



***Wicked* is the first of a two-part musical adaptation of Gregory Maguire's book of that title. Below is Kino Ken's review of its dvd release.**

11 of a possible 20 points = ** ½ = a bit above average movie

**United Kingdom 2024 color 160 minutes live action feature musical dramedy
Universal Pictures / Marc Platt Productions / Moving Pictures / SKY Studios /
Quebec Production Services Tax Credit / The Icelandic Film Foundation /
DENTSU Producers: Marc Platt, Joan Schneider, and David Stone**

**Key: *indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance
(j) designates a juvenile performer**

Points:

- 1 Direction: John Chu 2nd Unit Direction: Sam Renton**
- 0 Editing: Myron Kerstein**
- 2 Cinematography: Alice Brooks**
Aerial Photography Direction: Jeremy Braben
Additional Photography: Sean Seymour, Hubert Mosiej, and Jake Obiora
Still Photography: Giles Keyte
- 2 Lighting: David Smith* (gaffer)**
Special Visual Effects Designer: Nick Woythaler
- 1 Screenplay: Winnie Holzman, from the Dana Fox and Winnie Holzman
musical stage play adapted from the novel by Gregory Maguire
with music and lyrics by Stephen Schwartz involving**

characters from the Oz books of L. Frank Baum

Script Supervision: Lisa Vick 2nd Unit Script Supervision: Bex Church

Script Editing: Adriana Rivera

Music Supervision: Dominick Amendum and Maggie Rodford

Music Editing: Jack Dolman and Catherine Wilson

**Music Recording: John Prestage, John Michael Caldwell, Omisha Chaitanya,
Ian Kagey, Henry Reinach, Patricia Sullivan**

**Music Mixing: Laurence Anslow, Robin Baynton, John Michael Caldwell, and
Nick Wollage**

2 Music: Jon Powell, Stephen Schwartz, Batu Sener, and Markus Siegel

**Choreography: Wayne Cilento, Emilio Dosal, Comfort Fedoke, Peter Francis,
Leah Hill, Will Loftis, and Christopher Scott**

**Orchestrations / Arrangements: Jeff Atmajian, Sean Barrett,
Jonathan Beard, Jennifer Dirkes,
Benjamin Hoff, Steven Rader, Jacob Shrum,
Jamie Thierman, Edward Trybek, and
Henry Wilkinson**

1 Production Design: Nathan Crowley

Art Direction Supervision: Ben Collins and David Lazan

Senior Art Direction: Gavin Fitch 2nd Unit Art Direction: Ida Fly Hedqvist

**Graphic Design: Annabel Gibb, Anthony Noble, Kayla Pacenka and
Esmeralda Power**

Set Design: Cayti Crozier, Bria Kinter, Chris Lees, and Christopher Scott

Set Decoration: Lee Sandales, Nicola Bisello, Emily Lutyens, Joanne Ridler

Set Dressing: Adam Matthew, Brian Nobbs, Julie Pitt, Finlay Tofield

Costume Design: Paul Tazewell

Makeup Design: Frances Hannon

Makeup Supervision: Laura Blount and Karen Cohen

2nd Unit Makeup Supervision: Lorraine Hill

0 Sound

Sound Design: Malte Bieler, Brandon Jones, and John Marquis

**Sound Editing Supervision: John Marquis, Nancy Nugent Title, Erick Ocampo
and Tim Walston**

**Sound Effects: Jack Cucci, John Cucci, Esther Kim, Dan O'Connell,
Jessie Pariseau, Mikel Paragga-Wills, and Mikaela Padilla**

