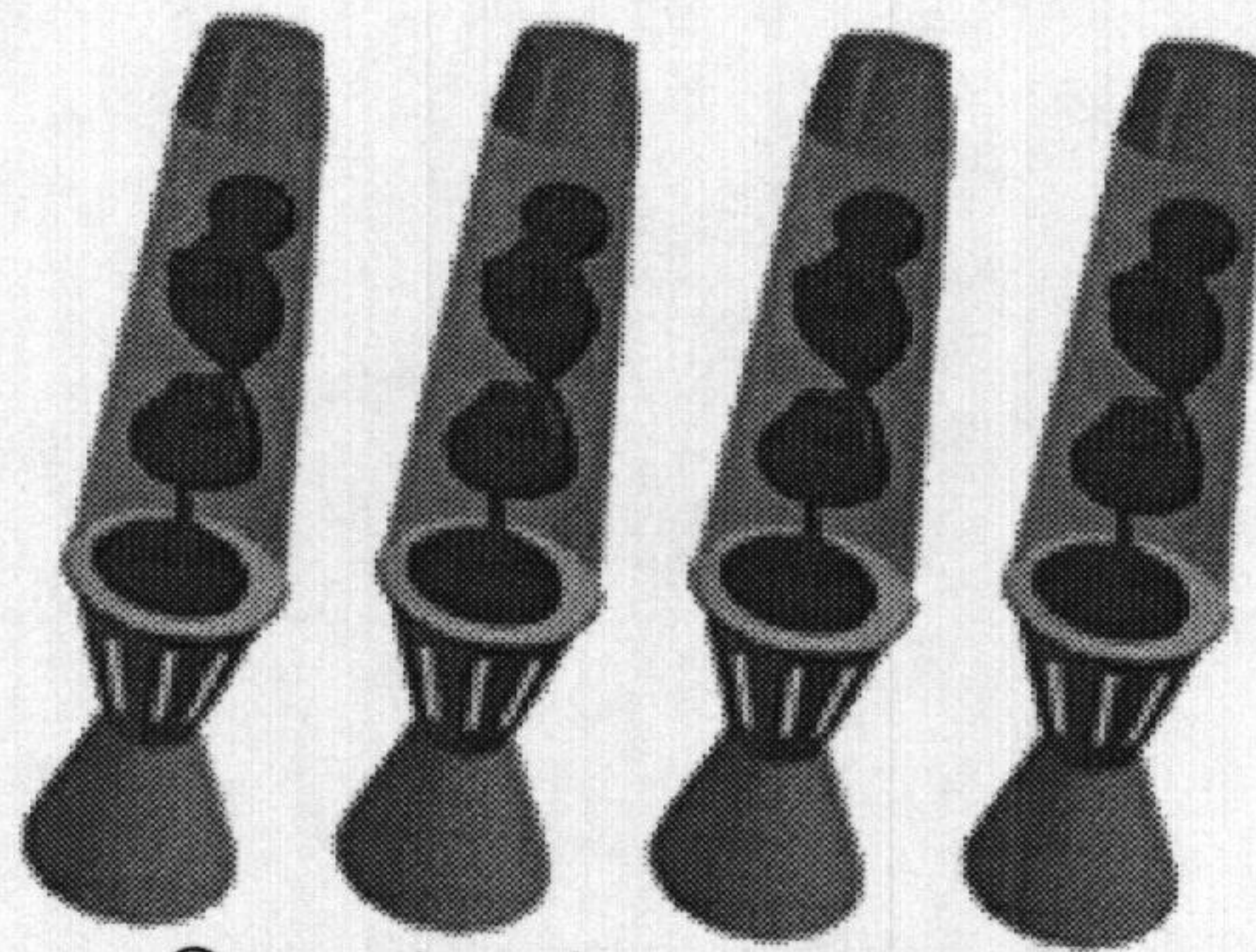


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Kiki's Delivery Service



Our rating: four lava lamps.

Information about this film in the Internet Movie Database.

We couldn't have asked for better luck; our day trip to Orlando, FL in mid-June to see a friend from college yielded an extra surprise -- the Florida Film Festival was just kicking off, and Disney had chosen that particular date for a rare theater screening of their first Hayao Miyazaki release: **Kiki's Delivery Service**. So we piled our friend Jeff into the car and then stood in line with assorted parents and kids, anime fanatics, and curious film buffs to get into the East Coast debut of Disney's retooled English language version of one of our favorite movies. (The national premiere took place a month before in Seattle.)



