

BY DUNCAN H. BROWN

MOVIE REVIEW

Nanny McPhee starring Emma Thompson and Colin Firth

Nanny McPhee is a funny and delightful movie in the English tradition of unruly children confronted by a nanny who aims to tame them.

Cedric Brown (Colin Firth) is a struggling undertaker. He's lost his wife, and is left with seven unruly children who have become ungovernable. The kids make a habit of driving off the various nannies that Brown hires to care for them. The agency that offers nannies locks their door and pulls in the welcome mat when Brown approaches for yet another victim. On top of this, Brown's business is foundering a bit; he's dependent on his Aunt Adelaide for an allowance in order to keep the wolf from the door.

Then Nanny McPhee (Emma Thompson) appears. She didn't come from the nanny agency; the film almost suggests she comes from the heavens a la Mary Poppins. Yet she is very different from Julie Andrews; for one thing, she is very stern; also, she isn't given to singing; for another thing, she's not at all pretty. But the kids will have to learn to put up with her, warts and all.

Nanny McPhee plunges in to the business of teaching the children the lessons they have to learn in order to grow beyond their anger and their fears. She seems to have magic at her beck and call, so that the children can learn in direct fashion the consequences of their actions and their misbehavior.

The movie is quite funny, due in no small part to some great character actors fleshing out the roles of the

daft cook, the housekeeper with the heart of gold, the rapacious woman who wants to marry the undertaker for his money, the slightly loony aunt who wants to take charge of Brown's problems, and so on.

Central to all of this, of course, is Emma Thompson's Nanny McPhee. She manages to imbue McPhee with a lot of heart and a lot of depth in a very quiet and understated way; she doesn't make speeches or rant and rave; she expresses all with a little wink or a mild "Hmph". As the children come to understand what she is, they come to cherish her. Just what she is, the viewer must determine from the clues given.

Should you see this movie? Yes, if you like Emma Thompson. Yes, if you liked Mary Poppins. Yes, if you're ready to be entertained and amused. Emma Thompson also wrote the screenplay for the movie; this is one of those happy occasions when a great actor also turns out to be a great and entertaining writer.

New and Notable on DVD:

Proof, starring Anthony Hopkins and Gwyneth Paltrow. A mathematician's daughter must puzzle out a proof the man was working on when he died. This is a moving family drama.

Just Like Heaven, starring Reese Witherspoon and Mark Ruffalo. A man moves into an apartment, and finds it haunted by the spirit of its last tenant, a workaholic doctor. This is a charming romantic comedy that works in spite of the unbelievable premise.