



IN PERSON & PREVIEWS

Guillermo del Toro's Pinocchio

+ Q&A with writer-director Guillermo del Toro

Guillermo del Toro's *Pinocchio*

Directed by: Guillermo del Toro, Mark Gustafson

©: Netflix

a Double Dare You! film

a Shadowmachine production

in association with: The Jim Henson Company

Executive Producer: Jason Lust

Produced by: Guillermo del Toro, Lisa Henson,

Gary Ungar, Alex Bulkley, Corey Campodonico

Script Supervisor: Derek Cohen-Copeland

Casting by: Mary Hildago

Screenplay by: Guillermo del Toro, Patrick McHale

Screen Story by: Guillermo del Toro,

Matthew Robbins

Based on the book *Pinocchio* written by:

Carlo Collodi

Director of Photography: Frank Passingham

Animation Supervisor: Brian Leif Hansen

Edited by: Ken Schretzmann, Holly Klein

Production Design by: Curt Enderle, Guy Davis

Art Director: Robert DeSue

Music by: Alexandre Desplat

Music Supervisor: Steven Gizicki

Sound Design and Supervision:

Scott Martin Gershin

Re-recording Mixers: Jon Taylor, Frank A. Montaño

Voice Cast:

Ewan McGregor (*Cricket*)

David Bradley (*Geppetto*)

Gregory Mann (*Pinocchio and Carlo*)

Burn Gorman (*priest*)

Ron Perlman (*Podesta*)

John Turturro (*Dottore*)

Finn Wolfhard (*Candlewick*)

Cate Blanchett (*Spazzatura*)

Tim Blake Nelson (*black rabbits*)

Christoph Waltz (*Count Volpe*)

Tilda Swinton (*wood sprite and Death*)

Tom Kenny (*Mussolini/right hand man/sea captain*)

USA-Mexico 2022©

116 mins

Digital

This glorious adaptation of Florentine writer Carlo Collodi's 1883 book *The Adventures of Pinocchio* is a striking, often breathtakingly beautiful synthesis of stop-motion animation and virtuoso visual effects. Del Toro and co-writer Patrick McHale bring the timeline of the story forward, to Mussolini's Italy, creating an allegory of a repressive society that ranks alongside the Mexican auteur's Franco-era Spanish dramas *The Devil's Backbone* and *Pan's Labyrinth*. It's a superb achievement. This screening is presented as a tribute to Mark Gustafson.

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Humanity may be made of crooked timber, but in Guillermo del Toro's take on Carlo Collodi's 1883 children's classic, it's the attempt to force us straight that does the damage. Del Toro's errant wooden boy – lovingly conceived and nurtured into the world over most of two decades by the Mexican director, modelled on Gris Grimly's illustrations for a 2002 edition of the book – is a natural free spirit, a born-wild child with stick limbs, a rosette of carved hair, open, unvarnished features and a nose for trouble. Where other characters in the film see a potential model Italian youth, or a ticket to riches, or even a surrogate son, del Toro gives us a puckish innocent driven by curiosity and affection, whose need to become 'real' is an embrace of love, loss and mortality. Around him, the film condenses Collodi's picaresque fable as a helter-skelter tumble through the perils of patriarchy and fascism in a 1930s Italy rife with false idols and warped father figures.

For all the 20-plus film versions of Collodi's story of an animated puppet – including at least four in the last three years, with two of those in as many months – del Toro is right to express surprise (and delight) that none have turned to stop-motion puppet animation for the task. He shares directing credit with Mark Gustafson, the director of animation on Wes Anderson's stop-motion *Fantastic Mr. Fox* (2009); the armature puppets were made by Manchester animation house Mackinnon & Saunders (who also supplied *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, as well as *Tim Burton's Corpse Bride*, 2005, and *Frankenweenie*, 2012); and the animation was performed by Portland's ShadowMachine, with supplementary work by del Toro's Centro Internacional de Animación in Guadalajara. Ambition, cutting-edge skills and a thousand-odd days of shooting have produced a marvellously rich and lively calibre of animation, a soaring interplay of lighting and camerawork and puppetry that raises the bar for the expression of character and action in this style.

What's surprising – though it's perhaps an obvious corollary – is that the switch to stop-motion means that *Pinocchio* really isn't so different to his animated maker and neighbours: they're all the same matter under the surface, though the bare-wood *Pinocchio* doesn't get to hide it. Little wonder, then, that del Toro makes *Pinocchio*'s birth scene rhyme with that of *Frankenstein's* monster, similarly unholy progeny. As with Robert Zemeckis's algorithmically ordained reanimation of Disney's *Pinocchio* starring Tom Hanks (which premiered on Disney+ in September), del Toro's film opens elaborating a back story in which *Pinocchio*'s carpenter father Master Geppetto (David Bradley) is wracked by grief for a real lost son (clear-throated Gregory Mann, who also voices *Pinocchio*), killed in a senseless act of violence at the end of World War I. One stormy night, a sozzled Geppetto lets fly at an oak tree on his grounds,

