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'The Fabelmans' Reminds Us Why Movies Are Filled With Dreamlike Magic

written by Toan Le • 2 years ago



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Movies are the wonders of everyone's childhood — an escape to worlds that are fantastic and utopic. "The Fabelmans" does just that, delivering a heartwarming, marvelous experience of what it means to chase after ambitious dreams, all captured through an imaginative cinematic lens.

This part-memoir, part-fictionalized film follows Sam Fabelman (Mateo Zoryon Francis-DeFord plays the child version while Gabriel LaBelle plays the teenage version) and his ambitious dream of becoming a visionary filmmaker. At the same time, Sam travels through a journey of growing pains with his Jewish family, including his dad's best friend, Bennie (Seth Rogen), during the post-World War II era.

His dream is greatly supported by his free-spirited mother, Mitzi (Michelle Williams), who is a former pianist. His dad, Burt (Paul Dano), an electrical engineer, has a more logical approach toward Sam's ambition. Along the way, Burt accepts bigger opportunities for his career, so Sam's family conflictly relocates to many places in the United States. As years go by, Sam grows to realize that all dreams, big or small, require great persistence and loving encouragement.

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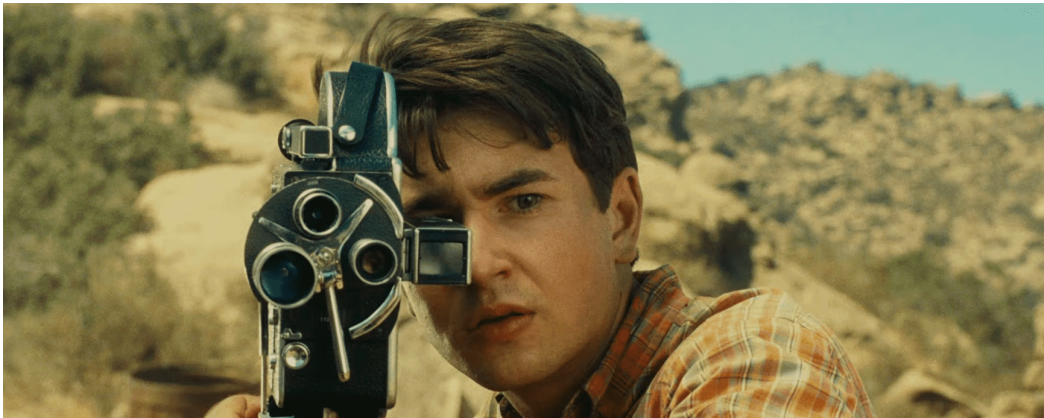
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Mitzi (Michelle Williams) is a former pianist while Burt (Paul Dano) is an electrical engineer.
Photo courtesy of Universal Pictures

Under Steven Spielberg’s exceptional direction, the film delivers a wonderful experience for most moviegoers. Every ounce of heart and love can be vividly seen throughout the film; Spielberg really devotes his time to making this film a joyous spectacle for everyone to see. Not to mention, the story is heavily influenced by Spielberg’s personal life and his road toward success, adding an insightful characteristic touch and an appreciative feel to the film’s superb quality.

The writing is an admirable combination of fiction and memoir. Spielberg and co-writer Tony Kushner translate personal experiences with such care and delicacy, outputting an emotional narrative for generations to come — an instant classic. Every word, every dialogue, every action relayed on screen is purposeful and commands attention.



Sam (Gabriel LaBelle) dreams of being a visionary filmmaker.
Photo courtesy of Universal Pictures

The light-hearted humor is the pillar of the film’s well-paced structure. Moreover, they seamlessly act as an effective mediator after every dramatic scene, evoking a bittersweet moment that leaves viewers emotionally satisfied.

The cinematography for the film is luminous and stellar, infusing a magical effect that seems so childlike and wonderful. Cinematographer Janusz Kaminski really vitalizes the aesthetic vision for the film with shots that feel imaginative and radiant.

What really pushes the movie to become the best of the year (maybe even the decade), is the talented ensemble. Williams and Dano carry out a performance of a lifetime, bringing most viewers to the verge of tears with their words and simple expressions. There are numerous occasions when both actors instill a memorable mark in the film. Williams embodies the character with so much tenderness and heart, making Mitzi complex to read. It’s an absolutely pitch-perfect performance to watch. From her simple gestures to her playful mannerisms, Williams aims for perfection and succeeds. There is a particular scene in the middle of act two that really showcases Williams’ magnificent talent; it’s a call for tears.

As for Dano, his screentime is not as much as Williams’, but he delivers an outstanding performance nonetheless. His quiet facial expressions throughout the film speak louder than what is on the page. Dano’s last scene is when he brings it

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home, displaying such a staying presence for the viewers with just his poignant, non-verbal cues.

The real screen stealer of the film, however, goes to Judd Hirsch. His portrayal of a visiting uncle to Mitzi is irresistible and dynamic. With only three scenes in the entire movie, Hirsch forcefully makes his everlasting impression on the audience with his entertaining semi-monologue and attentive body language, a glorious supporting performance that deems unforgettable.



The real screen stealer of the film goes to Judd Hirsch.
Photo courtesy of Universal Pictures

The young cast also does an excellent job to complement the sublime adult ensemble.

At its core, “The Fabelmans” is a masterful journey that reveals the emotional meaning behind pursuing ambitions. The film is a collection of reasons why dreams and aspirations are worth chasing. Spielberg never ceases to create wonders with his films that awake powerful emotions and cinematic glee. Elevated by a splendid, superbly-acted cast, a passionate narrative and extraordinary directions, “The Fabelmans” gracefully joins the ranks of beloved coming-of-age masterpieces.

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