

Daddy's Girl



SAVING MR. BANKS is an LVCA dvd donation to the Hugh Stoupe Memorial Library of the Heritage United Methodist Church of Ligonier, Pennsylvania. Below is Kino Ken's review of that film.

U.S. / U.K. 2013 color 125 minutes live action feature drama Disney / Ruby Films / Essential Media and Entertainment / BBC Films / Hopscotch Features Producers: Alison Owen, Ian Collie, Philip Steuer, K.C. Hodenfield

8 of a possible 20 points

**** of a possible *******

Key: *indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance

(j) designates juvenile performer

Points:

- 1 Direction: John Lee Hancock**
- 0 Editing: Mark Livolsi**
- 1 Cinematography: John Schwartzman, Ben Smithard (U.K.)**
Still Photographer: François Duhamel
Special Visual Effects: Vincent Cirelli, Justin Johnson, Simon Mowbray,
Alexandre Cancado, Glenn Morris, Pavel Pranevsky,
Steven Swanson, Joseph Bell, John Cassella,
H. Haden Hammond, Daniel Kepler, Rebecca Park,
Erin Perkins, Sankarasubramanian, Payam Shohadai,
Thanapoom Siripopungul, Srikanth, Derek Weil
- 1 Lighting: Tom Gates (U.K. Gaffer), Paul McIlvaine (Chief Lighting Technician)**
- 1 Written by: Kelly Marcel, Sue Smith**
Script Supervisors: Rebecca Boyle, Elizabeth West (U.K.)
Music Supervisor: Matt Sullivan
Supervising Music Editor: Bill Bernstein Temporary Music Editor: Sally Boldt
Score Recording: Thomas Vicari

- Music Mixer: Thomas Vicari**
- 1 Music: Thomas Newman Orchestrator: J. A. C. Redford**
Choreography: Mary Ann Kellogg
- 2 Production Design: Michael Corenblith**
Art Direction: Lauren Polizzi, Will Field (U.K.)
Set Design: Lorrie Campbell, Steve Christensen, Sally Thornton
Set Decoration: Susan Benjamin, Emma Verdugo
Set Dressing: Lawson Brown, Joe Bergman, Gregory Byrne, Karen Riemenschneider
Props: Scott Maginnis (Master), Karl McGovern (Master, U.K.)
Costume Design: Daniel Orlandi
Makeup: Kate Briscoe (Key), Fionagh Cush, Deborah La Mia Denaver, Julie Hewitt,
Emily Katz, Don Rutherford, Beth O'Rourke, Jenni Brown Greenberg
- 0 Sound: Jon Johnson (Supervising Sound Editor)**
Sound Effects: Yann Delpuech, Stefan Fraticelli, Tim O'Connell, Randy Wilson,
Trent Richmond
Dialogue Editors: Vanessa Lapato, Miguel Rivera
Sound Mixers: Rudi Buckle (U.K.), Brian Dinkins, Kevin Schultz, John Sievert,
John Pritchett
Sound Remixing / Re-recording: David Fluhr, Gregory King
Casting: Ronna Kress, Nikki Barrett, Terence Harris, Florence Chung, Natalie Wall,
Cash Oshman, Alana Raiser, Bill Dance
- 1 Acting**
- 0 Creativity**
- 8 total points**

Cast: Tom Hanks (Walt Disney), Emma Thompson* (Pamela L. Travers = Pamela Goff), Paul Giamatti (Ralph, the chauffeur), Jason Schwartzman (Richard Sherman), Bradley Whitford (Don DaGradi, storyboard designer), Colin Farrell* (Travers Goff, Ginty's dad), Annie Rose Buckley (j) (Ginty a.k.a. Pamela as a child), Ruth Wilson (Margaret Goff, Ginty's mum), B. J. Novak (Robert Sherman), Rachel Griffiths (Aunt Lily), Kathy Baker (Tommie, a Disney secretary), Melanie Paxson (Dolly, Disney receptionist), Lily Bigham (Biddy), Andy McPhee (Mr. Belhatchett, bank founder), Ronan Vibert (Diarmuid Russell), Jerry Hauck (Premier Emcee), Laura Waddell (woman on plane with infant), Fuchsia Summer (Flight Attendant), David Ross Paterson (Doctor), Michelle Arthur (Polly), Michael Swinehart (Porter), Bob Rusch (Doorman), Luke Baines (Waiter), Demetrius Grosse (Bartender), Steven Cabral (Bank Clerk), Kimberly D'Armond (Katie Nanna), Claire Bocking (Nanny Claire), Dendrie Taylor (Lillian Disney, Mrs. Walt Disney), Christine Ames

