

The Main Feature



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Little Miss Sunshine

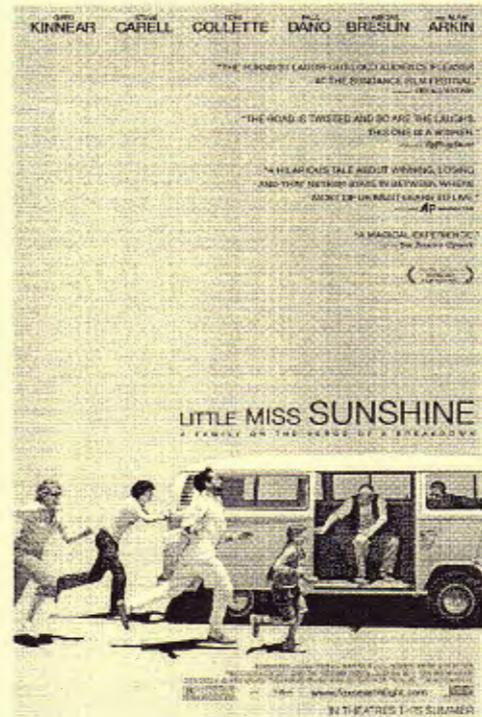
USA/2006/101 mins

Directed by Jonathan Drayton, Valerie Faris

Writing Michael Arndt

Cast

| | | |
|------------------------|-----|-----------------------------|
| <u>Abigail Breslin</u> | ... | <u>Olive Hoover</u> |
| <u>Greg Kinnear</u> | ... | <u>Richard Hoover</u> |
| <u>Paul Dano</u> | ... | <u>Dwayne Hoover</u> |
| <u>Alan Arkin</u> | ... | <u>Grandpa Edwin Hoover</u> |
| <u>Toni Collette</u> | ... | <u>Sheryl Hoover</u> |
| <u>Steve Carell</u> | ... | <u>Frank Hoover</u> |
| <u>Marc Turtletaub</u> | ... | <u>Doctor #1</u> |
| <u>Jill Talley</u> | ... | <u>Cindy</u> |



Little Miss Sunshine is a quirky little film that is almost impossible to categorise. Not quite drama, not out-and-out comedy, this charming and unusually understated film manages to squeeze more honesty and understanding into an hour-and-a-half than you'll get from a whole course of therapy!

The film follows a dysfunctional family crossing America in a battered VW camper van so that their seven-year-old can compete in the eponymous beauty pageant.

Screenwriter Michael Arndt uses the familiar structure of a road movie to probe social mores and reveal the intense emotional bonds, which unite even the most misfit and fractured of families. He arms the cast with an embarrassment of stinging one-liners yet still manages to make the characters seem very real, and all the more lovable for their quirks and eccentricities.

A sharply cut opening sequence introduces the Hoovers. Richard (Greg Kinnear) is a motivational speaker stubbornly committed to his "refuse to lose" philosophy, despite his career's refusal to take off. His frustrated wife Sheryl (Toni Collette) struggles to keep the family together, while teenage son and Nietzsche devotee Dwayne (Paul Dano) is maintaining a vow of silence until he becomes a fighter pilot. Richard's father, Grandpa (Alan Arkin), is a horny old heroin user with a propensity for swearing, while Sheryl's suicidal brother Frank (Steve Carrell) is the newest addition to the household, a gay Proust scholar who just lost the object of his affections and a 'genius grant' to a rival academic.

Completing the clan and its sole source of optimism is Olive (Abigail Breslin), a cheery, bespectacled seven-year-old with a passion for beauty contests. Coached by her

Grandpa, fate delivers Olive the chance to compete in the Little Miss Sunshine competition. The entire family reluctantly piles into a broken-down Volkswagen camper and leave their Albuquerque home for the contest in Redondo Beach, California. An extended series of in-fights, setbacks and disasters, the trip nevertheless bonds them together through adversity, writer Michael Arndt's script coaxing engagingly warm performances from this eccentric group.

The extremely talented cast make the dysfunction fresh and amusing. This is ensemble acting at its most effective, with uniformly excellent performances.

Collette brings warmth and a steely edge to her long-suffering mother, and Arkin is a foul-mouthed delight as a grandfather, who has no time for social niceties or political correctness. His inspirational speech to grandson Dwayne, extolling the virtues of sleeping around at college, is hysterical.

Carell is almost unrecognisable from his tour-de-force comic performances in The 40-Year-Old Virgin and the US version of The Office. There is a beautiful stillness and melancholy to his character, matched by Dano's brilliant portrayal of a truculent teenager who communicates using a notepad and claims to hate everyone. 'What about your family?' asks uncle Frank. Dwayne underlines everyone without a hint of a smile.

