



**MARY POPPINS is a Second Quarter 2019 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 dvd film.**

**10 of a possible 20 points**

**\*\*1/2 of a possible \*\*\*\*\***

**United States 1964 color 139 minutes pixilation feature musical fantasy  
Walt Disney Productions Producers: Bill Walsh and Walt Disney**

**Key: \*indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance**

**(j) designates a juvenile performer**

**Points:**

- 0 Direction: Robert Stevenson**
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Unit Live Action Direction: Arthur Vitarelli**
- Animation Direction: Hamilton Luske\***
- 0 Editing: Cotton Warburton**
- 1 Cinematography: Edward Colman**

2     **Lighting: Calvin Maehl\***  
        **Special Effects: Peter Ellenshaw\*, Eustace Lycett, Robert Matthey,**  
               **Lester Swartz, George Brown, Marcel Delgado,**  
               **Petro Vlahos**  
        **Special Mechanical Effects: Danny Lee\*, Walter Stones\***  
        **Special Visual Effects: Bob Broughton, Art Cruickshank,**  
                           **Jim Fetherolf, Constantine Ganaker, Ub Iwerks**  
        **Effects Animation: Lee Dyer\*, Dan MacManus\***  
        **Animation Camera: Ed Austin\***  
 0     **Screenplay: Bill Walsh and Don Da Gradi based on books by**  
               **P. L. Travers**  
        **Music Supervision: Irwin Kostal\***  
        **Music Editing: Evelyn Kennedy\***  
        **Music: Irwin Kostal\***  
 2     **Songs: Richard\* and Robert Sherman\***  
        1.) "Sister Suffragette," 2.) "The Life I Lead," 3.) "The Perfect Nanny,"  
        4.) "Pavement Artist," \*5.) "Jolly Holiday,"  
        \*6.) "Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious," 7.) "Stay Awake,"  
        \*8.) "I Love to Laugh," \*9. "Feed the Birds,"  
        10.) "Fidelity Fiduciary Bank," \*11.) "Chim Chim Cheree,"  
        12.) "Step in Time," \*13.) "A Man Has Dreams,"  
        \*14.) "Let's Go Fly a Kite"  
        **Choreography: Marc Breaux\* and Dee Dee Wood\***  
        **Dog Training: Robert Blair**  
 2     **Art Direction: Carroll Clark and William Tuntke**  
        **Set Decoration: Hal Gausman\* and Emile Kuri\***  
        **Scenic Art: Will Ferrell and Al Gaynor**  
        **Design Consultant: Tony Walton\***  
        **Nursery Sequence Design: Xavier Atencio\* and Bill Justice\***  
        **Costumes: Bill Thomas**  
        **Makeup: Pat McNalley\***  
 2     **Sound Supervision: Robert Cook\***  
        **Dialogue Editing: Chris Pinkston\* for the restoration**  
        **Sound Mixing: Dean Thomas\***  
        **Restoration Sound Mixing: Kevin Porter\***

**0        Acting**  
**1        Creativity**  
**10 total points**

**Cast: Julie Andrews (Mary Poppins), Dick Van Dyke (Bert / Mr. Dawes Senior), David Tomlinson (George Banks), Glynis Johns (Winnifred Banks), Hermione Baddeley (Ellen, the Banks' maid), Reta Shaw (Mrs. Brill, the cook), Karen Dotrice (j) (Jane Banks, sister to Michael), Matthew Garber (j) (Michael Banks, brother to Jane), Elsa Lanchester (Katie Nanna), Arthur Treacher (The Constable), Reginald Owen (Admiral Boom), Ed Wynn (Uncle Albert), Jane Darwell (The Bird Woman), Arthur Malet (Mr. Dawes Junior), Don Barclay (Mr. Binnacle, Admiral Boom's servant), Alma Lawton (Mrs. Curry, Old Woman in the Park), Marjorie Eaton (Miss Persimmon, Old Woman in the Park), Marjorie Bennett (Miss Lark, Old Woman in the Park), James Logan (Bank Doorman), others**

