



## TRANSCRIPT

**Cinema Review**  
**Number 2 (2009) – Slumdog Millionaire**

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And the winner is... *Slumdog Millionaire!*

But why? What is it about this Anglo-Indian movie that the Hollywood Academy saw fit to place it amongst the most highly-awarded movies of all time, giving it the Oscar for Best Picture and seven other Oscars to boot? Well let's have a look at it.

*Slumdog Millionaire* is an intriguing mixture of fantasy and reality. The story is a contemporary fairy tale: Cinderella of the slums – complete with horribly exploited children and the remotest possibility – however unlikely - of a happy ending. The counterpoint to the fantasy is the grim reality of existence in India's teeming Mumbai fleshpots: the filth of the slums; the vulnerability of impoverished children; the murderous horror of religious pogroms; despicable gangsters; and institutionalised corruption.

However, improbable as it may seem, most of the movie provides a disarmingly lighthearted perspective on the horrendous events which take place against this awful backdrop. It's a tribute to the great skill of the filmmakers that we can be lured into watching such material and, yes, even enjoying it.

Nonetheless, be warned that the content of the movie is a rather uneven mixture and there are some sequences in which the lightheartedness is overshadowed by images which cross the line into such horror that I had to close my eyes rather than go on watching. However, with these provisos taken into account the movie is a superb example of cinematic storytelling with unrelenting dramatic tension. All of its accolades are justified and I would urge you to go and see it.

The story is of epic proportions, tracing the life progress of three slum children over perhaps ten or a dozen years, but the events are portrayed with such energy that you are left with the feeling that the movie is shorter than it really is.

*Slumdog Millionaire* is the result of a successful mixture of British and Indian talent and expertise. The plot derives from a novel called *Q&A* by Indian writer Vikas Swarup but the screenplay was written by Simon Beaufoy, a British screenwriter who, eleven years ago, wrote the script for *The Full Monty* - another movie which also celebrates the notion that outrageous determination can triumph over adversity. The third member of the creative triangle is another Briton, Danny Boyle who, at least until now, was best known for his work on the 1996 success, *Trainspotting*.

The plot of *Slumdog* centres around an incident on the Indian version of the television quiz show, *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* A young man, played charmingly by Dev Patel, becomes a contestant on the show and proceeds to do very well. The movie cleverly uses flashbacks to not only depict the young man's life story as a slum child but also to reveal how certain experiences during his life have, by happy accident, enabled him to successfully answer the questions put to him by the quizmaster.

The screenwriting is razor sharp and director Danny Boyle moves the story along at a breathtaking pace. The characters – who change from children to teenagers and then into adulthood – seem to evolve and develop before our eyes, virtually morphing from one growth stage to another.

This might sound a bit like an Academy Awards category introduction, but the achievement of this seamless character development is a triumph for all of those involved in this production: writer, director, casting director and costume designer and, of course, the actors. All of the actors deliver engaging, truthful performances and, as you watch the youngest group – some of them perhaps only eight or nine years old – it is particularly amazing to consider that these children were, themselves, actually recruited from the Mumbai slums to play in the movie.

It's surprising to learn that the production cost was just over thirty-three million dollars – a very small budget given the period of time covered by the action and the broad sweep of its locations – from slum hovels to the Taj Mahal itself.

Director Boyle has been quoted as saying that he sets out to make films that are “life – affirming”. This intention is certainly well-realised by *Slumdog Millionaire*. In addition, as if the cast and crew still had energy to burn after completing this splendid movie, Boyle tacks on a kind of coda in which members of the cast gather with a huge troupe of dancers on a railway station platform and, in a colourful evocation of the effusive style of India's Bollywood movies, perform a vigorous dance routine choreographed to a piece of excitingly rhythmic original Indian music.

If this doesn't leave you with a smile on your face nothing will. *Slumdog Millionaire* is a finely-crafted, romantic fable with a social conscience and a heart as big as the Indian sub-continent. It's a four and half star movie and worth every one of its Oscars.