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AUGUST RUSH (2007)



‘August Rush’ is a 2007 drama film directed by Kirsten Sheridan and written by Paul Castro, Nick Castle, and James V. Hart, and produced by Richard Barton Lewis. It has been called an up-to-date reworking of the Oliver Twist story by Charles Dickens.

Extensive Viewing

I. Analyze the given synopsis, jot down its strong and weak points, produce your own synopsis of the film (consult ‘How to Write a Synopsis’ section first).

Estranged from his parents by circumstance and nudged toward a foster family, a young boy seeks out his long-lost folks and discovers prodigious musical talent in this family-oriented drama from ‘Disco Pigs’ director Kirsten Sheridan. In the aftermath of a passionate night together above New York’s Washington Square, a charismatic Irish guitarist named Louis (Jonathan Rhys-Meyers) and a reserved cellist named Lyla (Keri Russell) are forced apart by fate. Despite the fact that they do not remain together, however, their fleeting union has created something amazing that neither could have ever anticipated — a baby. Unfortunately, just after the child’s birth, the mother is misinformed that the infant has died. Cut to 11 years later, when the child, Evan, is living in a Gotham-area boys’ home and has developed an acute ability to listen to the sounds of the outside world — hoping against all hope that his biological mother and father will turn up to claim him, while those in charge try to encourage him to open himself up to the possibility of adoption. Unduly rejecting these bids, Evan

runs away into the city. Out on the streets, the child falls into the clutches of a manipulative, untrustworthy street person named Wizard (Robin Williams), who renames Evan “August Rush” and opens the boy up to the depth and breadth of his own musical talent even as he smells the opportunity to grow rich off of the foundling. Meanwhile, Evan/August’s hope persists that he will be reunited with his folks, and Louis and Lyla, unable to forget their initial night of love, feel themselves being drawn back together by fate.

CAST

Freddie Highmore	...	Evan Taylor / August Rush
Keri Russell	...	Lyla Novacek
Jonathan Rhys Meyers	...	Louis Connelly
Robin Williams	...	Maxwell “Wizard” Wallace
Terrence Howard	...	Counselor Richard Jeffries
William Sadler	...	Thomas Novacek
Jamia Simone Nash	...	Hope
Leon G. Thomas	...	Arthur

II. Think and answer the questions:

1. What is the very first episode of the film? Describe it. Can you predict the general tone of the film? Its style? Its main idea?
2. What is Evan’s life like in the orphanage? Why doesn’t Evan want to leave his first home? What does he think about his parents?
3. How does Evan meet Mr. Jeffries? What part does Counselor play in Evan’s life?
4. Why does Evan decide to escape? How does he manage to reach the city?
5. What are Evan’s first impressions of the city? What exactly does he pay attention to?

6. What do we get to know about Lyla and Louis, their families, their professional backgrounds, and their love story? How does it happen that their child gets lost?

7. What are the boy's feelings when he gets lost in the city? How is his mood reflected?

8. How can you describe the place where Wizard and the 'music lovers' live? What is the atmosphere?

9. How does Wizard define music? Jot his definition down. Do you agree with it? What can you say about Wizard's knowledge of music?

10. How does Evan's new name appear? Why? What is Wizard's attitude to the boy and to his gift?

11. Why do both Lyla and Louis quit their highly successful musical careers? How are their lives going without music? What triggers each of them to start playing again?

12. What is Lyla's reaction to the news from her father?

13. What do you get to know about 'Juilliard School of Music' and its traditions? What other musical schools of universal acknowledgment do you know (make an Internet search if necessary)?

14. Why do both Lyla and Louis decide to return to music? Do they succeed in their new musical efforts?

15. Which sounds does August include into his rhapsody? How does this piece of music appear?

16. What makes August leave the rehearsal? How does Wizard manage to convince him? Do you agree with the idea that music can't be learnt from books?

