

# Relishing Wickedness

While rewarding common sense and goodness

**CHARLIE AND THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY:**

Directed by Tim Burton. Written by John August, based on the book by Roald Dahl. Produced by Brad Grey and Richard D. Zanuck. Executive producers, Patrick McCormick, Felicity Dahl, Michael Siegel, Graham Burke and Bruce Berman. Cinematography, Philippe Rousselet. Production design, Alex McDowell. Costume design, Gabriella Pescucci. Editor, Chris Lebenzon. Music, Danny Elfman. Starring Johnny Depp and Freddy Highmore, with David Kelly, Helena Bonham Carter, Noah Taylor, Missi Pyle, James Fox, Deep Roy and Christopher Lee. Warner Bros., 2005. PG. 116 min.

Maybe I was in the mood for something wildly imaginative, because I loved Tim Burton's over-the-top *Charlie and Chocolate Factory*, and I haven't always been a Burton fan. Perhaps the ice-cream chill from the air conditioner on a 96 degree afternoon made me receptive to Burton's cool, warped tale of good and bad children. I relished seeing the churlish boys and despicable, snooty girls get their comeuppance. Whatever alignment of the planets created the pocket of goodwill I basked in during the film, I am thankful my inner cynic took the afternoon off so my child within could have a little fun.

Five lucky children find gold tickets in Wonka chocolate bars, and they come to the chocolate factory on the assigned day and time for a tour. But even before they meet their tour guide, Willy Wonka (Johnny Depp), the kids and guardians are treated to an outlandish musical sketch, in which various dolls present a Busby Berkeley-type singing, dancing spectacle. But alas, things go awry, which results in a kill-off of some of the adorable little animatad sugar-plum dollies.

Burton sets the tone for the remainder of the movie in this scene, touching base with the strangely innocent cruelty of children toward their favorite toys. Haven't you seen an angelic baby slam her favorite stuffed animal or rag doll on the floor, repeatedly and heedlessly? How about Christopher Robin dragging Pooh-Bear down the steps by one arm, thumping and bumping all the way? Burton honors this skinny separation between love and not-love that children exhibit at times.

Depp is fabulous as Wonka, a dandified only-child grown into an always-smiling,

somewhat vacant and often malevolent host to the children. Depp perfectly captures the ambiguous intentions of the character's original creator, Roald Dahl, as well as integrating Burton and writer John August's additional flamboyant, contemporary idiosyncrasies. Our collective belief in the wacky world inside the factory depends on how we feel about Wonka. He's unable to utter the words "parent" or "father" because of his own candy-deprived childhood with a strict father, a dentist played by Christopher Lee.

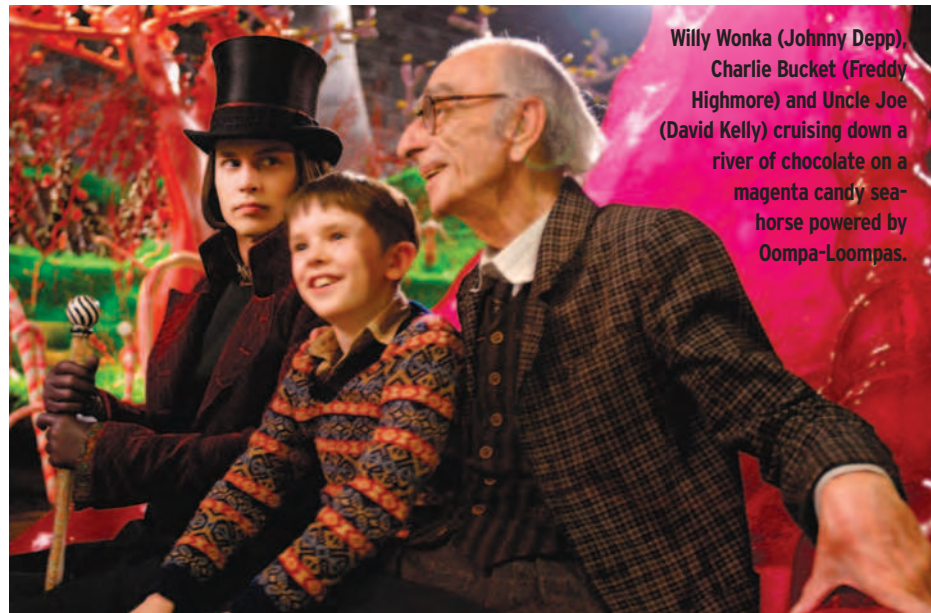
I deeply enjoyed the projections of Wonka's flustered, disturbed psyche as brought to life by Depp, Burton and production designer Alex McDowell. The Bollywood song-and-dance scenes with the Oompa-Loompas, clones of

actor Deep Roy, are both charming and nutso. The actual squirrels employed in the walnut-shelling section of the candy factory as well as the animatronic squirrels in the background are both cute and too rodent-like to be cuddly. Likewise, the homage to Stanley Kubrick's *2001* with the ape-like creatures in silhouette in the factory's TV lab send mixed messages. And the first time the Oompa-Loompas break into song, you'll think you're on the Yellow Brick Road to Oz for sure.

Freddy Highmore plays Charlie Bucket, a self-confident lad raised by a large, extended family in a shabby house that's falling in around them. Charlie's parents (Helena Bonham Carter and Noah Taylor) as well as Grandpa Joe (David Kelly) and three other grandparents make the best of their poverty with humor and mutual respect. Highmore, who almost stole *Finding Neverland* from Depp and Kate Winslet, is an actor who doesn't lose track of himself in his screen portrayals, which feel grounded and authentic.

The other children — greedy Augustus Gloop (Philip Wiegratz); gum-chewing champ Violet Beauregarde (AnnaSophia Robb); sociopathic, electronic whiz kid Mike Teavee (Jordan Fry); and rich, spoiled, narcissist Veruca Salt (Julia Winter) — can be as bratty as they like. And so they are.

I've never seen the 1971 *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* starring Gene Wilder. Therefore I had nothing to compare to this film version, which should stand on its own. It's the first of Burton's films I've liked in a long, long time. *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* is now playing at Cinema World and Cinemark. Highest recommendations. **EW**



Willy Wonka (Johnny Depp), Charlie Bucket (Freddy Highmore) and Uncle Joe (David Kelly) cruising down a river of chocolate on a magenta candy seahorse powered by Oompa-Loompas.

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