Kiki and Jiji (on her shoulder).

Kiki's Delivery Service is the story of an adolescent witch named Kiki (voiced in the English version by Kirsten Dunst) who leaves home at the age of thirteen to establish herself in a new city, according to witch tradition. Though **Kiki's** takes place in a world where witches are real and magic works, witches themselves are rare but not unknown to the general populace. Kiki is accompanied on her journey by Jiji (Phil Hartman), her black cat and familiar. All witches have some special power, like fortune-telling or potion making, but Kiki can only fly on her broom. And she's a little shaky doing even that.

But after deciding to settle in a beautiful seaside city, Kiki uses her flying skills to open up a delivery service for the locals. The movie chronicles her various deliveries and Kiki's discovery of her own strength and independence.

A little bit of conflict raises its head in the form of Tombo, a boy about Kiki's age who takes a liking to the witch when he first sees her fly. Early on, Kiki refuses to give Tombo the time of day, apparently because she thinks he's rude, but later on they become friends. This relationship reminded us of the one between Satsuki and Kanta from **My Neighbor Totoro**, in that the initial hostility between the girl and the boy doesn't seem to have any real reason to exist, other than the fact that little boys don't like little girls, and vice-versa.



Jiji in a tight spot.
The dog's name is Jeff.

What most sets Miyazaki's works head and shoulders above all other animated films are his visuals. This movie features plenty of cool shots of Kiki flying over the city and surrounding country, and even

the actionless scenes are full of details in the background. Maybe more so than any other Miyazaki film, Kiki's features a broad palette of colors that was absolutely beautiful to behold on the big screen. Too bad Disney is only planning on releasing this one on video.

Like *Laputa* and *My Neighbor Totoro*, *Kiki's Delivery Service* is much-loved among anime fans. Miyazaki's films always feature strong characters at a young age, discovering things about themselves and the world in a fantastic setting. Kiki herself has a compelling, bright personality, and Jiji, the cynical cat, complements her well. Disney did well to choose *Kiki's* for their first Miyazaki release; not only is Kiki a charming person, but the film holds plenty of story for those who like lots of plot, and isn't too action-heavy for kids. *Totoro's* relatively slow pace or *Laputa's* intense adventure sequences might have soured particular audiences against other Miyazaki films, but *Kiki's Delivery Service* will appeal to an extremely wide section of the viewing populace. Certainly, the grownups and kids at the showing we saw were entranced by the animation, the characters, and the story.



Those readers who have seen the Japanese version of this movie will be glad to know that the Disney dub is nothing short of excellent. It is loaded with celebrities, but each star is matched well with his or her character. Particularly effective is comic Janeane Garafalo as the plain-speaking Ursula. The casting of the late Phil Hartman as Jiji has been met with much grousing by hard core anime fans, but we found their objections a bit silly. The controversy stems from the fact that in the original Japanese version Jiji, who is a male cat, is given a voice that sounds distinctly feminine.

Obviously, Hartman sounds pretty masculine. But the thing about it is, the Japanese, for cultural reasons, think that all cats should have feminine voices. We in America, for equally obscure cultural reasons, think cats have gender specific voices. So in the Japanese version Jiji is a wise-ass male cat with (to the Japanese) a male voice, and in the American version Jiji is a wise-ass male cat with (to Americans) a male voice. To castigate Disney for this change is almost as silly as arguing over whether the sound cats make is really "me-ow" as we tend to write it, or "ni-ao" as the Japanese tend to write it.



Whatever the objections by the more ardent Miyazaki fans, *Kiki's Delivery Service* is sure to delight children and adults who see it. It stands tall against the more recent domestic Disney animated offerings as quality entertainment, and may just help repair the image of their kids' animation division, so recently tarnished by bizarre films like *Pocahontas* and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. If you're a parent, you owe it to your kids and to yourself to pick this one up when it hits video shelves in September. If you're without children of your own and feel silly seeing it by yourself, by all means borrow a five-year old and be prepared for an excellent movie experience -- by *any* standard.

Own It!

[More comments](#) about the Florida Film Festival screening of *Kiki*.

Review date: 6/14/98

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