

Article Details

SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE – HITS THE JACKPOT

by Preeti Thandi

Thursday, September 11, 2008 10:21 AM

"It finally took a Britisher to get an Indian film right," exclaims a journalist after the press screening of *Slumdog Millionaire*. Acclaimed director, Danny Boyle's film at the 2008 Toronto International Film Festival is a tribute to India but is not quite about India.



The film has not only received repeated rounds of applause by the TIFF media but is destined to be a major crowd puller and even an Oscar frontrunner. Set in Mumbai the film is the story of an underdog who strikes a jackpot on India's version of 'Who wants to be a Millionaire?' But at the core, the film is a love story interwoven with ecstatic moments. **Slumdog Millionaire** represents the essence of Mumbai with a sweeping flourish. The film is a high energy bonanza with a musical score by A.R. Rahman which will keep your pulse pounding and your senses exhilarated. Jamal Malik (Dev Patel), a kid from the slums of Mumbai ends up on a games show. With millions at stake, the question everyone is asking is, how could he get all the answers right? The gullible *chai-wallah* from a call centre is suspected of foul play and he ends up in a police station and that is where his life story unfolds in reverse gear.

Each question that he's asked on the show is somehow linked to his own life story in a bizarre yet believable way and he just knows the answer. The film pursues the life of little Jamal and his brother Salim who make an adorable and mischievous duo running around in the filth. But soon they are left to fend for themselves when their mother is killed in religious riots. Soon they find Latika (Freida Pinto) who becomes Jamal's love interest. But as circumstances would have it the two are separated. As the two brothers smarten up on the streets they travel to the Taj Mahal and set up shop as phony tour guides who give hilarious bits of history to the tourists, none of which is of course true. As they escape rough situations Salim ends up in the world of crime whereas Jamal's quest for Latika ends up in his losing her. Yet he is focused to get her back any way he can.

British actor, Dev Patel effectively bears the brunt of the underdog. Irrfan Khan plays the investigating police officer while Anil Kapoor is the egotistical game show host.

The screenplay by Simon Beaufoy (*Full Monty* fame) is based on Vikas Swarup's book Q&A. The film portrays contemporary Mumbai with all its' raw ambition, progress, squalor and poverty. The sights, sounds and even the smells of India come alive in the film. Yet nothing jolts the eye. The filth is just a backdrop for life that is constantly teeming. Neither is poverty depressing. The slumdog fights the system and even though he looks weak, he is smart. "He's built of steel," says Boyle, "as they try to humiliate, embarrass and torture him."

Boyle who had difficulty finding his lead man in India chose Patel because he didn't quite look like the young Bollywood guys who work their muscles in the gym all day. Patel effortlessly loses his British accent in the film.

"I loved being in Mumbai so much. I have to be honest, I didn't see very much of India," admits Boyle, "but I saw a lot of Mumbai. I loved it. I love cities. It just set me on fire. I read that book by Suketu Mehta book, *Maximum City* and I couldn't put it down it was riveting. I read it two, three times and made notes of all the little details he talked about. It was the energy of the place and I think cinema loves energy."