

Pink Panther 2

A film review by Rev Dr Steve Taylor

The Pink Panther is back, and the return is welcome. The 1963 original, starring Peter Sellers and made memorable by Henry Mancini's theme music, spawned nine films and a cartoon series.

In recent times Columbia Pictures, along with sister studio Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer have brought the rights. Their challenge is to update without losing either the iconic sound track, or the central characters, namely the bumbling Inspector Clouseau and his beloved diamond, the Pink Panther.

Their initial response was to Americanise, with the casting of Steve Martin as Inspector Clouseau in "The Pink Panther" (2006). And now, with "Pink Panther 2," their second response is to globalise. "Pink Panther 2" opens with high profile thefts from museums and galleries across Europe and Asia. In response, an international detective dream team is formed - including English comedian John Cleese, American Andy Garcia, Japanese, Yuki Matsuzaki and Bollywood star Aishwarya Rai Bachchan - to catch the artfully devious Tornado.

The genre is comedy and into the limelight must once again step Inspector Jacques Clouseau, superbly played by Steve Martin, and offset by his partner, Ponton (Jean Reno). It is a partnership to be applauded, with the shampoo scene simply superb. It is hard to comprehend how much good clean humour two grown men can extract from one shampoo bottle.

The plot takes a while to gather momentum, being delayed by a number of scenes which poke fun at political correctness. This makes good humour for adults, but (while never sexually explicit) does pass over the head of a younger audience, leaving a number of dead patches.

Yet the plot resolution is surprisingly ethical. Ponton, caught between work pressures and family life, makes the decision to place family first. The ending includes justice as the Tornado is captured, humility as the dream team of detectives acknowledge Clouseau's class, and a wedding, as true love waits.

Inspector Clouseau functions as the fool. While not a theme common to contemporary Christianity, it has fascinating roots in the Christian tradition. Paul describes his ministry as that of being a fool for Christ in 1 Corinthians 4:10. Georges Rouault painted Jesus as a clown, Dostoevsky described Jesus as the fool in "The Brothers Karamazov," while the movie "Godspell" portrayed Jesus with red clown shoes, suspenders and Superman T-shirt.

This is not heresy, for John Drane argues in "The McDonaldization of the Church" that the figure of the clown embodies central Christian beliefs about Jesus. The clown is a symbol of joy in the pleasures of the everyday, a symbol of hope who never gives up believing, a symbol of non-conformity who humbles the exalter and exalts the humble.

Good clowning sets worlds of success and failure against each other, in the process providing insight into what is real and meaningful. On that basis, take a bow Inspector Jacques Clouseau and "Pink Panther 2," for amid the humour, a Christ figure subverts many of the values of our media saturated culture.