

DVD REVIEW: ALYSON STONER'S MOVIE FORMULAIC BUT CHARMING

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I have to 'fess up: The first thing I thought when I saw the DVD cover of the new tween comedy *Alice Upside Down* was, "Hey, Luke Perry's still working!"

Adults out there might have the same reaction for Penny Marshall of *Laverne & Shirley* fame, who joins the former *Beverly Hills, 90210*, heartthrob with a supporting role in this independent film that was released on DVD Tuesday by Anchor Bay Entertainment (\$19.97).

For young viewers, though, the draw will be two promising young actors, Lucas Grabeel of the smash hit *High School Musical* and Alyson Stoner, a Toledo native who has steadily made a name for herself in Hollywood.

The 14-year-old girl with a cherubic face is already an old pro, having appeared as a dancer in music videos for Missy Elliot and Eminem and having acted in several high-profile movies, including *Cheaper by the Dozen* and the recent Disney Channel musical *Camp Rock*.

Alice Upside Down is Stoner's first real chance to play the star. She is the center of attention here as she portrays Alice McKinley, a pratfall-prone sixth grader who can't seem to get anything right at a new school.

The story is drawn from the Alice book series by Newbery medalist Phyllis Reynolds Naylor. Over the years, those books have found themselves on the American Library Association's list of most frequently challenged books for sexual content and offensive language, but there's not a trace of anything objectionable here.

This is family-friendly fare with lots of laughs mixed into a tale about trying to fit in and maintaining a family unit after mom is gone. When Alice moves to a new town with her widowed father (Perry) and brother (Grabeel), she not only has to figure out the awkward challenges of tween life, including how to deal with her notoriously stern teacher (Marshall), but she's forced to face the prospect of dad dating again too.

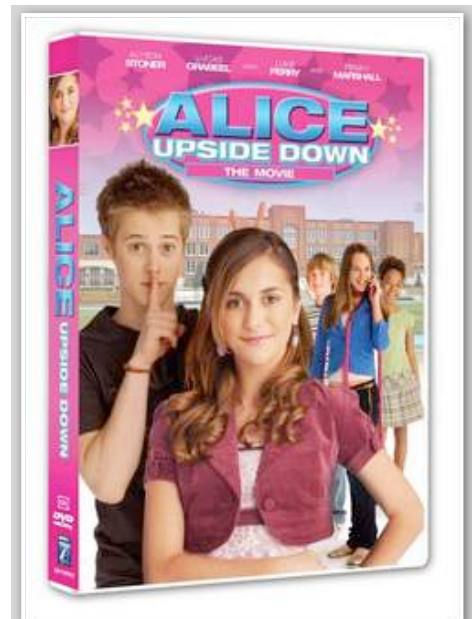
VIDEO

[See a trailer for 'Alice Upside Down'](#)

The movie approaches all of this with bubble-gum charm, and Stoner leads the way with her Bambi eyes and zest for the role. Her character's faux pas, most notably as a singer and dancer in the school musical, are made even more enjoyable because of the actress' real-life talent — she sang the movie's opening song and has danced for the American Music Awards and *The Tonight Show*.

Some of the sequences where Alice imagines a more confident, glamorous version of herself are a little clunky, and the plot can be formulaic and Disneyesque, but *Alice Upside Down* will no doubt find a happy fan base. Stoner has fun throughout, Grabeel steals a number of scenes — and laughs — with his goofy charisma, and Perry does his best to seem cool.

There are a few extras on the DVD too, including an interview with Stoner in which she comes off well-spoken and mature, even if it's too short to provide much depth. Maybe that's the way it should be, though, leaving at least a little mystery for when this local girl really makes it big. She's got a great start.



Alyson Stoner stars in the new DVD 'Alice Upside Down.'

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