

'Nutcracker' lacks magic; 'Home Alone' is lively fun

NEW YORK (CNS) — An animated version of E.T.A. Hoffman's fairy tale, "The Nutcracker Prince" (Warner Bros.) uses the music from the classic ballet score by Tchaikovsky.

Finding a nutcracker shaped like a toy soldier under the Christmas tree, Clara (voice of Megan Follows) is told by her uncle (voice of Peter Boretski) that the nutcracker is really young Hans (voice of Kiefer Sutherland), who is under an evil spell and in danger of complete destruction by a wicked rodent, Mouseking (voice of Mike McDonald).

That night Clara tiptoes downstairs to visit the nutcracker and finds Mouseking and his minions intent on finishing off all the toy soldiers. Clara comes to Hans' aid and is herself miniaturized so they can travel to the Land of the Dolls where he is their Prince. Once the Mouseking is vanquished the Prince asks her to become Princess and Clara wonders if she is dreaming or if she really will live happily ever after in the Gingerbread Castle.

This charming children's Christmas story is unfortunately given a flat rendering in this 73-minute animated film from director Paul Schibli's Canadian Lacewood Production. Although the voices are well-

done, including Peter O'Toole and Phyllis Diller in smaller roles, the visuals never come near the majesty of the music. The effort seems uninspired and lacks the necessary fairy-dust sprinkling of humor to lend it magic.

Sound effects are so obvious they call attention to themselves and the pretty backdrops outshine the bland animation of the characters.

Briefly exhilarating is the sequence where they fly together on the backs of swans to the castle and dance a stylized ballet number. But the lifeless dialogue won't hold adult attention for long and the hand-painted animation is a disappointment and doesn't live up to the story or the score.

Although the Mouseking looks very threatening at times, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-I — general patronage. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is G — general audiences.

'Home Alone'

An 8-year-old learns to fend for himself and outwit outlaws in "Home Alone" (20th Century Fox).

Kevin (Macaulay Culkin) is accidentally



Warner Bros. Inc. Uncle Drosselmeier (the voice of Peter Boretski) tells Clara (the voice of Megan Follows) the story of the Nutcracker Prince in the animated fantasy, *The Nutcracker Prince*.

left behind when his large family rushes off for a Christmas flight to Paris. Once they land, Ma (Catherine O'Hara) has little luck booking a speedy return and the phones are on the blink.

Little Kevin meanwhile holds down the fort. When he discovers two thieves (played by Joe Pesci and Daniel Stern) are bent on breaking in, he sets out to convince them that he's not really home alone and easy pickings. The two oafs are initially fooled by the bright lights, party music and



Don Smetzer/Twentieth Century Fox Macaulay Culkin stars as Kevin McCallister, who has to defend his house against a pair of bungling burglars in *Home Alone*.

cardboard cutouts Kevin moves around behind the curtains. Soon however, they are on to him and it's time for more drastic measures.

As Ma inches closer to home Kevin unleashes endless mischief to thwart the bungling burglars.

Writer-producer John Hughes and director Chris Columbus have concocted an amiable but contrived comedy of pranks and pratfalls.

Better not wonder why he doesn't simply go to a friend's home or tell the police what's cooking if you want to enjoy watching him play man of the house.

John Candy is wasted in a cameo role as a polka aficionado who gives Kevin's mom a lift, but the subplot involving a grizzly neighbor (Roberts Blossom) rumored to be a mass murderer — whom Kevin ultimately helps — is touching.

The movie's music and lively pace help matters since the situations are not consistently funny. Young Culkin is an appealing child actor and very resourceful, unlike the incredibly dimwitted crooks he's up against.

Kevin's tricks are not for duplication by little ones, but parents will be pleased by the heartwarming theme about appreciating the value of the family, and the movie makes for pleasant holiday family fare.

Due to minor violence and robbery played for laughs, the USCC classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The MPAA rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

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