



ERNEST ET CÉLESTINE (ERNEST & CELESTINE) is a January, 2015 LVCA dvd donation to the Hugh Stouppe Memorial Library of the Heritage United Methodist Church of Ligonier, Pennsylvania. Below is Kino Ken's review of that dvd film.

16 of a possible 20 points ****** of a possible *******

France / Belgium 2012 subtitled / dubbed in English color feature animation fantasy 80 minutes La Parti Productions / Les Armateurs / Maybe Movies / Mélusine Productions / StudioCanal Producers: Didier Brunner, Henri Magalon, Stéphan Roelants English Version Producers: Vincent Tavier, Eric Beckman, David Jesteadt, Ned Lott, Michael Sinterniklaas
Key: *indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance
(j) designates juvenile performer
Points:

Direction: Benjamin Renner*, Vincent Patar*, and Stéphane Aubier
2 Editing: Fabien Alvarez-Giro
2 Animation Camera
1 Lighting
1 Screenplay: Daniel Pennac, based on the book series by Gabrielle Vincent
1 Animators: Mathieu Chaptel, Thomas Charra, Michael Crouzat, Stéphanie Haulet, Patrick Imbert, Gaelle Thierry, Serge Umé
2 Music: Vincent Courtois Music Supervisor: Emmanuel Deletang
2 Production Design: Zaza (Marisa Musy) and Zyk

Graphic Character Adaptation: Sei Riondet

1 **Sound: Fred Demolder, Renaud Guillaumin, Raphael Seydoux, Thibaut Vandermeerch, Bruno Seznec, Christine Seznec, Pierre Aretino, Emmanuel de Boisseau, Bertrand Boudaud, Luc Thomas**

2 **Voices Cast, Original Version: Lambert Wilson (Ernest), Pauline Brunner* (Celestine), Anne-Marie Loop (La Grise, the Grey One), Patrice Melennee (Georges), Brigitte Vertudes (Lucienne), Léonard Louf (Léon), Dominique Maurin (Head Dentist), Yann Lemadic (Ernest's Defense Attorney), Féodor Atkine (Grizzly Bear Judge), Patrice Dozier (Rat Chief of Police), Vincent Grass (Bear Chief of Police), Jacques Ciron (Monsieur Ranconnet), Garance Pauwels (Child Celestine) Voices Cast, English Version: Forest Whitaker (Ernest), Mackenzie Foy (j) (Celestine), Lauren Bacall (The Grey One), Paul Giamatti (Rat Judge), William Macy (Head Dentist), Megan Mullally (Lucienne), Nick Offerman (George), Jeffrey Wright (Grizzly Judge), Delphina Belle (j) (Lila), Romy Beckman (Léon), David Boat (Bear Police Chief), Ashley Brooke (Nina), Marsha Clark (Big Rat Nurse), Cameron Dickson (Albert), Ethan Louis Samuels DiSalvio (j) (Martin), Ashley Earnest (Antoinette), Gary Littman (Rat Police Chief), Joe Ochman (Rat Lawyer), Maggie Villard (Liesel)**

2 **Creativity**

16 total points

Winner of the Cesar as Best French Animated Film, ERNEST ET CELESTINE (ERNEST AND CELESTINE) celebrates friendship, tolerance, and the art of Belgian illustrator and painter Monique Martin, better known by her pen name of Gabrielle Vincent. Monique created in the 1980s and 1990s a series of twenty children's picture books featuring watercolor adventures of an unlikely pair of companions: the music-loving bear called Ernest and an artist mouse named Celestine. So long as their originator lived, these two charismatic characters were denied transfer to theater or television screens. However, after Miss

Martin's death in 2000, her publisher began to look for someone willing and able to transform her beloved nursery favorites into film stars. Producer Didier Brunner, approached to undertake this task, proved surprisingly eager to do so. Years earlier he had read these stories to his daughter at bedtime. Brunner was more interested in creating a single theatrical film about them, though, then an episodic television series. He commissioned veteran writer Daniel Pennac to generate a screenplay. It would be teamed with character designs by novice animator Benjamin Renner, whose student graduation project of 2007, A MOUSE'S TALE, received worldwide acclaim on the Internet.

