



TRANSCRIPT

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Media Film and Technology

Film Review

Film Reviews - *Nim's Island* and *Definitely, Maybe*

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In my previous session on this program I discussed the work of actor Tommy Lee Jones who has become one of the grand old men of the movie industry. In this program I will focus on the work of an actress who is at the opposite end of the age demographic – a little girl who, if she continues in the acting profession, has the capability of becoming a very significant, long-term character performer.

The little girl's name is Abigail Breslin. At the age of twelve she's been acting since she was three and has already received one Oscar nomination. That was for her role as the pivotal character in the delightfully quirky *Little Miss Sunshine*. Already she seems destined to achieve greatness in motion pictures.

Abigail Breslin was born in New York and comes from an acting family and, to judge from her performances, she seems to have known just what to do from the moment she first toddled in front of a camera. She gives the appearance of being totally relaxed on screen and completely absorbed in the role she is playing. She slips on the cloak of her characters and infuses them with an almost uncanny level of understanding. I can't recall any other child actor who has been better able to portray the innocent wisdom of a thoughtful child.

Abigail Breslin is currently appearing in two very different but appealing movies: *Nim's Island* and *Definitely, Maybe*. Her performances are crucial to both of these movies. In fact she plays the leading role in *Nim's Island* and a small, but vital, role in *Definitely, Maybe*.

Definitely, Maybe is a charming, romantic "relationship" comedy which I sense has been somewhat under-rated on the theatre circuit. It has something of the flavour of those classics of the "relationship" genre *Four Weddings and a Funeral* and *Love, Actually* and, while it perhaps doesn't quite hit the mark as surely as those movies did, it is, nonetheless, an engaging production which absorbs and intrigues us as it unfolds its story with a satisfyingly complex screenplay.

The story is triggered by a ham-fisted primary school class in sex education which provokes an eleven-year-old girl to assail her father with a series of hard-to-answer questions. The major question is whether or not she herself was the result of a chance sexual encounter or the product of a loving relationship. In other words was she an "accident" or the result of real love? Her parents have already separated and are in the process of divorcing so the girl asks her father to put his relationship with her mother into the context of any other significant relationships he has had in his life.

Innocently, she is seeking to unravel the fabric of love in order to find its essence.

So, in place of a usual bedtime story, her father begins to tell the stories of the three great loves of his life. The girl's mother is to be one of these but father and daughter agree to change the names of the women so that it will not be obvious which one is her mother.

The story then unfolds mainly through a series of flashbacks. However, the narrative returns from time to time to the on-going bedside story situation and these sequences provide gratifying anchorage points in the development of the movie. And it is Abigail Breslin, as the daughter, who delights us and absorbs our attention during these moments. Although the rest of the movie is pacy and well-written, and contains a sophisticated and well-balanced mixture of the comic and the serious, it is the remarkable performance by this little girl that lingers in the mind after the closing curtain.

I gave the movie three and a half stars.

Nim's Island, in which Abigail Breslin has the leading role, is an adventure movie designed for all the family and I would thoroughly recommend it for anyone at all who is young at heart. It's a delightful mixture of fantasy and reality which manages to include most of the elements of any classic adventure yarn: a desert island, a volcano, storms, shipwrecks, helpful animals, heroes, villains, and a damsel in distress.

In a nutshell, and without giving away too much at all, the plot works as follows: Nim lives on an uncharted island somewhere in the south Pacific with her widowed father who is a world-renowned marine biologist. When he fails to return from a research trip at sea Nim, now all alone except for a menagerie of helpful animal pets, seeks help from the author of her favourite adventure novels.

This is where the plot expands and takes on additional layers of delight. The author, played by Jodie Foster, may have created a heroic Indiana Jones-style character who is the hero of her novels, but she herself is, in reality, a house-bound recluse who is too afraid of the world to even open her front door and walk out to her mail box.

How on earth can she respond to an emailed cry for help from an eleven-year-old girl stranded alone on a distant island?

Well the answer is provided with a wonderful mixture of slapstick comedy and edgy adventure. I loved *Nim's Island*. It made me feel like a kid again and I gave it four stars.

Goodbye for now. See you in the back stalls.

John McGowan
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