**One of the most obnoxious and overrated of all Disney productions, this 1964 attempt at technological extravaganza underlines all the weaknesses of the company at that point as well as its undebatable strengths. Using material about a flying nanny named Mary Poppins, the American animation giant undertook a transatlantic adaptation marred by Dick Van Dyke's appallingly inconsistent Cockney accent, a plethora of cute shots of various performers in lieu of any real dramatic or comic acting, and spotlighting of socially misleading, if not downright destructive, moral lessons. This movie is Walt Disney trying to be senior ethical guide, and he makes a gigantic mess of it.**

**On the plus side, most songs composed by Roger and Robert Sherman for the movie are excellent, tuneful, and rhythmically engaging. Choreography designed for the enormous fourteen-minute-long "Step in Time" number is worthy of a far better musical. This is painfully true also of the classic ballad emerging from the movie, "Feed the Birds."**

**Julie Andrews gives a capable, if thankless, performance as an utterly fantastic child-minder who shows up in the nick of time to release officious Mr. Banks from self-inflicted torture interviewing nanny candidates for his two more-than-mildly-impish children. Her singing, honed to a glorious richness by years of music hall experience, surpasses what she achieves in the realm of**

comedy. Her triumph in winning an acting performance Oscar pays tribute to the promotional pull exerted by Disney Studios then and now. However, at least she's absent the slapstick mugging of Mr. Van Dyke, whose ostentatious exaggerations not only set a very poor acting example for impressionable young Matthew Garber but were even in 1964 extremely outdated and aggravating. Watching him monkey around, almost literally, a viewer can only long for more disciplined acrobatics of predecessors such as Chaplin, Keaton, Harpo Marx, Lloyd, and Jacques Tati, all of whom took the trouble to insert unpredictable riffs into their bumbblings, making them appear fresh and attractively eccentric.

Robert Stevenson had proven earlier in his career to be a sensitive, intelligent director, as JANE EYRE from 1944 attested. Of course, he had support on that film from such acting heavyweights as Orson Welles, Joan Fontaine, Margaret O'Brien, and Elizabeth Taylor. His subsequent trajectory was a lengthy journey from distinctive craftsmanship to mediocrity and worse. He was well on the way to a nadir when undertaking this piece of pointless fluff. His achievement here is largely a negative one, as Karen Dotrice and Matthew Garber, at least watchable in THE THREE LIVES OF THOMASINA, are featured in a parade of predictable reaction shots egregiously prolonged in close-ups.

Tony Walton's sets achieve a brightness matching the generally saccharine tone set by dialogue and source books. Unsurprisingly, Bill Walsh, one of the clueless masterminds who created a revoltingly stupid screenplay for 1959's THE SHAGGY DOG, returns in tandem, this time with Don Da Gradi, to trot out another passel of frequently bland inanities. Jane Austen or Charles Dickens these guys are certainly not. What might have served as occasion for pointed social satire is instead mere drivel.

Take a closer look at some notions aired here.

Mr. Banks insults his boss, then gets rehired and advanced to a partnership in the same organization the very next day. Pay close attention, kids, and do likewise.

Best antidote to unemployment: Fly a kite. Sure beats pounding the pavement.

Look first to the never-married and childless for child-rearing wisdom. Parents never know what they're doing. Obviously.

Neglect your children. Don't get too bent out of shape if they consequently land in the hands of police. Ah, what fun times London's finest are likely to enjoy with teenage incarnations of Michael and Jane roaming the streets, picking up pointers from strangers they encounter.

Being obnoxious is the key to happiness, typified by Uncle Albert. Actually, the most depressing thought generated while watching his preposterous antics was the possibility of being stuck in a room with him for even two minutes.

Don't ever take the time to think about what you're doing. Just follow wherever your emotions lead. Never, ever disregard a strong feeling.

Feed pigeons now. No time like the present for enjoying yourself. With someone else's donated money. That's much more amusing than investing it to provide savings for the future. Jane and Michael are poster children for a rising Now Generation. Let spoilsports worry about what the future may bring.

Moms are best left to attendance at political activities, being quite unfit to educate or discipline offspring.

Chimney sweeps really have a boisterously joyful life. Especially those minors not in view, whose plight tugged at consciences of William Blake, Thomas Hood, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, all of them oblivious to the wonderful frolics enjoyed by these lads.

Changing occupations like Bert does on a daily basis encourages creativity. Tell that to Disney's animators.

Repair a child's toy yourself. Don't mess around allowing youngsters to attempt it with adult advice. You know they'll just flounder around and end up with a second-rate makeshift.

