

Review #54 : *Bugsy Malone* (1976)

A delightful miniaturised, musicalised version of a gangster movie

TRAILER

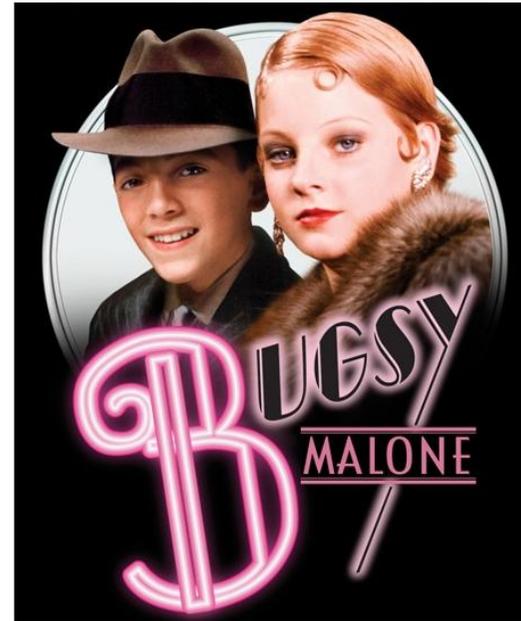
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NOrgDbldcA4>

At first the notion seems alarming : a gangster movie cast entirely with kids. Especially when we learn that *Bugsy Malone* isn't intended as a kid's movie so much as a cheerful homage to classic Hollywood crime films. *What are kids doing in something like this ?*

But then we see the movie and we relax. *Bugsy Malone* is like nothing else. It's an **original and charming** one, and it has another special performance by **Jodie Foster**, who at 13 was already getting the roles that grown-up actresses complained weren't being written for women anymore. She plays a hard-bitten nightclub singer and vamps her way through a torch song by Paul Williams with approximately as much style as Rita Hayworth brought to *Gilda*. She starts on stage, drifts down into the audience, arches her eyebrows at the boys, and, in general, is **astonishingly assured**. And her performance seems just right in the film, as *Bugsy Malone* depends almost totally on **tone and style**.

SYNOPSIS

Bugsy Malone tells a gangster story about a **tough new gang that wants to take over the territory**. The Boss recruits hired guns for protection in the middle of this mob war. *Bugsy Malone* (**Scott Baio**) is one of his best 'men'. But even *Bugsy* can't help, because the other gang has a



Starring :
Jodie Foster
Scott Baio



dreaded new weapon. In Al Capone's day, it was machine guns. In Bugsy's movie, it's *marshmallow* guns. They open up on you with one of these, and you got more than egg on your face. Old-fashioned weapons like custard pies are useless in a one-on-one situation.

REVIEW

When kids play, it's *real*. That's one of the things we lose when we grow up : the ability to turn the backyard into the OK Corral. The kids in *Bugsy Malone* don't behave as if the material is a put-on. For them, it's real – especially the indignity of catching a marshmallow in your ear. And so in an uncanny way the movie works as a gangster movie and we remember that the old Bogart and Cagney classics had a **childlike innocence**, too. The world was simpler then. Now it's so complicated !

Made in 1976, the anachronistic endeavour feels like a throwback to the kind of escapism Hollywood once made for a nation dealing with the Great Depression or war, one of those **all-singing, all-dancing old-school entertainments meant to transport you**. The kids are all great fun to watch, even if the glammed-up showgirls make things a little uncomfortable at times, but to me the complete absence of adults makes the whole thing feel more like some desexualized, **innocent play-acting**, a world so unreal that those concerns seem a million miles away.

A special mention to **Fat Sam**, incredibly confident in his pinstripes...

The film is also beautifully photographed, awash in that dreamy 70s haze you don't see anymore. First-time production designer Geoffrey Kirkland creates a **flawless, colourful imaginary world** for the characters. *Bugsy Malone* ran regularly on TV in the States about 30 years ago, but is mostly forgotten in America today. In the UK, however, it's a genuine cult classic +++

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=49fKPUiEKfY#aid=P-2-ERJJdXY>