Brunner took a sizable gamble with this unorthodox coupling of old and new. Even riskier was tapping Renner to direct the film, a position unprecedented for this young man who had not yet acquired any professional experience. Wisely, Renner requested an associate director as mentor and safety net. What he received were two Belgian animation veterans then making waves at festivals with plasticene animation. Vincent Patar and Stephane Aubier were charged with supervision of storyboard development and postproduction synchronization of dialogue, music, and sound effects. Renner would handle character design, overall art concepts, and supervision of both strands of animation: hand-drawn and computer. To keep intact the atmosphere permeating Vincent's children's books, backgrounds would be produced manually in an impressionistic style. As sop to contemporary child audiences, computer graphics would represent the characters, though nothing like the ones popularized by Aardman and Pixar. Renner himself referred for inspiration back to Studio Ghibli releases such as KIKI'S DELIVERY SERVICE and MY NEIGHBOR TOTORO, though eschewing their precision of tonal and linear details.

Happily, the final product matched hopes of those who had labored four years developing it. Often moving at breakneck speed, Renner's film utilizes frantic chases modelled on yesteryear escapades featuring Keystone Cops and Zecca's Paris gendarmes. As contrast, episodes in Ernest's country cottage permit quieter, more relaxed exchanges of philosophy and guardianship by two protagonists bonded by persecution and non-conformity.

Each is determined to nourish a passion for creating art. Ernest favors music; Celestine loves to draw. Both live in societies where such pursuits are regarded as intolerable wastes of energy and time.

Everyone knows bears and mice are enemies. Always have been, always will be. This is taught to youngsters in both communities, rat and bear, at bedtime, with illustrative examples coming from storybooks.

However, Celestine is too immersed in sketching ursines to pay attention to exaggerated histrionics of an elderly orphanage supervisor whose dramatic talespinning terrifies her not at all.

Ernest, long past an age for storytime frights, lives in a kind of Overworld where mice are seldom seen and heard. Individually too small and shy to threaten him or any of his fellows, Celestine's species hides to preserve itself. Except when a tempting tooth from a cub is left out for disposal by collecting mouse. Apparently bruin lore includes tales of a magical mouse that exchanges money for incisors.

So when Celestine one evening disrupts a bedtime reading session at the home of a bear family, she ends up trapped inside a garbage can. This fate seems poetic justice to shocked pursuers. Miserable, cold, with mission aborted, the unfortunate mouse is stuck in a most undesirable position.

Until a famished Ernest comes along. This travelling musical performer, unable to solicit either coin or snack from audiences and passing strangers, is now resorting to ransacking urban trash for survival. Encountering potential tasty tidbit when he paws through Celestine's temporary lodging, Ernest plans to gulp it down immediately. Celestine, thinking quickly, forestalls personal disaster by suggesting he might inflict a disease upon himself that way.

Thus begins a beautiful partnership, mouse claiming to act as health warden to bear; he, in turn, compelled to accept mousy advice about where to find grub.

Neither being inclined to heed rules or honor private property, the oddball couple is soon being publicly denounced for criminal conduct. Why?

Because Ernest breaks into a confectioner's shop to sample its wares in wholesale fashion. Greedily, he stuffs himself to the point of impeding retreat through his entry window.

Discovered trespassing by the store's owner, a crazy struggle begins. Undesirable visitor is frantic to leave. Shopkeeper is equally adamant about obtaining compensation.

Police intervention is loudly demanded. They rush to the scene for a fairly easy capture of an oversized crook. Ernest is tugged away, then shut up in a paddy wagon. Celestine loyally comes to his rescue, once again requiring illegal activity in exchange for her aid.

This time, Ernest must force his way into a tooth showcase belonging to a shop run by the confectioner's spouse. Once inside, he is to loot the contents, rows of bear teeth extracted from mouths of overindulgent candy and honey eaters. Celestine needs fifty or more of these biters so she can restore her honor at the underworld mouse dental clinic where large teeth are constantly in demand.

