

Props for 'Mr. Popper's Penguins'



My three young boys were not Jim Carrey fans, but that changed this summer when Alex, Andrew and Chase saw trailers of the rubber-faced actor in *Mr. Popper's Penguins*.

After reading the 1939 Newbery Award-winning children's book with my wife, Tammy, last year, the brothers were excited to watch the "loose film adaptation" of Richard and Florence Atwater's classic in 1938. In the book, Popper is a house painter who starts breeding trained penguins and takes his animal act on the road, creating a national sensation.

In the 2011 contemporary movie version, Carrey plays Popper, a successful Donald Trump-like real estate mogul, whose cold relationship with his family warms up after he "inherits" six cute but trouble-making penguins from Antarctica from his recently-deceased father.

Growing up, little Tommy Popper ("Tippy Toe") knew his globe-trotting adventurer dad more by the sound of his father's voice ("Bald Eagle") during nightly ham radio transmissions than from spending any real time with him. "The hardest thing about having it all is discovering what's missing," the film's trailer points out.

Divorced from his wife of 15 years, Amanda (Carla Gugino), Popper spends every other weekend with the couple's children, Billy (Maxwell Perry Cotton) and Janie (Madeline Carroll), to whom he feels detached—echoing his relationship with his absentee father.

Initially, Popper is desperate to get rid of the penguins, but when Billy and Janie get attached to the creatures, he embraces them as a way to connect with his kids, and the birds also help him fall in love again with his ex-wife.

Of course, the stars of the live-action film are Bitey, Lovey, Loudy, Stinky, Nimrod and Captain—the penguins named after their quirky personalities. Filmed on a refrigerated soundstage with real Gentoo penguins, the movie reportedly only used some CGI penguins for a seamless blend of live action.

The lovable and mischievous penguins naturally steal the show with their antics, including swimming about in the bathtub, aping Charlie Chaplin while glued to the TV, stealing the covers in bed and splish splashing at the Guggenheim Museum.

Of course my kids got a kick out of their shenanigans. “They were very funny,” Chase, 5, said. Andrew, 8, added: “I like Bitey because he was feisty.” Alex, 10, noted: “The movie made me wish we had penguins at home.”

Despite the film's formulaic plot—Popper's

penguins turn his swank New York apartment into a snowy winter wonderland and the rest of his life upside-down—the movie works and is a lot of fun because of the chemistry between the penguins and Carrey.

Along with his trademark uninhibited zaniness, a Jimmy Stewart impersonation and a pretending-to-be-in-slow-motion gag, Carrey is both silly and surprisingly heartwarming as Mr. Popper. Carrey is on charted territory in the movie—think Ace Ventura becomes a family man.

Also turning in a funny performance is Ophelia Lovibond, who plays Popper's perky secretary Pippy, who has a peculiar proclivity for the persistent practice of using words pertaining to the letter p. Meanwhile, Broadway legend and *Murder, She Wrote* star Angela Lansbury, still elegant at 85, is solid as the Tavern on the Green owner who prizes noble character over greed.

Rated PG, *Mr. Popper's Penguins* is surprisingly clean—sans animal fart and poop humor, and use of the pseudo curse word “freakin”—considering *Mean Girls* director Mark Waters was at the helm of the film, which was scripted by Sean Anders and John Morris (*She's Out of My League*, *Hot Tub Time Machine*).

Originally slated for a release on Aug. 5, 2011, the movie was pulled up to June 17 to coincide with Father's Day. Carrey, 49, told Breezy Mama that he got involved with the project

because of the themes
of family in the story.

“That’s what really drew me to the movie
other than the fact that I love penguins,” Carrey said. “The
theme of somebody
who is an adventurer but doesn’t explore his relationship with
his own son is an
amazing theme for me.”

Carrey told Breezy Mama that he could relate
to the subject because he had felt that way with his own
daughter, Jane, now 24.

“There have been times in my life when I was so crazed with
Hollywood and
everything that was going on that I missed time with my
daughter,” Carrey said.

“We’ve certainly mended anything that was going on between us.
We’re closer than
ever. ... The most important thing in the world is to make your
kids feel like
they’re the most important thing to you.”

What an appropriate message for an
entertaining, summer family-friendly comedy. It also helps
that Jim Carrey plus
incredibly adorable penguins equals a movie your children will
love and laugh
at.

Content Watch: *Mr. Popper’s Penguins* is rated
PG for mild rude humor and some language. Parents with young
children may want
to discuss lying and bribing shown in the film.

Image courtesy of 20th

Century Fox