

Ponyo

Another wonderment from the great Japanese animator Hayao Miyazaki (“Spirited Away,” “Princess Mononoke”), “Ponyo” tells the story of 5-year old Sosuke who lives in a seaside town with his mother. He discovers a sweet goldfish in a bottle on the beach, rescues her, and names her Ponyo. But she is really the daughter of a masterful wizard and a sea goddess, and she is able to use her father's magic to transform herself into a young girl and quickly bond with Sosuke. However, the use of her sorcery causes a dangerous ecological imbalance in the world. While Ponyo's wizard father sends the ocean waves to recapture his daughter, the two children undertake an adventure to save the world and fulfill Ponyo's dreams of becoming human. It is “G” rated.

This very Japanese film is voiced in English with familiar Hollywood actors. The adult roles in this film, for example, are spoken by the likes of Cate Blanchett, Tina Fey, Matt Damon, Liam Nesson, and Lily Tomlin, among others, all of them convincingly apt.

Miyazaki, born in 1941, has been an animator since 1963, with his feature-length pictures dating from the 1980's. He shows persistent themes in his work, such as using children as protagonists, especially young girls, and usually with a principal figure displaying some magical nature. His movies frequently carry an ecological message and often have sequences in some strange new land or environment. All of the previous elements are present in the dazzling “Ponyo.”

As important as his themes is the sheer magic of his animation. It might appear particularly welcome to any cinema goers who are somewhat tired of CGI (computer-generated imagery) animation, all the rage right now. While the later can be glorious (witness its spectacular use in films like “WALL *E” and “Toy Story 3”), there can be something missing in its rounded sheen and machine-like perfection. Just observe Miyazaki's traditional yet inimitable style: classic, fully drawn, exquisite animation that emphasizes both the line from a living hand and color from a wondrous palette. In a way, Miyazaki's images compared with CGI can be likened to a great painting (with its human idiosyncrasies) compared to the clean look of a fine photograph. Not to mention that the man is full of imagination and charm.

Take the kids for them to enjoy the sweet story and characters; enjoy it for yourself as a feast for the eyes.

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