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Les Misérables!



By **JON STEELY**

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Sometimes sadness has a big payoff. Such is the case with *Les Misérables*, a masterwork that has stood the test of time – in many incarnations. Originally conceived in 1862, *Les Misérables* first appeared as an eloquently-written novel by French playwright Victor Hugo. Since then, Hugo's creation has been reborn several times in film, TV, and most notably on the stage as the smash hit Broadway musical *Les Misérables*, which garnered eight Tony Awards and kicked off an international theatrical sensation.

Now in its twenty-seventh year, *Les Misérables* is still considered the world's most successful musical, continuing to break box-office records in theaters around the globe. So, how could this exceptional work of art get any better? How could this enthralling story of redemption and ode to the human spirit become even more interesting? Simple, just cast today's biggest Hollywood actors in the lead roles and bring it to the big screen as a 2012 Christmas release.

The latest cinematic adaptation of *Les Misérables* stars Hugh Jackman, Russell Crowe, Anne Hathaway and Amanda Seyfried, and also features strong performances by Eddie Redmayne (*My Week with Marilyn*), Samantha Barks (*Oliver!*), Helena Bonham Carter (*Alice in Wonderland*), Aaron Tveit ("*Gossip Girl*") and Sacha Baron Cohen (*The Dictator*). Helming this talented ensemble cast is Tom Hooper – Best Director Academy Award winner for *The King's Speech* – who approached this ambitious project by recording the actors singing live on set (instead of lip-synching to studio track recordings) and casting big screen newcomer and British stage actress Samantha Barks in the role of the destitute Eponine, a role that Taylor Swift, Scarlett Johansson, Evan Rachel Wood and "Glee's" Lea Michele were all rumored to show major interest in.

Though Hooper brings a new and beautifully stylized version of *Les Misérables* to the big screen, the story and songs of toil and doom remain the same. Jackman is Jean Valjean, a French peasant jailed for 20 years for—get this—stealing a loaf of bread so his hungry family can eat! Once freed from prison, Valjean – amid the June Rebellion of 1832 in Paris – violates his parole and sets off to begin a new life – much to the chagrin of policeman Javert (Crowe), who dedicates the next several years to capturing and returning Valjean to jail. Along the chase, Valjean assumes a new identity as a factory owner and small town mayor, while impoverished factory worker Fantine (Hathaway) loses her job and turns to a life of prostitution. Fantine, with her health failing, begs Valjean to get money to her illegitimate daughter Cosette (Seyfried). After meeting the child, Valjean vows to care and raise her and of course, to "keep her safe." Much to Valjean's dismay Cosette later falls hard for student revolutionary, Marius (Redmayne). Hooper's *Les Misérables* has something for everybody: great actors, timeless themes, visually stunning scenes and a beloved and powerful score.

Les Misérables also offers us a chance to hear some of Hollywood's biggest names – all of whom have musical theater backgrounds – do something we're not used to them doing; singing some of Broadway's most popular compositions, including "I Dreamed a Dream," "On My Own," "Bring Him Home," "Castle on a Cloud," and "One Day More." Yes, Wolverine and Gladiator actually sing!

There is also much ado about Anne Hathaway's indelible performance as Fantine – many industry insiders are predicting an Academy Award nomination – as well as her dramatic weight loss for this role. To prepare to play her emaciated, illness-stricken character, Hathaway dropped a whopping 25 pounds from her already small frame, joining the ranks of Christian Bale and Matthew McConaughey for executing this year's most talked about slim downs.

With an epic story, fresh performances of classic show tunes and lots of Oscar buzz, *Les Misérables* is this holiday season's most widely anticipated and beautifully crafted feature film. Personally, I've never been so excited over emotional devastation. Who knew that this much misery in the 19th Century could ever be so damn good? Don't miss it!

[*Les Misérables* opens in theaters on Christmas Day.](#)