‘Wildwood’ loses money but wins hearts

By K. FAE HULL
Staff Writer

In a world populated by computer-generated imagery, Laika Studio’s newest stop-motion film “Wildwood” was highly anticipated. It was 16 years in the making, being the largest-scale stop-motion production ever made. The film’s runtime is 132 minutes, the longest runtime of any stop-motion film, and it utilizes 231 puppets and 130 sets.

Wildwood debuted the weekend before Halloween with 99% on Rotten Tomatoes, an 8.7 on IMDb and became the sixth highest-rated film on Letterboxd this year. While those statistics are impressive, the amount of soul poured into the film is even more so.



ILLUSTRATION BY AVA STANGO

“Wildwood” is a dark fantasy PG-13 film based on the novel by the same name written by singer-songwriter Colin Meloy and illustrated by his wife, Carson Ellis. It is a common complaint that moviegoers miss seeing original stories in theaters. More often than not, large production companies have been rehashing older intellectual properties and creating sequels and spin-offs.

Animator and senior film, television and media major student at Quinnipiac University Molloy Rubin mentions a tiredness with the lack of original stories in theaters.

“I think that’s just really unfortunate, because Marvel movies, even if they’re not good, they're gonna make a profit,” Rubin said. “One-off fantasy films like this one aren’t gonna get much love.”

Rubin noted leaving the theater feeling different after watching “Wildwood.”

“I came out of the theater, and then it wouldn’t leave my mind for days, and so I went back to see it, back to theaters to see it again,” Rubin said. “Very, very quickly after.”

Many also appreciated the sound and visuals as well.

“It was probably my favorite movie of the year,” graduate film, television and media major and former president of the Quinnipiac Film Society Josh Brazinski said. “It was gorgeous, breathtaking in regards to sound and scale. Visually, just a feast for the eyes and a warm bowl of soup for the soul.”

Rubin mentioned that the scale was especially impressive to them, both in time and in size. They note the unusual frame rate of the film.

“It’s a full 24 frames per second. Which most animation, even hand-drawn animation, doesn’t do. And so it was really smooth,” Rubin said.

In relation to the physical scale, Rubin references two characters and their remarkable size difference.

“The smallest character is a little rat, and her model was probably, maybe as big as my hand, but it was probably smaller,” Rubin said about Septima, the rat voiced by actress Awkwafina.

“Then one of their biggest models for an actual character was probably half the size of me,” they said, commenting on the General, an eagle voiced by actress Angela Bassett. “I watched a lot of background stuff for the movie—and they had to make three separate models for the General. For different things. And they made it fully poseable, and thousands of handcrafted feathers.”

One of the more unexpected effects of the movie was its ability to bring viewers to tears, not just because of emotional scenes, but because of its display of pure craftsmanship.

“I am not entirely sure I would say I’ve cried at the artistry of something or just how beautiful something was, which this movie did do to me,” Rubin said, and then noted a particular scene that brought them to tears. “It was just the general flying around with Prue on her back, and you see just the whole setting below them and they’re just flying through the woods. And I thought that was—I started crying during that.”

Brazinski says he had cried at a film’s artistry before, but “Wildwood” was a unique example.

“I feel like Wildwood is a special case where I can understand a clear distinction in what I’m crying about, because it’s just so detailed, and you can tell the passion and meticulous time that went into the creation of this specific scene or moment, compared to crying because it is emotionally impactful,” Brazinski said. “I think both contributed to how moved I was.”

Laika has not made any profits with their movies since their release of “Coraline” in 2009. “Wildwood” doesn’t seem much different; with a reported $100 million budget, the film has only made back $15 million worldwide. Despite this consistent lack of profits, Laika continues to make time-intensive stop-motion projects.

Laika was heavily invested in by Nike co-founder Phil Knight and his son Travis Knight, an animator at Laika. They were heavily involved in the company as a passion project of his.

Both Rubin and Brazinski said something similar to the idea that Laika’s relationship with Nike is one of the few good examples left of the rich funding the arts.

Rubin says they are glad Nike funds Laika, and it benefits everyone, not just the companies.

“But this is one of the few cases, like with the Nike thing, where being a Nepo baby, I guess, is kind of paying off for everybody else,” Rubin said.

Brazinski said that a situation like this is almost unforeseen in the United States.