**Dialogue Editing: David Bach, Philippa O'Marra, Liisi Roosvald, John Stuver,
and George Weston**

Sound Recording: Roderick Hart

Sound Mixing: Simon Hayes 2nd Unit Sound Mixing: Tom Barrow, Alan Hill

Splinter Unit Sound Mixing: Simon Norman

**Casting: Tiffany Little Canfield, Bernard Telsey, Ryan Bernard Tymensky, and
Tamsyn Manson**

1 Acting

1 Creativity

11 total points

Cast: Cynthia Erivo* (Elphaba), Ariana Grande* (Galinda / Glinda), Jeff Goldblum (The Wonderful Wizard of Oz), Michelle Yeoh* (Madame Morrible), Jonathan Bailey* (Flyero), Ethan Slater (Boq), Marissa Bode* (Nessarose), Peter Dinklage* (Voice of Dr. Dillamond, history professor), Andy Nyman (Governor Thropp), Courtney Mae-Briggs (Mrs. Thropp), Bowen Yang (Pfannee), Bronwyn James (Shenshen), Aaron Teoh Guanti (Avaric), Keala Settle (Miss Coddle, headmistress of Shiz U.), Sharon Clarke* (Voice of Dulcibear), Jenna Boyd (Voice of Wolf Doctor), Colin Michael Carmichael (Professor Nikidik), Karis Musongole (j) (young Elphaba), Cesily Collette Taylor (j) (young Nessarose), Michael McCorry Rose (Wiz-O-Mania Narrator), Idina Menzel and Kristin Chenowith (Wiz-O-Mania Superstars), Robin Berry (palace guard), Tom Kitley (Voice of Snow Leopard), Elizabeth Dulau (Voice of Piebald Deer), Kim Durham (Voice of Tamarin / Owl), Jennifer Woodward (Voices of Birds), Stephen Stanton* (Voice of Flyero's Horse), David Eigenberg (Voice of Tamarin Monkey), Jason Lines and Alfredo Tavares (teachers), Kellan Tetlow and Darcy Rose Byrnes (Additional Voices), others

Though a huge hit commercially, *Wicked* is less successful artistically. Its biggest weakness is in sound mixing. A decision to send Ariana Grande to the top of her vocal register most of the time results in a smeary mess with lyrics indistinct and therefore unintelligible. Ariana's acting is commendably first-rate, though her character resembles this year's Barbie model. An indecisive screenplay, which initially casts Galinda / Glinda as a bubbleheaded blonde, transforms her unconvincingly into Miss Compassionate Multiethnic Enthusiast,

then leaves her a confused Paragon of Status Quo Virtue makes for a most bizarre character arc, something quite alien to L. Frank Baum's normal working pattern.

Her musical and female social partner is Elphaba, who unfortunately leaves the impression here that people who seem different wind up sliding into criminal behavior. Or perhaps this eventual villainess was born with some kind of evil gene. A saving grace is her affection for animals, which might be politically correct in liberal circles but appears hopelessly unpopular in Oz's stagnant conservatism. For it seems duplicitous Madame Morrible has an unshakeable belief animals are to be seen and not heard from. Since the current film is merely part one of a likely dyad, it's difficult to predict for certain, but Elphaba and her magic tutor, Mme. Morrible, appear set to clash over animal rights in part two. Considering that Elphaba plays a co-starring role in what must then become the chronological third Oz tale, a.k.a. *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) as The Wicked Witch of the West and M. Morrible fails to show up there at all, the outcome of their struggle would hardly seem in doubt. Cynthia Erivo, a proven dramatic talent, does what she can in green-face, which connects her insistently with a jealousy motive. It's equally impossible to ignore association with Kermit the Frog's melancholy song "It's Not Easy Being Green," especially given all the visual reminders art direction scatters around underfoot. On the other hand, Erivo's formidable singing power unleashes cyclonic rage in her exit song "Defying Gravity."

While uneven in quality, the music of Stephen Schwartz, ornamented with orchestrations provided by no less than a full dectet of musical colorists, carries the picture triumphantly from start to finish, linking actions together much better than a tangled and sometimes contradictory plot provided courtesy more of Winnie Holzman than original Oz creator Baum.

Despite a runtime of one hundred sixty minutes, director John Chu's movie canters along quite efficiently without unduly protracted scenes. However, some padding is evident. The backstory of Elphaba's birth, her dad's constant denigration of his publicly recognized elder child, and the social turnaround of students in a grotto dance hall / bar add nothing to either character development or setting. Just being green supplies adequate foundation for social ostracism of Elphaba. Further excuses are unnecessary. Cutting four additional "explanations" offered in support of community prejudice – namely

repulsive stink, unfashionable wardrobe, the young woman's caustic tongue, and her largely unwelcomed trespass into snobbish Shiz University – would shrink film length into something less testing of viewer patience and comfort.

Michelle Yeoh, in the guise of calculating Madame Morrible adopts Elphaba as a special wizardry project and consequently adds that misfit to Shiz's student roster. She portrays with steely self-righteousness a bigot masquerading as custodian of public morals. The milquetoast professor serving as useful screen for divisive segregationist policy is none other than the Wonderful Wizard of Oz, who for a time terrorized Dorothy and three of her companions in the 1939 M-G-M musical. Here he's portrayed as a scatterbrained, fickle, feckless fellow apparently operating under the direction of Madame M. Her background is left blank, perhaps to be detailed in Part Two. At any rate, neither green skin nor a gauche wardrobe led her into misbehaving. No, ambition seems likeliest to have plunged her into moral quicksand. Yeoh plays the woman as cool, confident, cunning, commanding. Iron fist inside elegant glove. Her real colors only show in climactic Emerald City tower scenes.

