"Mary Poppins Returns"

By Helen Lutz

Sometimes it's just good to be older. When I was 10 or 11ish my parents took the family to the movies to see Disney's new film "Mary Poppins" starring Julie Andrews. It was magical. I so wished that we could have a nanny like Mary Poppins even though I didn't really understand what a nanny was. My Grandma came to watch us every day while my parents went to work and then she and my Grandpa would go home after dinner. I remember being sad when Poppins left and my mother explaining why it was good and time for her to go. I never really bought into her explanation. As we left the theater we were all singing one of the many songs from the film; I still remember them today, just don't sing as well.

In a world full of movie remakes, Disney waited 54 years to play with 'Poppins.' It's nearly impossible to improve on a movie that's "practically perfect in every way." The much anticipated "Mary Poppins Returns" currently adorns theater screens everywhere. Much like the first, it's set in the mid 1930's, however, 25 years have passed and the Banks children, Michael and Jane (Ben Wishaw and Emily Mortimer) are all grown up.

Times are hard and even harder for the Banks. Michael's wife, the woman who made their house a home, passed away leaving a grief stricken Michael to care for their three children. To make matters worse Michael is an artist by trade – but no one has money to buy art. His wife Kate always managed the household and made ends meet, but he found it necessary to take out a loan against their house. When you miss mortgage payments the bank has a way of making life difficult, Michael is faced with repossession.

Just when life can't get any worse, a knock at the door delivers a familiar face – Mary Poppins (Emily Blunt). In her no nonsense way she steps in and takes charge wrangling the three Banks children who feel they have no need for a nanny and a father who has no room in his budget to pay her. At this point we know everything will be all right, but how?

Director Rob Marshall creates the same feel in "Mary Poppins Returns" as in the original with lots of song and dance numbers as well as animation; much more animation this time around. The movie is colorful and fun as we meet Mary's friend Jack (Lin-Manuel Miranda) a lamp lighter by trade who is always willing to lend a helping hand and appreciates the Poppins' style of magic. After breaking a prized bowl belonging to their mother, Mary, Jack and Georgie, the Banks children (Pixie Davies, Nathanael Saleh and Joel Dawson), pay an unusual visit to Mary's cousin Topsy (Meryl Streep) who is able to fix anything – but not on the second Wednesday of the month.

After the screening I had the opportunity to meet nine year old Antonio Raul Carbo who was a very disappointed young man. Antonio had a dancing role in the film and had just discovered that it was left on the cutting room floor. His scene was shot two years ago at the age of seven. I asked what he liked best about filming the movie and he quickly smiled and answered – the food. He felt like a star being interviewed by 'the press.'

"Mary Poppins Returns" is a nice family film for the holidays. Emily Blunt puts her own spin on Mary Poppins making the character her own. Another familiar face is that of Julie Walters who plays Ellen the Banks housekeeper. She steals every scene she's in. Disney's magic is just a bit tarnished with this sequel in that when I left the theater I couldn't remember a single song. What happened to the days of "A Spoonful of Sugar Helps the Medicine Go Down" and "When You Wish Upon a Star" and "Can You Feel the Love Tonight" and that ever popular earworm "Let It Go" from "Frozen"? I give "Mary Poppins Returns" THREE HARTS. It's beautifully done, but not memorable.