(Airline Stewardess), Melissa Bickerton (Mrs. Corry), Cheryl Dent (Flight Attendant), Lynley Ehrlich (Mrs. DaGradi), Tess Gordon (j) (Baby Moira), Kristopher Kyer (Dick Van Dyke), Ginger Pauley (Joyce Sherman), Victoria Summer (Julie Andrews), Tom Waters (Andrew Dutton), others

SAVING MR. BANKS recounts the back story behind creation of Walt Disney's **MARY POPPINS**. When Walt found his daughter Diane reading P. L. Travers' children's book one day between bursts of laughter, he was quite impressed. What was so hilarious? He borrowed the book. Having read it with enthusiasm, he made up his mind to film the story. **MARY POPPINS** combined fantasy, family-centered plot, a father needing enlightenment, and a British setting. All probable enticements for Walt Disney, who seemed to have had some unresolved issues concerning his relationship with papa Elias. Walt promised Diane, to whom this present release is dedicated, he would ultimately adapt the flying nanny story as a motion picture.

For twenty years, he annually requested permission to purchase book rights from P. L. Travers' agent. Twenty times he was denied that privilege. Finally, with money from royalties slowing to a trickle and no new book forthcoming, the authoress had to relent. She accepted Disney's invitation to fly from London to discuss conversion of **MARY POPPINS** into a live action family movie.

Once in the city of angels, a reclusive, recalcitrant, truculent writer raised dozens of objections to proposals made by Disney and his staff. No, the story could not be a musical. Nor a cartoon. She detested the color red. It mustn't appear in the motion picture. Mr. Banks had to be more playful. The Banks' house was too big. Why wasn't Mrs. Banks at home with her children where she belonged? She was a suffragette? Ridiculous! Mary cannot have a romance with Bert. It wasn't in the original story. Neologisms may not be employed unless they were her own. Goodbye, supercalifragilisticexpialidocious.

Walt, office staff, and film crew were regularly berated, snubbed, and flummoxed. Did Mrs. Travers want to see her book filmed or didn't she? Her overprotectiveness about Mr. Banks was unbearable. Surely compromise and negotiation about him should be possible. Why was she so obsessed with shielding his character?

This question leads to intermittent flashbacks of the author's childhood in Australia. It seems her father was a whimsical alcoholic banker who had difficulty maintaining a job. With three children, a wife, and sometimes even a nanny to support, Travers Goff led a moody life, deploring the dullness of his official position, seeking escape in a fantasy world he tried to share with his oldest daughter. This child, nicknamed Ginty, would grow up to become the reclusive curmudgeon P. L. Travers.

Christened Pamela Goff, she chose to have her famous first book published under the name of her beloved father. Apparently she still was suffering guilt as a result of having left

home to buy pears for a dying father, albeit at parental request, a mission causing her to be absent at his death. To compensate, she seems to have determined to remake Papa into efficient, dull, financially secure Mr. Banks, the stable character Travers Goff notably wasn't.

Papa scarred other members of his family as well, driving wife Margaret at one point to attempted suicide by drowning. She is rescued at the last moment by Ginty, who has a predilection about Mama's intent.

In more pastoral episodes, young Pamela is observed creating a world of her own out of available expropriations from nature. She occasionally rides a horse, both solo and with Papa. An early poem she writes wins an award at school, much to paternal dissatisfaction. He acts envious of her triumph. Is it because creative recognition has always eluded him? Travers is a natural storyteller too undisciplined to ever commit tales to paper.

