

children were the runners, bringing cups to the line to be filled, to Allashua to be emptied, then around the bed and back to the line of tea, racing giddily in their circle of tea delivery, pushed on by Allashua's squeals, shouts of delight and cries for "more sugar, Alex!"

A few aspects of the production were disappointing: Glenn Roy was a rather mechanical, low-energy Father, the sound effects and music sometimes threatened to obscure actors' voices, and the audience sat through a very long bout of storytelling by Kusugak before the play began. Kusugak is a storyteller, not a performer. He would be appreciated and entertaining in a small room with a fireplace and an audience of about ten people, but his skill was dwarfed by the stage and rows of seating. His stories were wonderful, giving context and culture to the performance, but they went on for longer than even my attention span could bear. When he began yet another story, having been on stage for quite some time, a child in front of me turned to her friend and asked despairingly, "he's gonna talk more?" Despite these few shortcomings, the production was, overall, very well done. The story came alive on the stage in a wondrous interplay of rhythm, narrative, song, dialogue, slapstick, dance and traditional Inuit chants, all laced with a great sense of fun.

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Giant Peach or Big Apple?

James and the Giant Peach. Directed by Henry Selick and Produced by Denise di Novi and Tim Burton. Allied Film Makers. 1995.

This lively screen adaptation of Roald Dahl's popular children's story might give you the sneaking suspicion that the tale itself has followed the "path of the peach" — from Britain to America. Yet unlike the giant peach, which tastes the same on both sides of the Atlantic, this tale has changed its flavour to appeal to an American palate.

Those familiar with Dahl's story will find much of the movie familiar ground. Yet while the book and the movie never seem as dissimilar as apples and oranges, they do invite another comparison — between the Giant Peach and the Big Apple. Randy Newman, who converts Dahl's verse into the film's best song, also adds pieces of his own, most of which praise New York as the city of limitless opportunity. The fantastic journey across the Atlantic becomes another version of the familiar yellow-brick road to the magical city, and this film provides a host of interesting fellow-travellers: a swaggering centipede, a musical Grasshopper, a cowardly worm, a Greta Garbo-like spider who prefers "to be alone," a prim but feisty ladybug, and a Victorian glowworm, who arrives in America exclaiming "God bless the colonies."

On its own terms, this film tells a powerful tale of populism, teamwork, and, at times, unrestricted delight. Like *The Wizard of Oz's* travellers, James and

his friends find that the journey itself brings the happiness and community they seek. The travellers, in turn, transform New York, allowing all children — regardless of race, class, or gender—to come to the peach, free from the charges of exploiters or the restraints of proprietors.

The populist message, however, brings mixed blessings. Sometimes it crafts interesting foes, such as James's exploitative aunts, or a harpoon-spitting mechanical shark, which pollutes the sea and threatens to suck everything into its consuming jaws. On the other hand, the emphasis on New York creates the film's duller moments, probably because the journey is more enjoyable than reminders of its destination. The clichéd praise of New York withers beside the sharp, cliché-cutting lines of characters like Miss Spider, whose deadpan one-liner, "my life hangs by a thread every day," will make even an adult laugh. Similarly, the three-dimensional effects of stop-motion animation and the striking color of the sea journey make the long-awaited city lights a disappointment. Enjoying the grasshopper's violin solo, played against a full moon, any viewer can enjoy the journey itself, without ever wondering "When will we get to New York?"

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101 Dalmatians (1996)

101 Dalmatians. Directed by Stephen Herek; written and produced by John Hughes Disney Enterprises/ Walt Disney Pictures/ Buena Vista.

Disney's animated version of Dodie Smith's book was a commercial success upon its original release in 1961, and subsequently has been a favourite with younger viewers since its release several years ago for the home video market. Clearly the corporate aim with this new live-action version is to cash in on the property yet again (the intertextual reference to Disney's earlier *Snow White*, when Cruella gazes at her reflection and asks, "Mirror, mirror, on the wall ..." is hardly unintentional). The only changes to the narrative in this newer version are superficial, or demanded by the differences between live-action and animation. So instead of composing songs, Roger now designs video games (watch for product tie-in coming soon!). Given its solid endorsement of traditional values in the manner of its predecessor, the new *101 Dalmatians* has been one of the biggest Hollywood family films of this recent Christmas season.

The story is rather simple, and has all the ingredients — love interest, broadly defined villains, cuddly animals, and adventure — to appeal to all children. The film's depiction of London invokes the nostalgic appeal of *Mary Poppins* even as it nods to the contemporary. The comforting notion of interspecies communication and cooperation, demonstrated when various barnyard animals assist the dogs in their escape, suggests a harmonious and beneficent nature that is sure to assuage any young child's anxiety about the possible absurdity of the universe.

Certainly the spotted quadrupeds are the star attraction. They perform well and do all the nifty tricks we expect of them. Viewers both young and old are