Don't expect sympathy from Father or notice from Mother. Look to hired help for nurturing and wisdom. Most useful advice this, particularly in the postwar world inhabited by MARY POPPINS's audiences.

Above all, never read anything. You might get an original idea or two in your head. How horrible. What the Empire needs is unswerving loyalty of young subjects to the status quo. Keep to the playing fields and leave all labor to adults.

Before starting further dissection of a lifeless cadaver, commendation is due matte painter Peter Ellenshaw, whose backgrounds merit gallery display. They are sorely needed, for California sound stages do not a gritty London make without substantial enhancement.

One other cultural novelty of note bequeathed the world by Disney's last big hurrah is the neologism "supercalifragilisticexpialidocious." Coined by Richard and Roger Sherman, it's void of any discernible meaning, dovetailing perfectly with its surroundings, filled with nonsensical sounds and nothing else.

Lacking a coherent story, MARY POPPINS proceeds to take viewers on various imaginative journeys which might have been explained sensibly as childish dreamings. No such saving grace appears. Audiences are expected to assume the reality of supernatural occurrences, none of which are traceable to any causative agent. This gaudy universe of anecdotal happenstances isn't topsy-turvy, backwards, parallel to another, or logically constructed from pre-existent conditions and materials. Its only foundation is magic, overlooking the fact magic has a real, if not readily apparent, basis.

In Mary's screwball neighborhood whatever happens, does. People lead senseless lives in a senseless environment doing senseless things in senseless ways to while away monotonously senseless days. Life is just one absurdity after another. There's no spiritual aspect to it, no goals to be achieved by struggling against adversity, no progress through effort and experiment. How barren a philosophy for anyone to endorse. Would you wish it upon a favorite child?

Here's what passes for a plot.

Two siblings, Jane and Michael Banks, live in a moderately upper-class district of London during the Edwardian era. They are alternately pampered with toys and neglected by parents otherwise, except for mandatory appearances at morning and evening mealtimes. What transpires during those ritual minglings? Our wordsmiths aren't telling. It must be a closely guarded secret. Try to imagine the energetic conversation between youth and age enlivening those moments.

Otherwise banished to park and nursery, the mischief-making duo retaliate by making life adventurously dreadful for a succession of nannies. Their idea of adult supervision, specified in their joint letter sung under the title of "The Perfect Nanny," is a mistress of ceremonies well-supplied with bribes in the form of treats. Who will tolerate anything short of attempted arson or homicide.

Into this den of unconstrained whimsy floats a young woman with skin carpetbag, impeccable white gloves, witch-black shoes, and a talkative

umbrella. Astonishingly, she speaks the King's Own English, dispenses bitterness inside fruity medications without an apothecary license, and refuses to offer either explanations or references to justify her own odd behavior. The question that should have occurred to Mr. Banks, her prospective employer, was whether to send her to Bedlam or steer the self-righteous ninny directly to Neverland. Instead, he allows the bizarre visitor full run of the house, without consulting his spouse about granting such liberty.

He "feels" she is adequate. Mrs. Banks "feels" hubby is correct and so doesn't interfere. Indeed, nobody meddles with the Poppins woman. How can they? She is too unreal to even contradict or derail.

Initiating rule by dazzlement in the best Disney tradition, Mary puts the nursery to rights in a matter of minutes, merely pausing for a duet with chirpy robin. Cue "A Spoonful of Sugar." She comes armed with singing mirror, possibly a cousin to the chatty one that taunted Snow White's evil stepmother. The current reflector is admonished for brazenness when it oversteps boundaries and generates tones of its own. How? You'll never know. Explanations are banished forever from Poppinsland.

Mr. Banks believes his inviolable routine is a Gibraltar of security, as he pompously declares in "The Life I Lead." This is evidently illusory, conveniently overlooking continual replacement of certain servants. His wife, whose sole enthusiasm surfaces in a "Sister Suffragette" marching song, is more dedicated to lifting spirits of arrested political zealots than sharing time or interests with Jane and Michael. She's no frontrunner for a "Mother-of-the-Year" tribute in anybody's book.

