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Burton, Depp return to Wonderland

Pair describe their journey together down the rabbit hole

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By Gina Piccalo
For the AJC

Director Tim Burton and actor Johnny Depp's first collaboration was 20 years ago on the surreal fable "Edward Scissorhands." Their latest journey into fantasy land (and seventh collaboration) takes them through the looking glass with a new rendition of "Alice in Wonderland," featuring Depp as the addle-brained Mad Hatter.

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Disney

Johnny Depp, Mia Wasikowska and Anne Hathaway star in "Alice in Wonderland."

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Leah Gallo, Disney Enterprises Inc.

Director Tim Burton on the set of "Alice in Wonderland." In his version

On "Alice in Wonderland," Burton combines live action with trippy computer animation to capture the absurdist realm created by Lewis Carroll in his books. The film opens in theaters Friday on 3-D and regular 2-D screens.

Burton's take on the tale presents Alice (Mia Wasikowska) as a 19-year-old with no memory of her adventures in Wonderland as a little girl. About to become engaged to a dreary aristocrat, Alice runs away, toppling down the rabbit hole again and emerging in the middle of a conflict between the despotic Red Queen (Helena Bonham Carter) and her noble sister, the White Queen (Anne Hathaway).

Q: What made you want to go into the world of "Alice and Wonderland" and in 3-D?

Burton: I have never seen a version I really liked. ... Also, I liked what [screenwriter] Linda [Woolverton] did with the script. She almost did with the script what the imagery does to the reader. It's the story about somebody using this kind of imagery and this kind of world to ... figure out problems and things in their own life. [Determining] what are fantasy and reality and dreams and reality. How they are not separate things.

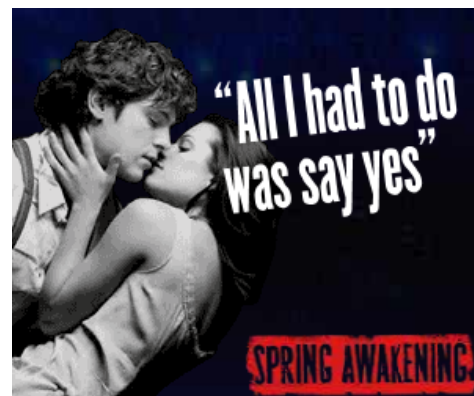
Q: When he came to you and said the Mad Hatter, what was your reaction?

Depp: To be honest, he could have said Alice and I would have played it. I would have done whatever character Tim

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of the Lewis Carroll tale, the title character is 19 years old.

wanted. Certainly, the fact that it was the Mad Hatter was a bonus. It was a great challenge to try to find this guy and not just have [the character] sort of be a rubber ball you heave into an empty room and watch it bounce all over the place. But find that part of the character; build more history or gravity to it.

Q: There's a tragic nature with the Mad Hatter's background that you bring out that we've never seen before.

Depp: There's the whole Hatter's dilemma, really, which was where the term "mad as a hatter" came from [related to] the amount of mercury that they used in the glue to make the hats. It was damaging. In that respect, it was this guy who was literally damaged goods. Physically damaged. Emotionally damaged. A little obtuse. And kind of taking that and deciding that he shouldn't be just this hyper nutty guy. He should explore all sides of the personality. To an

extreme. He would go from one second being very high with a lot of levity, straight into some kind of dangerous rage. And tragedy. It was interesting trying to map it out.

Burton: It being a Disney movie we decided not to focus too much on the mercury poisoning.

Q: How have you seen your professional and personal relationship grow through this story?

Burton: I always loved working with Johnny, from "[Edward] Scissorhands" on. For many reasons. He doesn't like to watch himself, which I love. That makes it a lot easier for me. He's always trying to do something different. It's great when you know somebody and they keep surprising you.

Depp: There's a certain amount of pressure where you go, "Will this be the one where I disappoint him?" I try to come up with something very different that he hasn't experienced before. That we haven't experienced together before.

Q: Of all your characters and films, which ones are your children's favorites?

Depp: "Edward Scissorhands" is by far my kids' favorite. It's funny because they've seen it, but they have a difficult time watching their dad, when they make that connection. They just see something in their dad [portraying] that isolation and that loneliness and that tragic character. And they bawl.

Burton: My kids don't really like my movies. I can't say that. They're too young. Since I don't really know what I do, I can't really describe what I do. So they don't really understand what I do.

The Associated Press contributed to this article.

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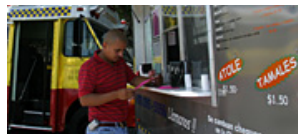
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