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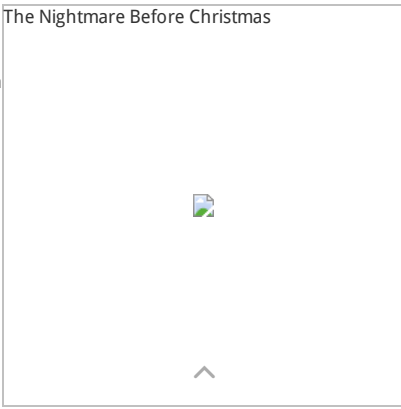
FIVE REASONS THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS REMAINS A CLASSIC

Posted by: Amanda Stonebarger October 9, 2011 in Film



For nearly two decades of my life, I've been fascinated with the world of the 1993 stop-motion animated film The Nightmare Before Christmas. In it, Jack Skellington, the Pumpkin King of Halloweentown, has become bored with the mundane routine of annual scare tactics. On a restless stroll through the forest, he discovers doors to other holidays and accidentally finds himself in the magical land of Christmastown. Utterly mesmerized by its merriment, Jack becomes determined to hold his own Christmas that year.

Borne from the twisted mind of Tim Burton, inspiration first came as he watched a retail store employee change a window display from Halloween to Christmas. Burton then wrote a poem entitled "The Nightmare Before Christmas," which eventually became the blueprint for the film. Scheduling conflicts prevented Burton from directing the film himself, so he took the mantle of producer and handed the reins to Henry Selick, who helped create a wonderful holiday film.



Since its original release in 1993, The Nightmare Before Christmas has grossed over \$75 million, enjoyed several re-releases in theaters, inspired a trading card game, made millions in merchandise sales, and was even recently reissued on Blu-Ray 3D in August, 2011. What is it about a 76-minute animated film that creates such an insatiable demand? I can see five overriding reasons.

1. Danny Elfman's Incredible Music

The Nightmare Before Christmas is as much composer Danny Elfman's film as it is Burton's or Selick's. A four-time Oscar-nominee, Elfman wrote the music and lyrics for the film and even provides the singing voice for Jack. While the film was still just a concept and storyboards, he had written the ten songs before screenwriter Caroline Thompson had been hired. Scenes were then written around the music.

Elfman's poetic lyrics propel the story forward while a full, lively orchestra enhances Jack's adventure. Mournful violins complement the despair heard in "Jack's Lament," bluesy horns intensify the jazz swagger of "Oogie Boogie's Song," and jaunty beats reflect the sensory overload of "What's This?" Somehow haunting, grandiose, and merry all at the same time, Elfman's score guides the audience through the foggy forest between Halloweentown and Christmastown.

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The music of The Nightmare Before Christmas has become so popular that it has spurred many quality covers from a wide variety of musical artists. A 2006 special edition soundtrack includes bonus tracks from Fiona Apple, Fall Out Boy, She Wants Revenge and Panic! at the Disco. In 2008, Walt Disney Records issued Nightmare Revisited, an all-cover album with contributions by Marilyn Manson, The All-American Rejects, Amy Lee, Korn, Flyleaf, Plain White T's, and more. Even as recently as 2010, alternative singer-songwriter LiLi Roquelin recorded a French version of "Sally's Song" for her album Will You Hate the Rest of the World or Will You Renew Your Life? With all of these assorted interpretations, Elfman's lyrics still shine through and prove how universal the music's message is.

2. Two Holidays in One

This is a Halloween movie. No, it's a Christmas movie. Stop—you're both right. Not only is The Nightmare Before Christmas so chock full of spirit that it spreads to more than one holiday, but it employs the most opposite of holidays—Halloween and Christmas. Where Halloweentown is dark, dank, and decayed in an almost charming sort of way, Christmastown is brightly warm, cloaked with fluffy white snow, and modeled after Dr. Seuss' quintessential winter destination, Whoville. The twining of these contradictory celebrations proves semi-disastrous for the characters, but is delightful for the viewer.

In addition, the Halloween/Christmas conflict lends itself to October and December screenings for those who are seasonal movie-watchers. An Easter Bunny cameo may even justify watching it in the spring. Plus, if you subscribe to the idea of "Christmas in July," that would add summer. You can basically defend watching The Nightmare Before Christmas year-round.

3. The Beauty of Stop-Motion Animation

Painstaking, intricate, and detailed, the process of producing a stop-motion film is slow and exhaustive. Filmmakers must create an entire world from scratch and physically manipulate it to capture each and every frame. Seconds of screen time can take hours to shoot. When done well, though, the style pays off exponentially, as it does in The Nightmare Before Christmas.

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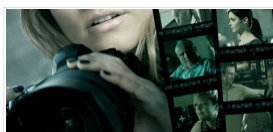
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Amanda Stonebarger • 3 years ago

Thank you so much! I hope they re-release it around here soon. It would be great to see it on the big screen again.

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El Bicho • 3 years ago

Great piece, Amanda. It's going to be out in 4D this holiday season, at least at the El Capitan in Hollywood

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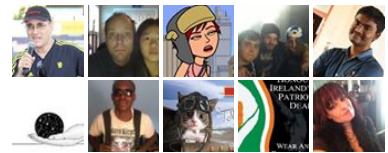
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