Once again, Ernest bumbles around the crime scene and gets himself detected in the process of committing a misdemeanor. Unwilling to lose his freedom a second time, he dashes into a convenient delivery truck. It just happens to be the confectioner's. Too bad. For him. Ernest races away with Celestine also aboard, police hot on their trail.

Wild driving and favorable fortune enable this desperate duo to flee successfully up into the hills. After taking a sensible precaution of camouflaging their getaway vehicle with earthy brown paint, Ernest and Celestine retreat to a country structure Ernest calls home. There, a tired host prepares to resume winter hibernation. Celestine decides to set up housekeeping. Despite heavy snoring from one occupant and harrowing nightmares besetting the other, both are agreeable to sharing a residence. Peace at last appears in the offing.

A threat of invasion by law enforcement remains constant, though. Criminals can hardly be left to roam the countryside at complete liberty. Society demands arrest, trial, and punishment. Rules must be upheld.

So as Ernest and Celestine continue to blissfully entertain each other with art and music, the outer world draws a menacing net ever closer. Until one day, after heavy spring showers wash away the outer layer of paint from a stolen van, two armies of police arrive. One is alternately stalking through and hiding behind surrounding trees. The other tunnels relentlessly uphill towards the

basement of Ernest's house. Will the joyful season of comradeship enjoyed by Big Bad Bear and Little Lost Mouse end in a far longer stretch behind bars? Watch the rest of this film and see.

Several elements of filmmaking here evidence superior craftsmanship. Vincent Courtois' music score is charmingly Gallic most of the time. Occasional forays into noisy cacophony are excusable, given the onscreen player's habitual ineptitude.

Not so felicitous is a recording mix which from time to time crushes dialogue beneath clamorous sound effects. Optional English subtitles could compensate for this. They fail to do so, however, since the translator operates loosely, without regard to prevailing tone. In one reprehensible scene he even replaces what ought to be innocuously tame scolding with abrasive street slang delivered in a completely undisciplined rant. Song lyrics left untranslated further mystify audiences, leaving them wondering what subversive content is being delivered.

Production design, modelled closely after Impressionist School paintings so dear to the author of these engaging adventurers, preserves background settings which enhanced her original tales. There's not nearly as much detail work as in Vincent's drawings, since director Renner elected to employ a minimum of lines and amorphous, airy pockets of empty space where his predecessor sprinkled daubs of springtime colors. Both approaches convey a sense of buoyancy and freedom. But Renner's system harmonizes better with foregrounded animation figures, keeping principal characters spotlighted.

Both vocal casts offer involving interpretations. However, the English receives a preference due to greater transparency for the American viewer. All performances are undercut in the original by subtitles which don't even parallel, let alone duplicate, what viewers observe. No brass ring for the translation.

Animation is satisfactory, not exemplary. Movements lack the convincingly realistic fluidity of first-rate Japanese or American counterparts.

A screenplay pitting establishment against rebels gives this film a tenor somewhat similar to BRAVE or STAR WARS. It was unnecessary to follow in their plot footsteps. If a villain truly is needed, uncooperative weather and balky machinery is always available as a humane alternative to battles, bullies, snobs, and land developers.

Warning to parents: The English Language version of the film contains a passage of decidedly vulgar rant by the orphanage supervisor during her condemnation of The Big Bad Bear. Trying the alternative subtitled option to detour this leads to two instances of completely irrelevant profanity in the text. For these reasons, a rating of 4+ is required, with parents urged to preview and supervise screenings. Children under the age of eleven should not be watching this motion picture alone.

For youths eleven and older, ERNEST ET CELESTINE is an amusing, generally cheerful depiction of loyalty, friendship, and creativity. Adults will find nothing offensive here except an occasional language transgression, already noted above.

The G-Kids / Cinedigm dvd release includes as special features a subtitled, jittery, fifty-two minute featurette about the film's production. It's marred by myriad hopping interruptions making coherency impossible. A fourteen-minute interview with director Benjamin Renner in English is much more enlightening and communicative. There's also a two-minute trailer for the film provided.