17. What can you say about August's attitude to Wizard?

18. Why does August finally decide to leave Wizard forever? What is Wizard's reaction?

19. What makes Lyla stop leaving the concert after her performance?

20. Describe the climax of the film. Which emotions do the characters experience? What are your emotions?

21. Does August achieve his main aim?

22. Can you predict the future for the characters of the film?
23. Which musical instruments can be seen (and heard) in the film? Jot down the situations where you see them.
24. What classical pieces of music are mentioned in the film?
What musical genres can be heard?
25. Explain the following expressions:
- to listen to music
 - to hear music
 - to follow music.

Intensive Viewing

III. Listen and try to catch where the following words and collocations are used in the film; jot their context down and memorize them:

- to knock smth. out of smb.
- to sit up straight
- to get away
- front row, center
- to talk back
- to be placed with a family
- Department of Child Service
- to walk smb. home
- Don't you dare!
- What's the point in doing smth.?
- to have a busy day ahead of smb.
- donations
- a real-estate tycoon
- a real piece of work
- to take family money
- While the cat's away... (the mice can play)
- a harmonic connection
- to be top of the class
- to have eyes in the back of one's head

- to be arranged by nature
- parental consent for the release for adoption
- to re-establish contact with smb.
- to be pretty quick to forget about smb.
- a precious gift
- to be on one's own
- a bass player
- a lead singer
- E, G, B, D on the lines, F, A, C, E in between
- musical class
- prodigy
- to check in
- to push oneself too hard
- to keep going
- scale evolution
- a diminished fifth
- key change
- horns, oboes, strings
- allegro staccato
- The New York Philharmonic Orchestra
- a rhapsody in C major
- a guest cellist
- to interrupt a rehearsal
- to learn smth. the hard way
- not to miss smth. for the world (I wouldn't miss it for the world.)
- to personify the mystery of music

IV. Reproduce the situations where the following remarks are made:

1. — All you have to do is open yourself up. All you have to do is — listen.

2. — Sometimes the world tries to knock it out of you. But I believe in music... The way that some people believe in fairy tales.

3. — It's a great sound, isn't it?

— What are you doing?

— Listening.

4. — Louis! Do you remember what dad used to say about princesses, huh? They're always looking for their prince... and you ain't no prince, brother!

— How would YOU know?...

5. — Are you thinking what I'm thinking?

— No, I'm thinking something else.

6. — Who's Wizard?

— He's a real piece of work, that's what he is.

7. — The chain is only as strong as its weakest link.

8. — You got to love music more than you love food. More than life. More than yourself.

9. — It's invisible, but you feel it.

10. — I mean, a baby. That baby, he could have hurt you. I wasn't gonna let that happen, Lyla. I made a choice for us.

11. — Do you have children, Mr. Jeffries?

— I did.

— Then you know.

12. — How long do you think you'll be staying?

— As long as it takes.

13. — You remember how you said Mozart was a musical prodigy?

— Prodigy.

— Yeah, well, I've got one of those and he's living under my bed!

14. — He's a mystery. I thought he was an angel. There is no record of an August Rush anywhere.

15. — How do you do it? How does music come to you?
— I just hear it.

16. — Wait a moment, we've been teaching him here.
— What can you do? Fill his head with classical theory and rules? You can't learn music from books! It's out there!

17. — You never quit on your music. No matter what happens. Cuz anytime something bad happens to you, that's the one place you can escape to and just let it go.

18. — Music has always fascinated us in the way that it communicates. Without words. Without pictures.

19. — The music is all around us. All you have to do is — listen.

Post-viewing

V. Every character in the film is a person of talent, but their gifts lie in different spheres. Which ones? Prepare character sketches of the following personages:

- August Rush
- Lyla Novacek
- Louis Connelly
- Wizard (Maxwell Wallace)
- Richard Jeffries.

VI. Discuss the role of music in our life. What does music mean to you? Is it a form of communication? Self-expression? Consolation? Has the film made you ponder upon music which is all around?

VII. Read the following reviews. Does your impression of the film coincide with that of the reviewers? What do you think about the cast? Express your own opinion of the film in the form of a review.

