



FAMILIES

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WONKA

What's it about?

Young Willy Wonka arrives in Europe full of drive and ambition. Despite his having an incredible product, the rival chocolatiers and an unscrupulous laundry owner take advantage of his naivety and kind nature in this musical comedy. If you've ever wondered how Willy Wonka came to be a chocolate impresario then it's all here; from meeting an Oompa Loompa, his flair for the theatrical and a commitment to the cocoa bean.

Director Paul King on 'Wonka'

I was finishing up *Paddington 2*, angling for work as you do and asked producer David Heyman if he had anything else cooking that he thought might be interesting for me. He went, 'I've got two words. It's "young Wonka".'

I was intrigued, because I'd grown up loving *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. It was one of the first proper-length books I read to myself. I had this old copy with the Quentin Blake illustrations that I read so many times the pages fell out the spine. I went back to the book and remembered Willy Wonka and the Oompa-Loompas and the extraordinary colourful characters.

I'd forgotten how incredibly moving it is. It's got this amazing Dickensian story of poor little Charlie Bucket and this terrible, impoverished place where he lives. One of the early chapters is called The Family Begin to Starve, and it's got this really surprisingly gritty edge to it. By the end of 150 pages or whatever it is, when he inherits the Chocolate Factory, I was completely in tears and went, 'Oh, wow! Roald Dahl was doing everything that I've been trying to do with the Paddington stories.' It's got these big, larger-than-life colourful characters, but it's also got a really strong beating heart and a real sense of emotion. That's what made me think maybe this is an area that I could explore and hopefully not mess up too badly.

Our movie's set 25 years before the events of the chocolate factory, and before Willy's retreated from the world and become this reclusive, strange, mysterious figure. For us as writers – I mean my partner Simon [Farnaby] – the key was looking to who he is. In the centre he's almost like a chocolate, because he's got this quite brittle exterior, and you're not quite sure who he is and what his attitude is and why he has invited these people? It's all quite unnerving.

You know Grandpa Joe likes him and Charlie likes him so you've got a suspicion that he'll turn out all right in the end. But then, at the end when he gives Charlie the chocolate factory you realise what he's been doing all along is this extraordinary act of generosity, that it's somebody reaching the end of his career or his life. He talks about that and how what he wants to do is give everything away to a child. We were really intrigued by that spirit of generosity and kindness and thought, 'Well, what does that character feel like before they've had all the kind of slings and arrows of life in the world of big business?'

This character began to come into our heads. One of the first images I had was this guy appearing out of the mist, and you can feel who he's going to be. He's got his top hat, but it's all messy and battered and his boots are leaking and his clothes are tattered. He felt to me like a Charlie Chaplin innocent character, almost like the immigrant tramp figure coming to this world for the first time, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed and completely naive – with this childlike wonder but none of the street smarts that he's going to develop over the next 25 years.

Interview by Lou Thomas, bfi.org.uk, 7 December 2023

Wonka

Directed by: Paul King

Production Company: Warner Bros.

Producers: Alexandra Derbyshire, David Heyman, Luke Kelly

Cast: Nina Gold

Screenplay: Paul King, Simon Farnaby

Based on characters created by: Roald Dahl

Director of Photography: Chung-Hoon Chung

Editor: Mark Everson

Production Designer: Nathan Crowley

Music: Joby Talbot

Cast:

Timothée Chalamet (*Willy Wonka*)

Calah Lane (*Noodle*)

Paterson Joseph (*Slugworth*)

Olivia Colman (*Mrs Scrubbitt*)

Sally Hawkins (*Willy's mother*)

Simon Farnaby (*Basil*)

Matt Lucas (*Prodnose*)

Mathew Baynton (*Fickelgruber*)

Jim Carter (*Abacus Crunch*)

Natasha Rothwell (*Piper Benz*)

Rich Fulcher (*Larry Chucklesworth*)

Colin O'Brien (*young Willy Wonka*)

Rowan Atkinson (*Father Julius*)

Rufus Jones (*Jenkins*)

Hugh Grant (*Oompa Loompa*)

Phil Wang (*Colin*)

Ellie White (*Gwennie, Mistress of the Keys*)

USA-UK-Canada 2023

116 mins

Digital

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