Ethan Slater is Boq, a maladroitness Munchkin Shiz U. attendee enamored of Galinda, who palms him off understandably on Elphaba's wheelchair-bound half-sister Nessarose. One good thorn deserves another, in Galinda's opinion. That wannabe blonde bombshell's own amorous interest, late arriving troublemaker Prince Flyero, has little to recommend him other than multiple scholastic expulsions, an aversion to study, and his buff body. Another pair obviously made for each other. Both these couples are frequently milked for comedy, one pair being notably awkward and the other unrelentingly self-preoccupied.

A third twosome sporadically onscreen provides opportunity for gender politics. Bowen Yang has the thankless role of Pfannee of Phan Hall, Galinda's effeminate male hanger-on. He's mostly paired with Bronwen James's Shenshen, a pudgy female friend of Galinda's. Both are complete peacocks, narcissistic aristocrats who preen, insult, and exude offensiveness. Thoroughly nasty and utterly rude, the couple is exclusively utilized as comic relief. It should be remarked they are also arch-conservatives.

In a role as the sole talking animal professor at Shiz U., Peter Dinklage depicts a holdout liberal who's first to inform students of a secret plot to demote and subjugate those beasts of Oz retaining capability of speech. Only his voice is

used in this film, masterfully suggesting a wise, elderly advisor whose counsel goes unheeded by all his students except convention-smashing Elpheba. Of course, troops of Oz invade the classroom where he started to elaborate on Oz's pre-Wizard history, much to the chagrin of Madame Morrible, who intervenes to stop his lecture midstream. Protest isn't tolerated in Oz.

Dr. Dillamond, the too loquacious goat, is replaced by a propagandist named Professor Nikidik, who satisfactorily puts all the class in from of him to sleep with a boringly supercilious speech. Except the always-rebellious Flyero and Elphaba. Those two abscond with a caged lion cub, being keen on freeing anything oppressed, wherever it should be found. Alone together, Flyero attempts to flirt with his companion. But her heart belongs only to non-human animals. Any romance between them would spoil a plot hinging on what looks like some kind of yin-yang relationship involving Elphaba and Galinda. There's more than a hint of Elsa and Anna (see *Frozen*) here.

Jonathan Bailey turns in a fine performance as arrogantly dashing hedonist Flyero Tigelaar, ideal partner for super-consumer Galinda. Both characters value looks and popularity over every other trait, fancying themselves leaders of an easily swayed student populace.

Marissa Bode, likewise quite credible as spoiled paraplegic Nessarose, conveys the embarrassment and frustration of always being someone else's charge, an eternal supporting cast member in lively dramas being enacted by more active characters. She resents enforced second-class status, especially when it short circuits romance.

Seven choreographers combined to create an assortment of dances, those being crucial in keeping a labyrinthine story progressing and involving. Just how complicated its twists and turns are will become obvious in *Wicked's* sequel.

Too much reliance on computer generated images mars this production. So does poor judgment about sound mixing. Retaining childishly vibrant colors topping those of Hollywood's 1939 Oz opus, *Wicked* counterpoints them rather clumsily with a topical and very adult storyline, one which gets sabotaged by this odd combination. The audience for *Wicked* is definitely not children. A color palette of clashing browns and grays invading pastel territory would have had greater relevance and be more suggestive of emotional turmoil basic to this drama.

As indicated above, a tendency to reproduce exaggerations of color vividness, along with outsize room measurements and impossibly leveled topography results in adult tensions percolating in a childish teapot. Or, to put it another way, Shakespearean subterfuges cloaked in fairy tale garb. Screenplay and art direction oppose each other, none too subtly. Utterly fantastic costuming follows dictates of fairy tale setting. As do set designs. Yet what child would wish entertainment where every character in an apparently perfect physical environment is either simpleton, victim, or hypocritical transgressor of moral or civil codes of conduct?

Returning to positive thinking, cinematography and lighting are major assets here. Gaffer David Smith achieved optimum acuteness of definition with his illumination choices and the photographic achievements of Alice Brooks, alongside Jeremy Braben's aerial shots and Jeremy Paige's special visuals offered stunning views of Oz's landscape and interiors of Emerald City.

Wicked is a mixed bag for adults and a tantalizing disaster for teens who may swallow its flimsy characterizations completely, failing to notice talented actors battling script stereotypes and marginally motivated actions they're supposed to make believable anyway. Catchy tunes, plus one classic song delivered in fitting grandiosity, help diminish negative effects of artwork warring with characterizations and orchestra swells contending with lightweight soprano singing. The result is especially unfair to Ariana Grande. L. Frank Baum takes a hit, too. His source story reemerges as political fodder for progressively inclined adults. *Wicked's* definitely a yellow light film in regard to content. Proceed with caution if thinking about buying this dvd.