



Animated Disney+ feature considers how a soul becomes a 'Soul'

We've all imagined what a human soul might look like. But Disney+ makes it the centerpiece of a storyline in an animated film that begins streaming Christmas Day, Friday, Dec. 25.

In "Soul," we are introduced to Joe Gardner (voice of Jamie Foxx, "Ray"), a middle-school band teacher with a passion for jazz, who falls through a manhole in the middle of New York City and into The Great Before, a fantastical place where new souls get their quirks, personalities and interests before they head off to their human incarnations.

There he meets up with 22 (voice of Tina Fey, "30 Rock"), a precocious soul who never understood the allure of the human experience. As Joe tries to show 22 that life as a living, breathing person has its upsides, he sets off on a journey that may help him answer some of life's more important questions.

The film was directed by Oscar winner Pete Docter ("Up," "Inside Out"), who years ago became fascinated with his own infant son's apparent personality and soul at birth. More than 23 years later, he turned that into a story when he began questioning his own life path.

"(It) just inspired him to think about his kids," explains Dana Murray, the film's producer, "like his son when he was born, just (how) he showed up with so much personality on day one. And how is that? Where does that come from? And so really just those two things really inspired the spark, really, for the idea."

As for portraying the soul itself, Murray and the team at Pixar Animation Studios did plenty of research, talking to a wide range of spiritual people, including priests, pastors, Buddhists and Shamans to get their take on how a soul might appear.

"And across the board," Murray says, "it was very, very similar in how people described it: ethereal, vaporous, no form. And so we were like, 'Oh, well how are we going to portray that on a screen? We need something.' But we didn't want it to be ghostlike, like Casper the ghost."

"So from that research, we just started our character artists down a path of exploring and they went down all kinds of crazy routes and we went back to a drawing that Pete had done at the very beginning. Super simple, of just like that light bulb shape."

Indeed, this is prime Christmas Day viewing for the family. Murray thinks it has something for everyone.

"I feel like after 2020 and just the year I think the world has had ... often the holidays can be a time of reflection," she says. "And so I'm hoping people can walk away from the film wanting to just take a look at their own lives and think about: Are they spending the limited time they have on Earth wisely and what would they change? And just to be kind of grateful for what they have around them. But I feel like there are a lot of themes in the movie that it's just interesting, I hope everyone walks away feeling something different."

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