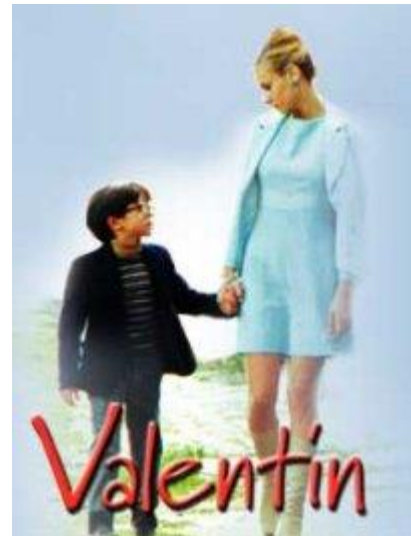


Valentin

Argentina, Netherlands, France, Italy, Spain/ 82 mins/ Cert PG

Director and Screenplay:	Alejandro Agresti
Cinematography	Jose Luis Cajaraville
Editing	Alejandro Brodersohn
Original music by	Luis Salinas and Paul M. van Bruggen

Cast:	
Valentin	Rodrigo Noya
His father	Alejandro Agresti
Abuela (Grandmother)	Carmen Maura
Leticia	Julieta Cardinali
Rufp	Mex Urtizberea
El tío Chiche	Jean Pierrre Noher
Dr. Galaburri	Carlos Roffe



After a rather stately start Valentin wins you over slowly but surely, and is a convincing reminder, that good cinema can be found in the most unlikely places, and can be presented in under 90 minutes.

The film, which was Argentina's official submission for the 2003 Oscar Awards, Foreign Language film category is based on a magical event from Director's Alejandro Agresti's own childhood, when he spent a day with one of his father's girlfriends, going to the cinema and to the park.



The year is 1969, and bespectacled Valentín is living in Buenos Aires with his grandmother a year after his grandfather passed away. Carmen Maura, who will be familiar from her appearances in Pedro Almodovaar films, plays the role of grandmother.

He does not know where his mother is and for his father, Valentín is a burden, a way to get new girlfriends but hassle once they move on. All that looks like changing with the arrival of Leticia (Cardinali), his Dad's latest flame. She's kind, smart, blonde and Valentín reckons the perfect stepmother for a little boy.

Like its leading man, 'Valentín' is short and slight but the film overflows with charm. It's a study of loneliness from multiple angles (a boy, his grandmother, a beautiful young woman, a dumped next door neighbour) that's both sweet and moving and will have people leaving the cinema that bit younger.

Valentin spends the entire film trying to understand the adults that inhabit his world with little success. His innocent meddling in the messy relationships that surround him provides the film's overriding appeal.

Valentin may be cute, but he is also profoundly unhappy.



Behind these touches in the film is Alejandro Agresti's (shown in the photograph at the film's premier in Seattle) semi-autobiographical script - and his decision to play the unpleasant character based on his own father brings all sorts of poignant resonances to the role.

Without doubt, though, the real star here is newcomer Rodrigo Noya, who never overplays Valentin's sense of loss and betrayal.

About 300 boys were seen for the part of Valentin. In a role that's just made for upstaging adult actors there is never a feeling that's Noya's hogging scenes or trying too hard - his screen time with Cardinali and Urtizberea as the lovesick neighbour ebbs and flows wonderfully.

It is so refreshing after being barraged with annoying kids in Hollywood movies for years to witness Noya's central performance. He is cute without being cringe-worthy precisely because the filmmakers don't milk the oooooo! and ahhhhhh! factor. He isn't forced to jump through hoops to get a reaction out of the audience.

This deeply autobiographical film is a modest and realistic exploration of human relationships filtered through the eyes of a child. Agresti remains true to his diminutive hero, never breaking off from his point of view in an attempt to over-complicate the drama.



If this all seems too sickly-sweet for words...well, it can be. Eager to please and wearing big blocky eyeglasses, Noya can be downright cutesy. But director Agresti reminds us that we're dealing with important matters here – love, family, and bigotry -- and the film's best moments feature him in conversation with Leticia (the gorgeous Julieta Cardinali), his father's latest girlfriend.



Iain McGlashan

For some, the ending will be a little too perfect, but a hero this cool only deserves the best.

At the conclusion of the film Valentin tells us he has decided to become a writer: ' "At least I had enough for one story, even if it is a little one."'

It is a little story, but like the boy, it is a delight.