

Review: Steven Spielberg's joyful, emotional 'The Fablemans' heads to the Oscars



CHENNAI: Steven Spielberg makes marvelous movies that are fantastically imaginative but his latest, "The Fablemans," running for the Best Picture and Best Director awards at the upcoming Academy Awards on March 12, is his first autobiographical work.

Her depicts his childhood and his joyful introduction to cinema with a compelling sense of optimism and also offers a critical look at his own beginnings.

Spielberg is Sammy Fableman, a child growing in 1950s New Jersey, and his first dramatic encounter with cinema is no less than Cecil B DeMille's "The Greatest Show on Earth." Therein begins his love affair with the magic of movies and some fascinating on-screen moments include the boy using his toy trains and an 8mm camera to recreate footage from DeMille's 1952 film.

Sammy grows up — his teen self is played by actor Gabriel LaBelle — and he and his sisters travel around with their parents as their father's work takes the family to Arizona and California, where he was bullied by antisemites, only to find love with a Christian girl later in the story.

“The Fablemans” is brilliantly evocative and captures Sammy's journey into cinema, a career that may not have begun at all. It is wonderfully edited and photographed and, above all, captures suburban American life in all its serene splendor. “The Fablemans” has liberal traces of Spielberg's magic realism and is suitably intense in its emotional review of the lauded director's life — in fact, he is widely reported to have cried on set while directing the production.

And there are some painful moments to cry about — his mother (Michelle Williams) is having an affair with his father's friend and employee, Bennie Loewy (Seth Rogen), who is a perpetual fixture at their home, joining them ever so often for supper and going on picnics. At one of them, Sammy shoots a home film in which his mother dances in her nightie and Sammy edits out a frame in which she can be seen holding Bennie's hand before he presents the final film to his family. It is a fascinating comment on the power of editing in creating a story for the screen, something the legendary director is well-versed in.
