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SURFING THE WAVES OF POPULAR CULTURE
BY MICHAEL GILTZ & FRIENDS

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Happy Feet -- The Review

I'm glad George Miller's "Happy Feet" is a huge smash. As I've said before, he's one of my favorite directors working today. But having seen it over the holiday weekend, I have to admit I'm rather disappointed. This is Miller's first movie in many years that won't make my Best of the Year list. ("The Road Warrior," "Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome," "Babe" -- which he produced but did not direct -- "Lorenzo's Oil" and "Babe: Pig In The City" all did and the original "Mad Max" probably would have too if I'd seen its original version instead of the dubbed US take on it.) In it, penguins are shown singing pop songs -- each one has a heart song that will attract one other penguin. So we get everything from Prince's "Kiss" to a Spanish language version of "My Way." Our misfit hero sticks out because he can't sing worth a lick but loves to dance, something penguins just don't do. Plus, the supply of fish is running out for some mysterious reason....

"Happy Feet" is technically dazzling: Miller used camera moves rarely seen in animated films, his motion-capturing of dancer Savion Glover to depict our hero's dance moves is top-notch and there are some fun action scenes. It's a fine film well worth taking the kids too. But what bothered me was the film's creative randomness. All the clever touches -- the pop songs, the idea that each penguin has their own particular tune, the characterizations of Happy Feet's mom and dad as Marilyn Monroe and Elvis sound-alikes -- were haphazard and not thought through.

Take the parents. For no particular reason, they use the voices of Fifties icons. It doesn't affect their characters in the least as far as how they behave. And why are they the only ones to mimic stars? If the movie wanted to be consistent, all the other adults could have been Fifties icons too, from Bogie to Bobby Darin to James Dean. And that could have solved the movie's other random problem -- the songs. If the adults consistently favored early rock n roll like Elvis and Bobby Darin

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