{phocagallery view=category|categoryid=58|imageid=367|displayname=0|float=left}By PATRICK HALL
The Wilson Post

After a stint on vacation, I caught “Brave” in our local theater over the weekend, which despite some laughs, the movie presents more of the same: misunderstood princess, overbearing royal mother, witless father and their path to realizing each other’s true worth.

Directed by **Mark Andrews**, **Brenda Chapman** and **Steve Purcell**, the latest release from animating juggernaut Pixar, “Brave” is the story of Princess Merida, voiced by **Kelly MacDonald**, as she struggles with being a princess and her mother, Queen Elinor, voiced by **Emma Thompson**.

When Merida is informed she is to be married to the eldest son from one of the other three clans, she of course, hates the idea of an arranged marriage and runs away, finding “help” from a witch (**Julie Walters**) who gives her a magic cake to change her mother’s mind.

Of course, Merida gets far more than she bargains for and for spoiler’s sake I won’t tell you what happens to her mother. But, the mother-daughter pair finds themselves alone in the woods, discovering more about one another and coming to appreciate one another.

But that’s where “Brave” just feels like you’ve seen or heard this all before. In most films involving a princess where there isn’t a character named “Prince Charming,” you can bet the princess hates her life that requires she marry a man she doesn’t love and just wants to make her own way in life. (Understandable)

With her is a bossy mom who tells her “don’t put your weapons on the table,” “don’t stuff your face,” “don’t slouch,” and so on and so forth. Unfortunately for “Brave,” Merida’s father, King

Fergus (**Billy Connolly**) is just a goofball that is never capable of showing backbone, except in defending his family from a “demon bear.”

Of course, Fergus is a great buddy for Merida, giving her a bow and arrow at an early age, which she becomes very talented with as she grows up. They make fun of potential suitors, but he’s never shown doing any real parenting. He’s just a stereotypical strongman who is loud, depicted at times as a not-so-smart buffoon who doesn’t listen to anyone.

You could say the same about Elinor, who never listens to her daughter, only tries to talk over her and obviously more serious than her husband. At the heart of this family is the fact that no one listens to anyone.

There are plenty of laughs to be had, from the antics of Merida’s three little brothers who exist to be plot devices or just agents of chaos and comedic relief. They are good at the job, though.

For me, the highlight of the story is the Witch, who is never given a name and doesn’t appear all that evil. She’s first shown being a woodcarver, a weird and funny one at that, with a broom that sweeps when no one is holding it and a talking crow.

When Merida asks for something “to change her fate” she really just wants to change her mother, whom I can see how a child would make the assumption that the only way to change my life is to change my parents.

The Witch “bakes” her a small cake for her mother to eat that will change her, and it sure does work, but not in the way Merida hopes. Of course, over time, it does work because through the big mishap, both Merida and Elinor realize their faults and appreciate one another.

Elinor gives in on controlling her daughter’s life and bucks tradition, while Merida realizes her parents are looking out for her best interest and her mother always loves her.

Whether the kids in the audience can grasp the message is debatable, like most Pixar movies, they are filled with goofy moments to entertain the youngest audience members, a moral lesson to pitch to the not-so-young and usually some deep theme to keep the parents entertained.

I don’t know if I can see a Pixar movie ever again without comparing it to the absolute brilliance of 2009’s “Up,” and unfortunately “Brave” isn’t really a courageous attempt to tell a new story, or even the same story in a bold new way.

Of course, parents have to be brave enough to let children decide their own path in life, after spending years prepping them for that eventuality. Children must be brave enough to take the step off the path that may have been laid for them in order to find their own way in life.

Unfortunately, I’ve seen these characters too many times in the past, just with different names.

On another note...

Prior to the film, Pixar showed a short called “La Luna” that I may have enjoyed more than “Brave” itself. A little boy, his father and grandfather row out to the middle of the ocean in a small rowboat.

The grandfather, with his long gray beard and the father, with his strong, straight mustache, give the boy a newsboy hat, like the one they each wear. They argue over which way the boy should wear it, mimicking the style of his father or his grandfather.

They’re charged with sweeping up shining little stars off the moon, the father using a push broom and the grandfather an old straw broom. They try to get the boy to use their respective brooms.

Of course, the boy looks up to the men, loves them and their company, but maybe doesn’t want to emulate one at the expense of the other. It’s a fitting short to include before “Brave” and

clutches the heart of the full-length film with greater success and more creativity than “Brave.”

I loved the short.

‘Brave’ is rated ‘G’ and is currently playing in all local theaters with a runtime of 93 minutes.

Staff Writer Patrick Hall may be contacted at phall@wilsonpost.com.