Under the dubious guardianship of Mary and her admiring Jack-of-All-Trades Bert, the younger Banks are treated to merry-go-round rides, rooftop balancing acts, an aerial tea party (Suggested by the Mad Hatter affair in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland?*), and a bevy of encounters with penguin café waiters, fox hunters, racetrack Pearly Kings and Queens, scampering animated squirrels (BAMBI, anyone?), assorted barnyard balladeers, and the renowned Bird Woman of St. Paul's Cathedral. The latter does double duty as farewell tribute to veteran American actress Jane Darwell and an excuse to reprise the plaintive "Feed the Birds." Each adventure leads higgledy piggledy to another.

Mary's most ill-advised counsel comes relatively late in the picture, when she bamboozles Mr. Banks into proposing Jane and Michael accompany him next

day on an educational outing to his workplace. This results in the chaos of a bank run, patterned somewhat after the more savagely satirical one in Frank Capra's *AMERICAN MADNESS*. Holding Banks Senior responsible for the balkiness of his son, management calls the former to account that evening, justifiably sacking him. The cashiered employee then blames his woes on an absent pair of nuisance siblings who, stirred on by fellow plotter Mary Poppins, all leagued against him. Indubitably. As auditors can hear in the sorrowful strains of "A Man Has Dreams," the second strongest piece of music composed for this release.

Will the wretched fellow ever come to his senses, realize the providential interference of contrary Mary, and stoop to amiable companionship with likely inheritors? Where will those runaway troublemakers of his find a sympathetic ear as they dodge police and investors after exiting the bank in panic?

How will these calamities play out? Why not watch the rest of this multiple Oscar®-winner and find out?

Laboring under strains created by multinational casting, acting here fails to meet minimum acceptable family film standards. Dick Van Dyke is no credible Englishman. Nor is Ed Wynn anybody's conceivable British uncle. Arthur Treacher's Constable Jones is reliably British in speech and bearing. He's variably dutiful or befuddled as required by the script. Elsa Lanchester, playing a departing disciplinarian nanny, is pure negativity, impossible to empathize with, an imposing martinet much too quick to surrender under fire. As Mrs. Banks, Glynis Johns is solely ornamental, lacking anything suggestive of an adult personality. Faring little better is character actor Reginald Owen in the role of a retired loudmouth naval officer appropriately named Mr. Boom. He is only a bluff paper tiger, like all too many Disney creations.

Given the underdeveloped caricatures peopling Mrs. Travers's books, it's no wonder acting is mostly overplayed and gratingly strident, the key exception being Poppins herself. Even she lacks credibility, though through no fault of her own.

Turning to additional aspects of production, sound recording and mixing prove exceptionally fine. Lighting, animation, and art are exemplary. But a Swiss cheese script, insufficiently motivated editing cuts and too many hyperbolic gesticulations seriously weaken the claim of *MARY POPPINS* to be anything more than inoffensive popular amusement.



Music throughout helps enormously to patch over its relatively threadbare contents, with tremendous eye-popping dance adding luster to an otherwise dangerously conventional final act. If only that stretch of inspired gymnastics had been placed earlier in the film where it would have bolstered a sagging middle section.

Billed as superior family fare, superficial conversation and overreliance on spectacular visuals insure this Disney hodgepodge placement instead on a far lower rung of the artistic ladder. It cannot be recommended even to young teens, let alone adult counterparts. Younger children without much historical background knowledge or experience of cinema acting achievements may find this release entertaining. Edifying, it isn't.

As compensation for storytelling underachievement and insignificant character doodling, the dvd release includes one disagreeably cynical song titled "Chimpanzoo," an enlighteningly anecdotal audio commentary by leading performers and co-composer Richard Sherman, a set top game returning gravity-challenged Uncle Albert to view, a fifty-one-minute documentary about the making of the film which from time to time repeats matter found in other extras, a slew of tv spots and trailers, numerous still photo galleries (the most notable highlighting Peter Ellenshaw's glorious paintings, a seventeen-minute "Magical Musical Reunion" focusing on key songs with accompanying tidbits of background information, about thirty minutes of song favorites from the movie with full lyrics, and a twenty-one-minute "Musical Journey with Richard Sherman" presenting even more details about various musical numbers used.

While enjoyable as a showcase for noteworthy musical talents of the Sherman Brothers and Julie Andrews, the only other essential aspects of MARY POPPINS are its choreography, groundbreaking pixilation, and background art. If these suffice to maintain your interest, then by all means treat yourself to Walt Disney's last major foray into feature musicals.