Film Close-Up: Hugh Grant

by Joey_Berlin

In "Music and Lyrics," a rumpled but still dashing Hugh Grant plays an '80s-era pop icon confronted with his own irrelevance in today's youth-driven music industry. A teen pop diva wants to record a hastily arranged duet with Hugh's washed-up character, but his songwriting skills evaporated years ago. Drew Barrymore co-stars as a talented wordsmith on the rebound from a bad relationship, and Hugh and Drew learn to make beautiful music together.

HUGH GRANT - Hugh Grant plays washed-up singer Alex Fletcher in the romantic comedy 'Music and Lyrics.' CNS Photo courtesy of Gene Page.Earlier in his career, the actor had appeared in television and films for a decade before he shot to fame in 1994 with "Four Weddings and a Funeral," only to wind up as 1995's "celebrity mug shot of the year" after an encounter with a Los Angeles prostitute. Grant's rebound from that low point was nothing short of a show biz miracle, one that even a washed-up '80s musician could admire.

An Oxford University graduate with a degree in English, Grant has a dry, quick wit which in print can come across as sour; however, his tone in person is really quite charming and funny.

Q: Did you enjoy the process of shooting the hysterical music video scenes for "Music and Lyrics?"

A: You'd think that would be fun because it looks like it's fun. But of course it's torture. It was the very end of the shoot and we'd all had enough of each other. And it's not easy for me. I am a man of 46; I'm very ill-cast in the film. I'm not a music enthusiast, I don't move very naturally, I don't sing very naturally. I don't exist very naturally. So I find a lot of the pop stuff incredibly difficult.

You know, Marc (Lawrence, the writer-director) would say, "Well now let's do some isolation shots where it's just each member of the band standing by themselves, and just freaking out." Well I mean, forget it. That's just not going to happen. That's why I play the keyboards a lot in that, because I found it easier if I had a prop.

Q: Did you watch Duran Duran videos for inspiration?

A: I did watch Duran Duran videos, yep. I watched them at night to send me to sleep. And Drew was concerned that I had no interest in music so she bought me a lot of music, which was very kind of her, hundreds of albums and she put them all into a CD book for me.

Q: Did you end up liking any of them?

A: No, not one of them. No, that's not true. I'm very grateful for them. And they look very good on my shelf. Now I look like a human being because before I only had "Godspell."

Q: There was apparently a big difference between your trailer and Drew's trailer on the set. What was the different about them?

A: Yeah, Drew's is all warmth and people and laughter and candle light and there's fabrics lying everywhere. And there's things happening and films being made and magazines being shot. Mine is a dank, empty cell with one furious little Englishman sitting in the corner, grinding his teeth to a fine dust. No one's ever going to know it though, except a very timid dresser, twice a day.

Q: You didn't want to decorate your trailer too much?

A: I think trailers are undecoratable. They're so vile. It's like, you couldn't sit down and design something more repulsive than the inside of one of those motor homes. And they're lethal. You know they have to stick

stickers on them now saying, "These walls bleed toxic gas." If you're unfortunate enough to have an afternoon off and you go to sleep in your trailer, you're very lucky to wake up at all.

Q: Is it true that Andrew Lloyd Webber's mother taught you how to play piano when you were young?

A: Yes she did, yeah, briefly. And then I had a tantrum and gave it up. She was very nice, it had nothing to do with her. I remember distinctly going round there and I had to sit on three London telephone directories to be able to reach the keyboard. Yeah, I did it for about a month or two. You know, I wish passionately that I'd got on with it. I just wish I had.

Q: Were you nervous about the singing you would have to do for the film?

A: Well the funny thing is, to begin with on the whole film, yes I was incredibly nervous about the singing. And I sounded like a mouse, nothing came out. But they've got this process now with the computer where basically they can make anyone sound good. You get more and more confident and in the end you actually sing much better anyway because you know they can fix you if you don't.

Q: How do they fix it?

A: You do a little piece of it 16 times and then they fix it with a computer and stick it all together. The whole of the music industry is a gigantic fraud, and these New York record producers would be the first to admit that that's absolutely true. So by the end of the film, yes, I came to quite love the sound of my own voice. In fact, I'd love to sing for you now.

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