

Happy Feet Two: An Incoherent Mishmash of Pop Culture, Child Peril and Eco-Fear Mongering

P. Donohue Shortridge

November, 2011

I went to see *Happy Feet Two* so you don't have to.

First, a sidebar rant on the experience of going to the "child-oriented" movies: Even before the coming attractions, we are bombarded by a swirling, loud blur of advertisements for:

The movie, *The Lorax*

The movie, *Smurfs in New York*

Barbie

Disneyland (don't wait too long to make those memories)

Leap Pad (so you don't even have to use a pencil)

Gap Kids, I Want Candy

Nike

Sprint

Leap Frog Tag Reading System

Happy Feet Two honors the 7-second imperative of maximum sustain in one shot. We zoom through this movie.

Cartoon Network preview of *Level Up*

Chevrolet

Skylanders video game (if your preschooler wasn't in your lap before viewing this trailer, she will be by the end of it)

Coke Zero – *Mission Impossible Ghost Protocol*

World Wildlife Fund and Coke Zero (in the white can) so you can donate to save the polar bears

All the above flashing before our eyes and screaming into our ears in a scant 15 minutes.

I'm not going to do a blow-by-blow account of this movie, mostly because I was confused and bored within ten minutes and I don't want to inflict that on you, but I do want to highlight a few items:

Just like in the original *Happy Feet*, there is a constant theme of child terror.

The movie opens with ominous music and a scene of melting ice-caps. The voice-over warns us that "everything, no matter how big or small is connected in ways we never expected."

Happy Feet Two then moves quickly (*OK, if I were to tell you about every time HF2 "quickly moves" from scene to scene, there would be no room left to talk about anything else. Suffice it to say that Happy Feet Two honors the 7-second imperative of maximum sustain in one shot. We zoom through this movie.*) Anyway, after the ominous warning in the opening shot, *HF2* segues into a rap song and dance routine that if we work together we can build a better nation, as the penguins dance in the melting ice.

The rest of the movie incoherently jumps from a) impending group armageddon due to global warming – the ice caps keep breaking apart trapping the happy hoofers in a cavern without food, to b) family drama – dad feels inadequate as a dad and says so in front of his young child, "So much for my daddy skills", to c) attempts at self-actualization of the toddler penguin, "If I will it, it will happen". And finally just like in the original *Happy Feet*, there is the constant theme of child terror at the prospect of getting lost; also of separation from a parent because parent is in peril; and that most terrifying one, fear that parent is dead.

Technically, the images, voice-overs and soundtrack are overwhelming for any young child. There are a lot of

fast-paced swirling images, scenes of innocent creatures getting sucked into a vortex or a predator's mouth and swimming for one's life. The toddler penguin is cute and shows a lot of apprehension and fear in his face with soundtrack to match the heightened emotions.

The eco-fear mongering scenes run throughout the length of *HF2*:

- grass grows at the top of the ice caps;
- there's the oil tanker explosion and fire with innocent creatures having to swim in the oil-slick waters,
- the stalactites are melting
- dancing in melting ice
- and the caving in of the ice cap trapping the entire Penguin colony – they can't get out and are about to starve

The pop-culture references are also everywhere in the movie:

Mom says to toddler penguin "When your daddy digs a big hole, he has to learn to stop digging." And "I think your daddy needs to be alone right now."

Other dialog includes:

"I'm sorry I've lost my mojo."

"If you will it, it will happen."

"We could create our own swarm." "We can't, we're both males."

"I think we should split up." "Is it your personal space you need?"

"I hate this long distance relationship."

"Nothing makes sense in this world."

"I feel a stalker vibe coming on."

"Dancing is a momentary release from the existential terror of existence."

In sum, I would again advise not to take any child under the age of six to this movie. The two preschoolers I saw in the theater were sitting in a parent's lap within 10

I would advise not to take any child under the age of 6 to this movie.

minutes. For children 6-12, I would ask myself why am I taking my child to this movie? Do I want him or her to be exposed to so much pop culture and does this movie align with my values on family life and global warming? And finally, it is really boring and incoherent. The tween girl sitting in front of me was wiggling in her seat and then texting halfway through the movie. The only people in the theater that seemed to be enjoying themselves were two middle-age women behind me who giggled at every pop culture reference especially those mouthed by Brad Pitt and Robin Williams. The rest of us couldn't wait till it was over.

Donohue Shortridge, a Montessorian since 1980 speaks and writes on topics related to children and their families in the American culture. Visit her at www.pdonohueshortridge.com

P. Donohue Shortridge

fostering the authentic life of children and their families in the American culture