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SIGHT AND SOUND

IN PERSON & PREVIEWS

**The Pirates! In an Adventure with Scientists!
+ Q&A with director Peter Lord**

Wed 21 Aug 15:30

Peter Lord in Conversation

Wed 21 Aug 18:30

Preview: Kneecap + Q&A with director

**Rich Peppiatt and actors Mo Chara,
Móglai Bap and DJ Próvaí**

Thu 22 Aug 20:20

Preview: Starve Acre + Q&A with director

Daniel Kokotajlo and further guests TBA

Wed 28 Aug 18:10

**S.O.U.L Fest Opening Night: Sing Sing + Q&A
with guests TBA**

Fri 30 Aug 18:00

Doctor Who: The Happiness Patrol + Q&A with

actors Sylvester McCoy, Sophie Aldred, script

editor Andrew Cartmel and director Chris

Clough

Sat 31 Aug 11:30

S.O.U.L. Fest Shorts and Awards

Sat 31 Aug 15:20

S.O.U.L Fest Preview: Mr Loverman + Q&A with

actors Lennie James and Ariyon Bakare, author

Bernardine Evaristo and producer Irma Inniss

Sat 31 Aug 18:30

S.O.U.L Fest UK Premiere: The Lost Holliday +

Q&A with writer-director Jussie Smollett, actor

Vivica A. Fox and executive producer Tressa

Smallwood

Sat 31 Aug 20:45

LAIKA: Frame x Frame

Embark on a journey behind the scenes of LAIKA, one of the world's foremost pioneers in stop-motion animation. This immersive new exhibition will transport you into the boundary-pushing art and science behind every one of the nearly one million meticulously constructed frames that bring each of LAIKA's five groundbreaking feature films to life. Opens Mon 12 Aug

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dragging its trunk into his workshop for some angry woodwork before collapsing asleep, whereupon, in one of the film's looser bits of exposition, floaty-eyed spirits coalesce into the blue-fairy Wood Sprite to give the boy life. (This being a film about surrogates and doppelgangers, both Sprite and her underworld sister, the griffin-like Angel of Death, are voiced by Tilda Swinton – adding another to her portfolio of double acts to follow *Hail, Caesar!*, 2016; *Okja*, 2017; and *The Eternal Daughter*, 2022.)

The townsfolk are of course suspicious of Geppetto's spirited sprig, though Pinocchio, struck by the church sculpture of a wooden Jesus on his cross, innocently wonders 'why people love him and not me' – a succinct shot/countershot beautifully crystallising del Toro's lapsed Catholicism. But a larger-looming authority figure is the local blackshirt, Podesta (Ron Perlman), who admires Pinocchio's 'good Italian wood' and insists he be sent to school to learn discipline; Pinocchio's later truancy, however, raises a red flag: he may be a 'dissident – an independent thinker'. One of del Toro's masterstrokes is to translate Collodi's boy-trapping Land of Toys ('Pleasure Island' in the Disney adaptation) into a fascist paintball bootcamp – no donkey metaphors required – where no sooner have Pinocchio and Podesta's put-upon son Candlewick made common cause than they are forced into gladiatorial combat.

Disney's original 1940 *Pinocchio* emerged in a world sliding into political savagery and horror. Del Toro's (like Zemeckis's, and Matteo Garrone's 2019 prosthetic-effects version) arrives in an era of rekindled grievance and chauvinism, one in which aspiring tyrants incant lies and the previous president of the US fibbed so incontinently the *Washington Post's* Fact Checker felt compelled to invent a 'Bottomless Pinocchio' rating. Facing such adult wickedness, del Toro – conjuring the monsters of European fascism a third time after the Spanish-set *The Devil's Backbone* (2001) and *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006) – upends Collodi's instructional moralism, in which it's the wayward Pinocchio who needs civilising restraint. Just twice does Del Toro's Pinocchio find his tell-tale nose growing (and not straight but branching at all angles; it has to be chopped back down, like del Toro's Hellboy shaving his horns): the first time in a gush of imagination-flexing, the second a moment of creative deliverance, or big white lies. The small-spirited mendacity of the adult world, by contrast, comes to a point in a diminutive role for a banally murderous Benito Mussolini.

Not that the world of art and entertainment is an escape from cruel vanities. Pinocchio's pied piper, Count Volpe (Christoph Waltz) – a combination of three Collodi characters: tyrannical circus master Mangiafuoco and tricksters the Fox and the Cat – proves an impresario of the highest duplicity. (He has his own brutalised underling, the monkey Spazzatura, whose grunts and shrieks are given virtuoso expression by Cate Blanchett.) Ewan McGregor's Sebastian J Cricket, Pinocchio's would-be guardian and biographer, is also prone to pomp and pontification, though as a dapper yet frequently flattened insect he also marks the film's intersection of gothic macabre and cartoon levity – he's del Toro's most garrulous bug, with his own slapstick powers of revival. Down in the underworld, we also meet death's-head mafiosi rabbits; above, in the hazardous Mediterranean, we find the monstrous whale and naval mines on the journey home to true familial love. How the film keeps all these plates spinning is a wonder, but the musical numbers, composed by Alexandre Desplat with lyrics by del Toro, Patrick McHale and Roeban Katz, are nimble and witty. Most of all, the film exudes all the joy it preaches, giving and breathing life into its world, then embracing it, in all its wonky wonder.

Nick Bradshaw, *Sight and Sound*, Winter 2022-23