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Film review

'Millions' lets audience see events through the inquisitive eyes of a child

Conversations with saints and a magically appearing bag of money make Boyle's film an enchanting fairytale

BY JOSH LINTEREUR
PULSE REPORTER

Someone knew what he or she was doing when handing the directorial reigns of the film "Millions" to director Danny Boyle.

The PG-rated film about a family coping with loss must have sounded like a bit of a stretch for a director whose opus spans the toilet-diving heroin addicts of "Trainspotting" and the flesh-eating zombies of "28 Days Later." But the inspired visual pizzazz that the director honed during those darker pictures integrates flawlessly with the fairy-tale aura of "Millions," and the film is easily one of his best.

"Millions" tells the story of two young brothers whose mother has recently died. Along with their father, they move into a new home and attempt to deal with the loss. At night the widowed father sleeps nestled up against a row of pillows before making room for 7-year-old Damian (Alexander Etel), who laments no longer sharing a room with his older brother Anthony (Lewis McGibbon).

Each day the tender but reticent father whisks the boys off to school and holds the house together the best he can. When the boys are thought to have stolen money from a Mormon household, the father bluntly instructs them to stop crying and to stop stealing.

The imaginative story line, which involves frequent appearances by Catholic saints and a bag of cash that falls from the sky, requires a fanciful touch of directorial wizardry to avoid all-out hokeyness. And thankfully, because of Boyle's spirited filmmaking, the enchanted fable doesn't require a dramatic leap of

faith from the audience.

Damian, who idolizes saints the way his peers worship soccer stars, receives a steady stream of advice from the holy spirits and treats each encounter with wistful nonchalance, even brushing his teeth during one of their visits.

His spiritual receptivity isn't jarring because it's mixed with the fanciful daydreaming of everyday boyhood. Passing trains shake the flimsy walls of a fort Damian built near the train tracks behind his house, inspiring the boy to imagine himself launching his fortress into the air.

Whether Damian is talking shop with saints or building forts, Boyle infuses each scene with an equally weighted sense of wonder, which challenges the audience to see the unusual events through the indiscriminating eyes of a child.

After a visit by a cigarette-smoking St. Clare of Assisi, a duffle bag filled with cash crashes into the fort. First believing the money is from God, the two brothers are faced with a moral dilemma when they discover the fortune was stolen from a bank.

The film ups the fairy-tale ante when one of the robbers shows up looking to reclaim the money. Eerie breathing is heard before he enters each of his scenes, and he materializes like a boogeyman, even crawling out of the ceiling while Damian sleeps.

The film meanders a bit as the boys first give away and then spend the cash, but its quirkiness remains engaging until the end.

"Millions" is playing at the Bijou Art Cinema at 492 E. 13th St.

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