

# Movie Review: ‘Ferdinand’

NEW YORK — Generations of children have fallen in love with the peace-loving protagonist of Munro Leaf and Robert Lawson’s 1936 classic “The Story of Ferdinand.”

Now that amiable bull, who was featured in an Academy Award-winning 1938 short from Walt Disney, gets his first full-length screen outing with “Ferdinand” (Fox), a pleasing piece of animation in which he’s voiced by wrestler-turned-actor John Cena.

The book is a brief one, so it’s not surprising that the film’s plot feels somewhat padded. But good values go a long way in masking this defect and in maintaining a receptive mood among viewers.

Escaping the confines of the stable in which he and other bulls are prepared for their fateful confrontation with a matador, and where his preference for smelling flowers rather than locking horns makes him a bullied misfit, Ferdinand is adopted as a pet by an affectionate little girl named Nina (voiced at different ages by Julia Saldanha and Lily Day).

All goes well until a misunderstanding interrupts Ferdinand’s idyllic existence and sets him back on the path to the bullring — where his commitment to nonviolence will be put to the ultimate test.

To turn this easily summarized story into a more than 90-minute movie, screenwriters Robert L. Baird, Tim Federle and Brad Copeland introduce a variety of lively secondary characters. The most prominent of these is Lupe (voiced by Kate McKinnon), the slightly pixilated goat who volunteers to serve as Ferdinand’s coach as, once back in captivity, he reluctantly trains to face down famed bullfighter El Primero.

Charming pastoral landscapes and such colorful sights as a flower festival also strengthen director Carlos Saldanha’s picture. But what moviegoers who base their ethics on the Gospel, and parents in particular, will find most congenial is the central theme, which exalts tranquility over needless conflict.

That solid foundation will make this fable an appealing one to children who may be facing peer pressure or intimidation themselves. It also outweighs some fleeting elements Catholic viewers might find dubious, such as a comic but not fundamentally disrespectful portrayal of a group of nuns much given to blessing themselves when surprised or alarmed.

Easily frightened tots may not appreciate the dangers Ferdinand faces during his quest to be true to himself. These include a trip on a slaughterhouse conveyer belt. Ferdinand also discovers that humans always prevail in the bullring — with fatal consequences for the animals placed there.

The potty humor so common in kids' movies, on the other hand, is virtually absent here. And, on the whole "Ferdinand" provides appropriate — and morally enriching — entertainment for a broad spectrum of age groups.

The film contains scenes of peril, some mildly irreverent humor, a vague scatological reference and one slightly crass expression. The Catholic News Service classification is A-I — general patronage. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG — parental guidance suggested. Some material may not be suitable for children.

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