

The One Movie You Can Definitely Take Your Family to This Weekend

Classic children's characters Winnie the Pooh, Eeyore, Piglet, Tigger and more are transported to the real world in the new Disney release *Christopher Robin*, directed by Marc Forster (*Finding Neverland*, *Quantum of Solace*). The live-action story finds an adult Christopher Robin (Ewan McGregor) reuniting his childhood pals from the and rediscovering his sense of childhood joy and adventure.

Brigham Taylor, producer of Disney blockbusters such as *The Jungle Book* and *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Men Tell No Tales*, shepherded the project along with co-producer Kristen Burr, based on an idea he once pitched of an adult Christopher Robin remembering his childhood. In this exclusive interview, Taylor discusses the genesis of the project, balancing work and family in his own life, and what family-friendly feature is coming next from his production company.

The idea for this movie is actually something you came up with as you were reading one of A.A. Milne's books, so will you tell me your inspiration for it?

I had been familiar with the books in childhood. They were frequently read in my house and then also growing up, with the animated features that Disney produced, which I loved. It was early in my career as an executive I thought it would be a really fun idea to sort of bring to life in a live-action context, and also to tell that story from the perspective of an adult. I think we've had so many iterations of Pooh told through animation and through the younger perspective of the kid, and I felt like that there was an interesting way, a way to sort of prove the worth and value these characters to the

older generations. The whole story through an adult's point of view, I thought, would need adults in the audience find more relevance in the film while never abandoning the childlike charm the characters have themselves.

Those of us with a faith background know that there is something special to actually returning to childhood innocence, the trusting innocence of a child. Was that something that you wanted to explore, something that excited you?

Yeah. To say the simplicity and the joy that you can experience at that age. And to me it's sort of the manifestation of what it feels like just to pick up a book that you loved and haven't read and so long and you read it and realize that it means as much, if not more, to me today because of my experiences that it might've meant me when I first read it. I think that's precisely right. Not everything from childhood needs to be held onto, but there are so many valuable things that get sort of stripped away from us or get beaten out of us or we just plain lose sight of. To me, there is a simplicity and a joy, the kind of friendship and the time and the focus you spend on each other with each other. It really gets lost. And I've noticed it in my own life, and it felt very relevant for me. And I look around see, it's fairly universal fact that, that it's hard. It's harder and harder to find the quality time just to be super present with the people that you love because of responsibilities pushed on you. I feel like Pooh is this unhurried character who really exemplified in the best way the ability to just be with you, with his friends. Even if his objectives don't align with yours, he will take the time for anyone, whether it's Christopher, Piglet or anyone, and it's an amazing sort of hallmark and a great sort of quality to emulate. And certainly it's something that I thought would be easy to say that the adult version, Christopher Robin might've lost at this point in life. Right? So what better way to be reminded of it than

by visitation from an old friend?

I think of that old Disney movie with Bruce Willis, *The Kid*, where he meets himself as a kid. If that happened to you, what would your younger self say to you?

It's funny because I think, and thematically that's a wonderful corollary to this movie. I think I would think that that kid "me" would tell me that he needed to take more time out of work to spend more time to be with kids, to engage with them. Hopefully we would find some, some joy in the fact that we were making fun movies, movies, that I can't complain about. I feel very lucky to work in industry and work with Disney to work on these kinds of films because that's something that the kid "me" might've enjoyed doing. Doing that, it's still a busy job. And, and this even this very film to be overseas where we shot in London where I had to be separated from my wife and four kids for long stretches of time. It was a great irony to me to be working hard on a script whose central message was about balance, knowing that during that period of time, all of this, we're certainly out of balance. But it's still valuable to tell yourself that because you need to make up for that time, all the more so importantly.

The films that you've been a part of it are ones that adults and children can connect together. Isn't that a beautiful thing?

That was ... honestly the thing that got me most interested and excited about it. My family, my mother who's now 85, she had a really great love for these books and these characters, and she really instilled that in me. There's a lot of the old, wonderfully witty and entertaining charm. But they do contain wonderful life lessons about friendship and the caring and kindness. I have seen firsthand how those things get passed along to my kids and now her great-grandkids. There's great value [in] not forgetting that stuff too. I wanted to generate

a movie that would be as appealing hopefully to adults and parents as it would be kids and to have a communal experience and multigenerational experience with it. It was kind of, I felt like the job No. 1.

What's the next project you are working on?

One project now has a year of post-production left, and it's a beautiful book adaptation called *The One and Only Ivan*. It's from the perspective of this adult silverback gorilla who's lived an entire life inside of in a small circus inside a strip mall in Florida. It's about his slow awakening to that there is more in this world outside of that. He takes responsibility for some of his friends and decides to get away, sort of get them into a better situation. It has a very sort of serious progression, and the themes have a lot to do with how we treat each other, both as human to human and human to animal. But it also has interior messages about friendship and support and responsibility. It's in the context of a kind of a fun, character-driven, photo-real, talking animal movie. We'll have gorilla and a dog and elephant and a few other denizens of the little circuit. I'm really excited about, it's a really lovely film.

I'm looking forward to sharing *Christopher Robin* with my kids.

It was engineered to be something I think that you can take anyone of any age to. It doesn't avoid, I think the sadness that comes sometimes with adulthood and childhood. But it's one that brings you to a pretty joyful place. I'm hoping that's your takeaway. {eoa}

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