“I’d make the argument that it’s one of the rare cases in which we could actually see capitalism working,” Brazinski said and noted that it’s rare for money to be used in such a positive way. “Aside from, you know, obviously charity, it’s like, a company as affluent as Nike helping literally handcraft a movie like Wildwood, that is just so good and filled with so much artistic merit.”

Despite the rarity of Laika’s funding, “Wildwood” seems to have genuinely inspired creators to rise against the odds. To quote American poet and painter E. E. Cummings, “To destroy is always the first step in any creation.” In Laika’s case, they destroy their chances at profit, and in return they create a space in our hearts.

Why Harry Kane and Bukayo Saka’s Ballon d’Or night mattered most

By REX NAYLOR
Satff Writer

The 70th annual Ballon d’Or ceremony took place Monday, Oct. 26, in London, with football players coming from all across Europe to attend the ceremony in hopes of hearing their name called for football’s most prestigious award.

However, there was something different about the award this year: Inter Miami forward Lionel Messi and Al-Nassr forward Cristiano Ronaldo weren’t favorites to win.

The two have dominated the award for over a decade, with 13 combined wins. Only two other players have won the award during their dominance.

This year, the award came down to three names: Barcelona winger Lamine Yamal, Real Madrid striker Kylian Mbappé and Bayern Munich striker Harry Kane with Kane the victor.

Out of the three, Kane was the outlier. He was never a highly touted prospect such as Yamal or Mbappé. He was released from the Arsenal academy at just eight years old, and bounced around the lower leagues of England on loan until Tottenham Hotspur finally gave him a chance.

Kane won individual accolades with Tottenham, including three Golden Boots, before he left for Bayern Munich in August 2023. Kane has won two league titles and became the fastest player to 100 goals, as well as the most goals in his first 100 appearances.

Kane’s win seemed to have a larger impact on the worldwide football community, especially online. Months before the ceremony, Kylian Mbappé put out statements campaigning for himself to win the award, something that has never been done before.

This was the first time a candidate had put out what was essentially a public relations statement; despite his efforts, the comments weren’t enough to win over the journalists who vote.

Yamal also made similar statements as the teenager still looks to collect a Ballon d’Or, although he won the Men’s Young Talent of the Year award for the third consecutive time.

Kane’s win is the first for an Englishman since Liverpool striker Michael Owen in 2001, cementing his name in English history as one of, if not the best ever English footballers.

Kane exemplifies perseverance despite setbacks from his youth. Kane had a season that won’t be beaten for years to come, and possibly the best individual season for an Englishman.

In addition to Kane’s award, Arsenal winger Bukayo Saka won the Socrates Award for his off-field contributions involving humanitarian work.

Think of it as the NFL Walter Payton Man of the Year award. Oftentimes, people forget how much impact an athlete can have when they aren’t playing.

Unlike Kane, Saka was treated as a top talent as a teenager, starting for England at the Euros in 2021 at just 19 years old. After the tournament, he was subjected to racial abuse after missing a penalty that ultimately cost England the Euros.

Since then, Saka has become Arsenal’s talisman, and a beacon of positivity despite constant online harassment whenever he steps on the field.

Saka partnered with the BigShoe Foundation to fund over 100 life-changing surgeries for children in Nigeria, his parents’ homeland, suffering from hernias to brain tumours. He also supported emergency housing and shelters for families displaced by earthquakes in Turkey and Morocco in September, 2023.

He donated more than 1,000 school uniforms to four schools in London, including Greenford High School, where he attended, and donated over 100 pairs of football cleats to Street Soccer Academy.

Despite all his great work, TikTok user ajknowsball posted a video reacting and laughing while downplaying Saka’s achievements, calling him a “good yute,” which is the equivalent of a teacher’s pet.

The video sparked intense criticism and backlash, prompting the creator to take the video down not long after.

Sometimes life is bigger than sport; Saka understood and realized this, so he used his platform for good, for what’s right. Both Kane and Saka had historic nights in London for their contributions to the beautiful game and larger-than-life causes.

Both of them show different forms of adversity: one who was overlooked, and the other who was abused. Instead of crumbling, they rose and overcame what stood in their way, and their names are etched in club and football history.



ILLUSTRATION BY CAITLIN MUSSA