Bee Movie


Date of review: Thursday 6th December, 2007

Director: Steve Hickner and Simon Smith
Duration: 87 minutes
Classification: G
We rate it: 2 and a half stars.

It’s very clear that the Christmas holidays are on their way: we’ve got the first of the season’s family films, here in the shape of the “computer-animated comedy voiced by Hollywood royalty” - Bee Movie. The film has been co-written, produced and graced with a central vocal performance by Jerry Seinfeld, the man who made a genuine fortune as star of his own legendary sitcom and who has been far from the limelight for quite some time.

Seinfeld was clearly the primary creative force behind this production, and one can see numerous aspects of his personal stamp in the finished film. As it was for Seinfeld’s sitcom, the setting for Bee Movie is New York City (and though much of the action takes place within numerous bee hives, the “wider world” is the world of New York); many of the characters are of the “workaday schmuck” type that peopled Seinfeld, and the film’s humour is as strongly based on the quirks of interpersonal communication as was the TV show. There is much that makes Bee Movie its own, however; much script-time is spent making puns on bee behaviour and lifestyle, and the story, such as it is, takes in both career frustration and a David vs. Goliath story of worker exploitation.

The plot of Bee Movie is very simple: our hero, Barry B. Benson (Seinfeld) comes of age as a bee and finds his future all mapped out for him – he’s to join the rest of his relatives and friends as a simple worker bee, spending the rest of his short life engaged in the seemingly thankless task of keeping the hive functioning and producing honey. This prospect doesn’t exactly thrill him, so he sneaks out of the hive and heads into the Big Apple: there he finds danger, excitement, and a young woman, Vanessa (Zellweger) who helps him learn, as the saying goes, about life and love.

While much of Bee Movie is quite charming and amusing (though the endless puns built around the word “bee” do wear thin) there’s a strong air of seen-it-before about...
this film. Coming as it does from the Dreamworks stable, Bee Movie struggles to match up to the inspired output of the Pixar studio, which is, for my money, the outfit that put this kind of film on the map with major successes like Toy Story, A Bug’s Life and The Incredibles. The writing in those films was so strong that it made even the exquisite computer animation take second place to the narratives; with Bee Movie though the story and dialogue never rise to the heights that the Pixar movies routinely inhabit. There’s inoffensive charm here, indeed, but if you want a CGI extravaganza to really knock the socks off the whole family, my tip is to re-watch the Pixar back-catalogue. Those films never cease to astonish.

Nick Prescott