with hearing problems; and an inspired creation, Hank (Ed O'Neill), a surly octopus who can change shape and color at will.

As Dory and Hank try to escape the Institute, Marlin and Nemo are trying to work their way inside. The resulting near-misses and slapstick chases are spectacular, especially with Thomas Newman's score and the movie's colorful palette.

Kids will love the energy and characters in Finding Dory, even if children are depicted as monsters in the movie. Adults should appreciate the fact that Stanton and his team at least try to question whether aquariums and by extension zoos are good or bad for animals. (Kudos to Sigourney Weaver for putting up with some good-natured ribbing as the "voice" of the Institute.)

The movie also deals honestly with Dory's behavioral problems, showing viewers how memory loss stunts and even endangers lives. Without lecturing, the filmmakers make an emotional case for tolerance and understanding that is hard to resist.

Performers like Albert Brooks and Ed O'Neill are superb in their roles, but they are veteran actors who are supposed to be good. Ellen DeGeneres, known more as a TV personality and spokeswoman, may be the most surprising element here. Her Dory is honest, open and utterly disarming, even when she is at her most exasperating. It is a sensational performance that balances fear and self-doubt with courage and optimism.

Like the best Pixar movies, Finding Dory is ultimately about loss, and at times this sequel ventures into much darker territory than Finding Nemo. Few other animated features can match the depth, sincerity and artistry of Pixar at its best. In Finding Dory, Stanton and his crew strike a perfect balance between art and entertainment.--Daniel Eagan

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Source Citation (MLA 8th Edition)

Eagan, Daniel. "Finding Dory." *Film Journal International*, vol. 119, no. 7, July 2016, p. 104+. *Gale OneFile: Business*, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A456758782/GPS?u=slclpowersearch&sid=GPS&xid=2bf9b5c0>. Accessed 28 Sept. 2020.

Gale Document Number: GALE|A456758782