



FILM: **THE FABELMANS**

FDG RATING: 3.5 ☺☺☺○○

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Steven Spielberg: *director/co-writer*
Gabriel LaBelle: *actor, Sammy Fabelman*
Michelle Williams: *actress, Mrs. Fabelman*
Paul Dano: *actor, Mr. Fabelman*

DATE: January 22, 2023

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **THE FABELMANS**

The Fabelman's is Steven Spielberg's most personal film as he admitted during his acceptance speech for the 2023 Golden Globe for best director. "Everything I've done up to this point has made me ready to finally be honest about the fact that it's not easy to be a kid," Spielberg said.

We had high expectations, wanting to be mesmerized by a young boy's deep love for movies and watch him develop his talents to become the movie making icon we know. We were unaware of the personal thread about his mother's affair with his father's best friend, and his parent's eventual divorce, a painful experience for young Spielberg, which he bravely exposes in the film, finally coming to terms.

The story is about eight year old, Sammy, whose parents (a fabulous Michelle Williams as his mother) take him to see his first film, The Greatest Show On Earth, which ends with a spectacular train crash. Sammy is obsessed with the crash sequence and asks for a train set, which he repeatedly crashes in an attempt to recreate what he saw on the big screen. His scientist/engineer father is furious, saying that Sammy doesn't appreciate nice things. His mother suggests that the boy use his father's Super 8 camera to capture the trains crashing so that he can repeatedly watch the crash instead of repeatedly bashing the trains.

The rest is history. We watch Sammy try multiple angles and edit the film to build suspense. He makes films in Boy Scouts, and a Western with a bunch of neighborhood kids, where he figures out how to make it look like the boys' toy guns are actually firing. He does a World War II combat film starring his fellow Eagle Scouts, that wins him a merit badge for photography. When the family, including his father's best friend, Benny, move to California, he experiences bullying by the popular WASP kids in his high school, but turns the situation around by creating a senior class film featuring the bully as the "star". Sammy's ability to manipulate a story through editing shows us the power of the editor in film making.

The subplot focuses on his parents' relationship, his mom's career as a concert pianist was cut short when she married, his dad has a relatively dry personality while Benny, who seems like part of the family, is outgoing, fun, and clearly his mom and Benny enjoy being together. Sammy discovers just how much when he films the family picnic.

One discussion participant said the film raises the question, can a woman love two men at the same time? Another noted that Spielberg gave a honest, objective, intimate portrayal of his mother and father, confronting the pain he experienced and suppressed until being able to tell his story in the guise of The Fabelmans.

Negative comments noted that Spielberg was emotionally heavy handed in co-writing the script and that the movie was full of stereotypes. The film seemed a series of vignettes that fell short of being inspiring and were less introspective than expected. If we were expecting to feel the spark of creative genius coming alive, instead we saw the techniques of film making being perfected.

On the positive side, the story shows the power of the editor in telling a story. Sammy's precociousness came through in his ability to make something dramatic. We also applauded the message, "follow your heart."

The movie shows how a camera reveals so much about life, including secrets, and can manipulate perspective. We appreciated the insight Spielberg shared about his upbringing and although we were entertained, many of us wanted to feel more. The unforgettable coming of age 1988 film, Cinema Paradiso, emotionally emulated the love Salvatore Di Vita, a famous film director, feels for movie making. The Fabelmans is less about a prodigy becoming a genius film maker, than it is about The Fabelmans, a family. "It's all about telling the story". We rated this story a less than enthusiastic 3.5 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best.)



See you at the movies!
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