Review I (by Brandon Fibbs)

More fable than film, there is no earthly reason why “August Rush” should work. But it does.

“August Rush” is about a love triangle. Twelve years ago, on a rooftop overlooking New York City’s Washington Square Park, Louis Connelly (Jonathan Rhys Meyers), a charismatic young Irish guitarist, and Lyla Novacek (Keri Russell), a sheltered cellist, shared a magical evening beneath a full moon.

But their romance was torn apart before it had a chance to begin, leaving, in its wake, two destitute young people who gave up on their music and an orphan child, the only hint of their enchanted union, who Lyla is led to believe died stillborn in a car accident.

Now, years later, the child they don’t even know exists is performing on the streets of Manhattan, cared for by the mysterious Wizard (Robin Williams) who dubs the boy August Rush (Freddie Highmore). A musical prodigy who can hear music in the random, dissonant sounds of everyday life, August is convinced he can use his remarkable musical talent to reunite himself with the parents he has never known.

Preposterous from beginning to end, for “August Rush” to work, you have to accept it for what it is — a fairy tale wrapped in contemporary clothing. Do not try to apply the laws of logic and realism to this film or you will only come away frustrated. “August Rush” is an enchanted fable, and only by accepting it on those terms will it be successful.

Director Kirsten Sheridan (the daughter of Jim Sheridan, director of “In America,” “In the Name of the Father” and “My Left Foot”) knows the lofty limitations of her story and, instead of hesitating for even a moment, runs full-speed ahead with her outrageous concept. As much a music video as a movie, Sheridan understands that music is pure, undistilled emotion and will win over her audience despite whatever reservations it might bring to the theater.

Meyers (TV’s “The Tudors”), who has been enjoying well-deserved success of late, is wonderful as Louis. Captivating Russell, who delighted audiences in summer’s “Waitress” continues to charm. Terrence Howard, always compelling, plays a kindhearted child-services officer trying to keep August and other lost boys like him safe.

And Highmore, best known for his role as the melancholy brother in “Finding Neverland,” continues to be the cutest kid working in film. If “August Rush” fails at all, it is in the choice to cast Robin Williams as Wizard. Whenever Williams appears on-screen, the film’s gears seize up. A walking parody, Williams is a liability for the film, not an asset.

Reminiscent of 1995’s “Mr. Holland’s Opus,” “August Rush” is unabapologetically supercharged with hope and optimism. The film doesn’t have a drop of cynicism in it. No, fairy tales do not reflect reality. But then, that is exactly why we so desperately need them.

Review II (by Stephen Holden, the New York Times)

Is That Music We Hear or a Tyke’s Beating Heart?

To describe “August Rush” as a piece of shameless hokum doesn’t quite do justice to the potentially shock-inducing sugar content of this contemporary fairy tale about a homeless, musically gifted miracle child. August Rush (Freddie Highmore) hears music

everywhere. Whether it's the wind in the grass or the roar of a subway, the sounds of the world are a symphony to his ears, and the movie's soundtrack offers a Hollywood realization of a John Cage idea in which all sounds are music.

August, introduced as Evan Taylor, has absolute faith that music will mystically reunite him with his parents, who he is certain must be somewhere out there, although he has no clues to their identity. As we learn early in the movie, those parents — Louis Connelly (Jonathan Rhys Meyers), an Irish rock singer with a musical sweet tooth, and Lyla Novacek (Keri Russell), a classical cellist — fell in love at first sight and conceived him on a rooftop overlooking Washington Square but were kept apart by her conniving, ambitious father (William Sadler).

Months after their night of love, the pregnant Lyla is hit by a car and gives birth prematurely. In the most preposterous of the many ludicrous plot twists in a movie whose continuity is flimsy at best, her father forges her signature on adoption papers, gives the baby away, then tells her it died. Louis and Lyla abandon their performing careers and morosely search for they know not what.

