

‘Hugo’: Martin Scorsese’s Uplifting Masterpiece

by Alan Mowbray



Mention the name Martin Scorsese and the image of rough-and-tumble movies (*Taxi Driver*, *Raging Bull* and *Goodfellas*) pops up.

So when my wife, 10-year-old son and 4-year-old daughter sat down to watch *Hugo* on DVD together, I was excited because this was the first family-friendly Scorsese flick ever! I was not disappointed. We were riveted. Even my youngest, who is normally squirmy, and up and down and up and down was glued to the couch.

Based on Brian Selznick’s 2007 novel, *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*, the story centers on 12-year-old Hugo (Asa Butterfield, *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*)—an orphan living in the bowels of a busy 1930s Paris train station.

Hugo fixes things and keeps the train station clocks running for his uncle—skills he learned from his father (Jude Law, *Sherlock Holmes*), a clock maker and tinkerer. The only thing that Hugo has left that connects him to his now-dead father is an automaton (mechanical man) that doesn’t work without a special key, which he doesn’t have. Hugo needs to find that key to unlock the secret he believes it contains.

Hugo befriends station shopkeeper Georges Méliès (Ben Kingsley, *Schindler’s List*, *Shutter Island*) and his adventure-seeking goddaughter Isabelle (Chloë Grace Moretz, *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*). Hugo discovers that they have a transformational connection to his father and the automaton—unlocking a past the old man has buried inside himself.

Hugo is an excellent movie in countless ways. The period

imagery is so real and delicious to your eyes that you think they actually went back in time to film the movie on location.

You are immersed in innocence. The kids are just kids doing kid stuff. I can't tell you how refreshing it is to watch a large studio, big-budget movie that succeeds on delivering romance without innuendo, childhood without whiny victimization and a complete total lack of questionable language anywhere.

And I can't forget the adult supporting cast: Kingsley (one of my favorite actors), Sacha Baron Cohen as the awkward station inspector Gustav (who actually performs a whole movie without being crude or gross—will wonders never cease) and Sir Christopher Lee (*Lord of the Rings*, *Star Wars*) as the librarian Monsieur Labisse, who I would have loved to have seen more of in this movie.

The score is epically, irresistibly and wonderfully French. This is an uplifting movie that has that unique ability to deeply touch everyone—no matter the age or background.

After earning 11 Academy Award nominations, *Hugo* won five Oscars in February for technical achievements such as cinematography and art direction. Like *The Artist*, also the winner of five Oscars, but for Best Film and Best Actor, *Hugo* is a tribute to the birth of cinema, as well as the definitive class for young filmmakers on how to make a movie.

If you're looking for a fantastic, non-animated family-friendly DVD to add to your collection, I highly recommend this masterpiece. Overall, it was refreshing to see Scorsese make like Walt Disney for *Hugo*—the director's first use of 3D. The Blu-ray version includes the film in 3D format.

Content Watch: *Hugo* is rated PG for mild thematic material, some action/peril and smoking. Hugo's Uncle Claude is obviously a drunk, but alcohol consumption is not glorified in any way. Hugo steals food from vendors in order to survive (he

does the work, but his uncle gets the pay). He also steals gears and parts from the storekeeper in order to obtain parts to restore the automaton. Isabelle lies to Gustav to protect Hugo from the orphanage. The two also pick a lock and enter a theater to see a movie—without paying. Some of the actress costumes in the period films are quite skimpy.

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