Ten-year-old Breslin is sensational as the youngest member of the Hoover clan, whose fragile confidence is knocked by her father's meddling. The scene in which Olive tearfully asks her grandfather, 'Am I pretty?', and then sobs, 'I don't want to be a loser - Dad hates losers,' leaves us just as upset as the little girl. For once, her grandpa knows what to say. 'A real loser isn't someone who doesn't win. A real loser is someone so afraid of not winning, they don't even try.'

Little Miss Sunshine is the directorial film debut for music video directors Jonathan Dayton and Valerie Faris, who manage to maintain a strong, confident mood that teeters excitingly on the edge of farce throughout the film.

The critical darling of the Sundance Film Festival, where it incited a frenzied bidding war, Little Miss Sunshine is a joyous celebration of 21st century family life in all of its perplexing, dysfunctional glory.

It quite simply is a treat from start to finish.
Suzi Olohan

Critics Comments:

"Little Miss Sunshine is a genial and breezy film, with a neatly engineered dramatic twist - yet the satiric intent is weirdly uncertain." - The Guardian

"Charming, funny and wonderfully acted: this delight of independent cinema will make you want to pick up the phone and call your own dysfunctional family just to tell them you love them." - Channel 4



Critics' award for Day-Lewis film

Epic drama *There Will Be Blood* has dominated the National Society of Film Critics' Awards in the United States.

It was named movie of the year, while Daniel Day-Lewis took best actor for his role as an oil prospector and Paul Thomas Anderson was best director.

Julie Christie received best actress for *Away From Her*, while Casey Affleck and Cate Blanchett won awards for their supporting roles in other productions. The society includes 61 critics from leading US publications and websites.

Tamara Jenkins won best screenplay for comic drama *The Savages*, starring Laura Linney and Philip Seymour Hoffman. Romanian release *Four Months, Three Weeks and Two Days* took the prize for best foreign-language film.

And No End in Sight - a documentary about US foreign policy, particularly in Iraq - was best non-fiction production.

Affleck received his best supporting actor award for his role in *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford*. And it was Blanchett's portrayal of musician Bob Dylan in *I'm Not There* which earned her a prize from the society.

There Will Be Blood, which is due to be released on 15 February in the UK, has been described as "grim" and "gritty", and tells of a businessman who becomes desperate to make money through oil. Set in the early 20th Century, it has already been nominated for best drama at next week's Golden Globes, and is considered a candidate for best picture at the Oscars in February.

In a separate ceremony also held on Saturday, Day-Lewis won the Desert Palm achievement award at the Palm Springs International Film Festival in California.

Golden Globes ceremony scrapped

The Golden Globes ceremony has been cancelled and replaced with a news conference because of the strike by writers over royalties.

The winners will now be revealed at an hour-long press conference replacing the usual dinner and ceremony. Actors had said they would not cross picket lines in support of writers. The Writers Guild of America (WGA) has been on strike since November over "residuals" - royalties for work distributed online or on DVD. The dispute has brought to a standstill the production of nearly all TV comedy and drama shows.

The conference revealing the film and TV award winners will take place at 1800 local time on Sunday (0200 GMT Monday) in Beverly Hills.

The WGA has yet to decide whether it will call off its planned picket of the event.

The Hollywood Foreign Press Association, which organises the event, had earlier said it was striving to find a compromise allowing the event to take place "with the creative community present".

President Jorge Camara said: "We are all very disappointed that our traditional awards ceremony will not take place this year and that millions of viewers worldwide will be deprived of seeing many of their favourite stars."

Reactions to

La Belle et la Bette – 13th December 2007

Score 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Votes ~ ~ ~ 3 3 4 12 6 4 ~ 1

Total Votes - 33 Average Score - 5.97 Position in Season - 7th

| Film | Score | Position |
|--------------------------|-------|-----------------|
| The Lives of Others | 8.23 | 1 st |
| Notes on a Scandal | 7.73 | 2 nd |
| Pans Labyrinth | 6.88 | 3 rd |
| The Prestige | 6.86 | 4 th |
| Offside | 6.56 | 5 th |
| L'Enfant | 6.37 | 6 th |
| Belle et la Bette | 5.97 | 7 th |
| The Day I became a Woman | 5.72 | 8 th |

Your views

Too much a fantasy story

Delightful - a good Xmas choice

I must admit, I was quite glad when the interval came. Worth coming for the mince pies.

Terrific: loved the candlesticks

Even for 1946 I found it too stilted

Not my idea of the start of Christmas

Well worth seeing

I love a happy ending!

Creaks a bit now, but still has magic

Too gloomy for Christmas

Quite magical

Much heralded but never seen. Most enjoyable.

Next Time

24th January 2008 – The Last King of Scotland

Forest Whitaker in an Oscar winning performance as Ugandan President, Idi Amin.

Skilfully written, the film explores the relationship between Amin and his physician through his spiral into murderous insanity. Multi award winning.

 USA/2006/121 mins



Repropoint

sponsors photocopying of the main feature