

# Wonder Woman: the Amazon Princess Returns

Columbia ★ Star

By Jan Collins

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With the summer blockbuster “Wonder Woman” continuing to smash domestic and overseas box office records, Hollywood may be re-thinking its long-held view that female-led superhero movies are destined to flop.

Indeed, the film about the Amazon princess – with her tiara, sword, shield, and Lasso of Truth – is wildly popular, not only in the United States and Europe but also in China, Mexico, Russia and the United Arab Emirates, countries where it’s not so easy to be a powerful, outspoken woman.

What gives? Well, women have always loved to go to movies, and we have always admired strong, sassy heroines. Think Katharine Hepburn, Barbara Stanwyck, Bette Davis, Rosalind Russell, Helen Mirren, Judi Dench.

In the last decade, though, most American films seem to have been aimed at teenage boys and young men. Lots of action, lots of violence, lots of battle scenes, lots of blood, lots of wars. Now comes “Wonder Woman” – and she wants nothing less than world peace.

As portrayed by Gal Gadot, the radiant Israeli model, actress, and veteran of the Israeli Defense Forces, Diana Prince (a.k.a. Wonder Woman) strides across the screen and swashbuckles with the best of them in this well-executed action movie. But while Superman upholds “truth, justice, and the American way” and Batman is all about avenging his parents’ death, Wonder Woman fights for world peace.

Plus, she is athletic, strong, smart, and fearless. And, she believes in love. Can we shout hurrah?

Many women, according to press accounts, went to see the film with their book clubs or girlfriends. But nearly as many men have been flocking to see the film, too. Still, it’s the young girls, who always need inspirational role models as they grow up, that I’m especially interested in. What do they think of Wonder Woman?

My own decidedly un-scientific survey indicates they are smitten. My granddaughter Ciara Rennicks, who is 14 and lives in Asheville, North Carolina, said that she and her friends found the movie to be extremely uplifting. “At our age, we haven’t done anything yet with our lives,” she explained, “and so it showed us that you can do anything. You can fulfill your dreams.” Ciara, an excellent photographer, hopes one day to work in the film industry, and so the fact that “Wonder Woman” has a first-class female star as well as a female director is icing on the cake, she said.

Catherine Gillam, a rising ninth grader at Dreher High School in Columbia, also 14 years old, declared the film to be “empowering.” Diana “was a princess, and usually princesses are so dainty. But Wonder Woman was certainly NOT dainty, and I loved that.”

How about the younger set? “I wish I was Wonder Woman,” said Sylvie Stucker of Columbia, who is 6 years old and another of my granddaughters. “Then I would be so strong and make big jumps.” (Sylvie, who is a dead ringer for the young actress who portrayed Wonder Woman as a little girl, loved seeing “herself” on screen.)

Then there is this Facebook post from a kindergarten teacher who is said to have sent the following stories to Patty Jenkins, the director of “Wonder Woman”:

One girl in her class, the teacher said, refused to listen unless you addressed her as Wonder Woman. Another girl came to class dressed in costume because “she wanted to be ready to save the world.” Still another group of seven girls playing together at recess said they all wanted to be Wonder Woman. They agreed to be Amazons but not to fight. Instead, they would work together to defeat evil.

Whether or not these kindergarten stories are true or apocryphal, they point up the importance of having strong role models for our young girls. It’s hard to aspire to be something you’ve never seen. The more female doctors and dentists and lawyers and businesspeople and politicians and scientists and engineers and superheroes that young girls see, the better.

Meanwhile, back in Hollywood, will the powers-that-be in La La Land finally start producing more good films starred in and directed by women, which audiences clearly want? If money talks, the answer is yes.

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