In the meantime, Evan flees from a group home in New Jersey to New York City, where he falls in with a band of runaways living in the old Fillmore East Theater in the East Village. Here, Wizard (Robin Williams), the Fagin character in the movie's "Oliver Twist"-inspired subplot, reigns as their cunning surrogate father who collects and distributes their earnings from panhandling.

When Evan, who has never touched a musical instrument, picks up a guitar for the first time and plays it like a pro, Wizard christens him August Rush, a rock-star-worthy name taken from the side of a truck, and seeing a potential gold mine exploits August for every penny he can earn. After the boy demonstrates the same talent on a church organ, there is no stopping his meteoric ascent. In six months he is conducting a symphony orchestra performance of his original composition on the Great Lawn in Central Park.

The movie, directed by Kirsten Sheridan from a screenplay by Nick Castle and James V. Hart, is acted in a style best described as overawed. Oblivious to persecution and exploitation, Mr. Highmore's August glides through the movie with a beatific smile on his face. Mr. Rhys Meyers and Ms. Russell, who have no romantic chemistry, wander about in an emotional limbo.

There is a lot of music in "August Rush." But except for a couple of gospel songs, most of it, including August's "Rhapsody" (composed by Mark Mancina), is amorphous, pumped-up schlock.

DRIVING LESSONS (2006)



‘Driving Lessons’ is a 2006 British dramedy film written and directed by Jeremy Brock. The plot focuses on the relationship between a shy teenaged boy and an aging eccentric actress. At the Moscow Film Festival, Julie Walters won the Silver St. George for Best Actress and Jeremy Brock was awarded the Special Jury Prize. Walters was nominated for the Satellite Award for Best Actress — Motion Picture Musical or Comedy but lost to Meryl Streep in ‘The Devil Wears Prada’.

Extensive Viewing

I. Analyze the given synopsis, jot down its strong and weak points, produce your own synopsis of the film.

Ben Marshall (Rupert Grint), a seventeen-and-a-half year old boy, was struggling to become a young man. Although living in what appeared to be a strong Christian household, Ben was urging to break away from his overpowering mother and a push-over father. Ben, a struggling poet, finds a housekeeping job for a retired actress named Evie (Julie Walters). Ben, who comes from a house of constant fighting, is very sad when he meets Evie. Despite his unhappiness, Ben opens up his heart and becomes close to Evie, making her feel cheerful after the longest time of being unhappy from horrors in her past. Not only does Ben housekeep for Evie, he also accompanies her on other events like camping trips where they spend time quoting plays with one another and just plain having fun. It doesn't take long for Evie to realize that she needs Ben in every aspect in her life, and he needs Evie, too, and in the end, Evie helps Ben become the man he wants to be.

CAST

Rupert Grint	...	Ben Marshall
Laura Linney	...	Laura Marshall
Nicholas Farrell	...	Robert Marshall
Jim Norton	...	Mr. Fincham
Julie Walters	...	Evie Walton
Oliver Milburn	...	Peter
Tamsin Egerton	...	Sarah

II. Think and answer the questions:

1. What are your first impressions of Ben?
2. How can you characterize the atmosphere in Ben's family? The relations between his parents? Does the boy feel comfortable at home?
3. It is generally assumed that every person is a result of his/her upbringing. Try to prove it on the example of Ben. How can you describe the relations between Ben and his mother? Ben and his father? What are their methods of child rearing?
4. What is the essence of Robert Marshall's sermon in church? Do you agree with his words?
5. Ben's mother is considered to be a truly religious woman. Can you prove that she is a hypocrite rather than an ideal parishioner?
6. What are Ben's feelings when Evie first involves him in dramatizing in the garden? Why does she do it?
7. Why does Evie insist on a two-days camping trip? What is the result of it?
8. What are Laura's tricks to make her son feel constantly guilty? Does she succeed in her efforts?
9. Why does Ben tell the girl that Evie is his grandmother? Is it only a pretext to explain his duties? Or do they have something in common?
10. How does Evie manage to reveal Ben's real self? What rules does she make him break? What for?

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