Only after pursuit of an alienated author back to London does Disney accomplish the fulfillment of his fatherly pledge. He does this by sharing an anecdote about boyhood delivery of newspapers in Kansas City. Making his rounds in winter at sunrise and twilight, eight-year-old Walt was under threat of a belting from Dad for tardiness or ineptitude. A Recollection of those chilly, miserable experiences caused the child to escape into an imagination world.

Walt affirms his belief in the superiority of offering hope rather than punishment or despair. That is what the Magic Kingdom was intended to accomplish, bringing joy to children whose present might not otherwise be so happy.

Comprehending at last that her host's life had been less than one long basking in the sun, P. L. Travers signs over rights to Mary Poppins.

She's not invited to the premiere, being considered too likely a wet blanket there. But her agent presses the writer to show up anyway. So she does, enduring torment as dancing penguins, Dick Van Dyke's muggings, and Julie Andrews' chirpy cheerfulness wow viewers and desecrate her story. A good time was certainly not had by all.

Though not included in the movie, Travers' subsequent disavowal of it indicates confirmation of her worst fears. She is profiting at the expense of her father's "tarnished" memory. Ginty's nanny has become Disney's Mary Poppins, a character Pamela Goff hardly recognizes.

Would Carlo Lorenzini, Charles Perrault, and James Barrie have responded similarly to Disneyfication of their works?

This attempt to interweave a sordid tale of one author's childhood with subsequent adult fantasy lacks credibility, mainly due to two overriding factors: an economic decision to forgo location shooting in Australia, and cartoony presentation of everyone connected with the Disney Studios other than Walt himself. The Sherman Brothers, Don DaGradi, Ralph the chauffeur, and Dolly the receptionist have no more reality than Peter Pan or Mickey Mouse. In fact, their actions and responses are markedly similar to those of Disney animated

characters. Director John Lee Hancock demonstrated with *THE BLIND SIDE* commendable skill in directing actors. It is mostly absent here, the two exceptions being foreigners Colin Farrell and Emma Thompson. These two are inventing a fantasy world of their own, trying to generate another, far more serious motion picture. They do their utmost to ignore studio stereotypes.

Ricocheting back and forth from Goff's childhood to the present and back again wears out its welcome. Not being a science fiction adventure, there's no artistically valid reason for a plenitude of flashbacks. A couple extended ones would have been more coherent and less disconcerting.

As mentioned above, screenwriting for *SAVING MR. BANKS* seldom rises to the level of sober drama, preferring instead to meander about in search of buffoonery and sentimentality.

That situation is not improved by casting Tom Hanks as Walt Disney. Hanks is not avuncular, lacks deep character lines etched into Walt's face, doesn't match familiar tones audiences of *The Wonderful World of Disney* shows remember coming from their host.

Kristopher Kyer's vapid imitation of Dick Van Dyke and Victoria Summer's lackluster Julie Andrews personification are equally annoying. It would have been far better to just insert clips from *MARY POPPINS* itself rather than reshoot scenes with such unappealing copycats.

Thomas Newman's music is adequate underpinning. Nothing more. It has the unfortunate task of matching up with inspired songs from the Sherman Brothers. That doesn't happen.

Recording engineers and sound editors fail to provide audible dialogue at an appropriate volume level. Many lines are indistinct due to a penchant for very soft conversations poorly miked or deplorably mixed.

Lighting alternates between vapory dullness and brilliant clarity, the former being more appropriate for a horror flick.

One bright spot is the set designs and dressings. Props are abundant and memorable. Cheery California studios and amusement park give welcome relief from drab rowhouse London and serene Outback views. However, filming Down Under scenes in Southern California studio lots completely invalidates their authenticity, forcing a multitude of constructed sets to uncomfortably unite with abominably artificial exteriors. Anyone who has either been to Australia personally or spent much time screening antipodean movies is in for a major disappointment.

Due to a scene of Walt Disney smoking, one thwarted suicide, a brief bar episode, Travers Goff's alcoholism, and overall grimness, *SAVING MR. BANKS* is suited only for teens and adults. It does expose the conflicted origins of Walt Disney's *MARY POPPINS*, a film which no doubt will be cherished by music and animation buffs long after this belated addendum is mercifully forgotten.

