

Brattle Theatre Film Notes: Mulholland Drive

USA, 2001. Rated R. 147 min

Cast: Naomi Watts, Laura Harring, Justin Theroux, Ann Miller, Dan Hedaya, Robert Forster; Writers: David Lynch; Music: Angelo Badalamenti; Cinematographer: Peter Deming; Producers: Neal Edelstein, Tony Krantz, Michael Polaire, Alain Sarde, Mary Sweeney; Director: David Lynch

**"It is all a tape recording...
it is an illusion."**

So it goes in MULHOLLAND DRIVE, David Lynch's breathtaking, hilarious, unsettling, one-of-a-kind, indisputably weird take on Hollywood, dream logic, and ever-shifting identities. It's the rare film where one honestly cannot predict or even imagine what direction the plot or characters will take next. And no, it is not necessarily all a dream, or an illusion. Originally conceived as a television series pilot for a baffled ABC (they rejected it), Lynch shot additional footage and reshaped it all into a two and a half-hour film. He also got the last laugh, winning, among other accolades, Best Director at the 2001 Cannes Film Festival (shared with the Coen Brothers for *The Man Who Wasn't There*), Best Film in a 2001 *Village Voice* critics poll, and Oscar nominations for Best Director and Original Screenplay.

At the heart of the film is Betty (Watts), an unforgettably ecstatic, fresh-faced blonde ingenue from Ontario. She's an aspiring actress in Hollywood for the first time, apartment-sitting for her Aunt Ruth. Enter Rita, (Harring), a sultry, mystifying brunette whom Betty finds in Aunt Ruth's shower. Rita has just stumbled away from a fatal car crash that prevented her from getting shot by a would-be assassin, but that also left

her with a head wound and amnesia. Across town, a young, arrogant filmmaker, Adam Kesher (Theroux), is being pressured – nay, forced – by his studio and Mafioso to cast a woman named Camilla Rhodes as the lead actress in his next film. Adam's defiance brings forth consequences progressively more peculiar and severe, culminating in a surreal meeting with an enigmatic figure called "The Cowboy."

Meanwhile, Betty and Rita are trying to piece together clues regarding the latter's identity. The actions they take are, grippingly,



equal parts Nancy Drew and Alfred Hitchcock, hurtling them towards an increasingly closer and redefined relationship, an elusive blue box, and the most haunting, beguiling, a cappella rendition of a Roy Orbison song that you're ever likely to hear. Along the way, there are typically Lynch-ian non-sequiturs, such as the hit man whose simple job goes comically, fatally awry; or a scene set in a diner where a nondescript, suited man gives another a play-by-play account of his worst nightmare, only to watch it eerily spring to life. You'll also see the likes of Ann Miller (yes, the one who appeared in *On The Town*), Lee Grant, Dan Hedaya, Billy Ray Cyrus (!), Chad Everett, and even Robert Forster turning up in supporting roles, cameos, and throwaway parts.

Of course, little is actually what it seems to be. The brilliance of MULHOLLAND DRIVE lies in its mind-blowing, densely elaborate construction. Locations, characters, objects, faces, names and even hair-styles suddenly, slyly reappear throughout, slightly tweaked or distorted or assigned alternate associations, as if in a tapestry that barely holds together one (or many) character's psychological states. Think of these disparate elements as puzzle pieces – yet, try not to get frustrated if they fail to fit perfectly together. They do coalesce into a complete picture of sorts, but one decidedly worthy of Salvador Dali or Luis Bunuel. The real fun is in the shape and design of each individual piece, and the emotions it elicits when one jagged edge rubs up against another. Think of this during the film's spellbinding, creepy final half-hour, an ingenious reshuffling of the narrative cards that will likely wrack your brain and make you think, "Huh?"

Not that one would expect anything less from the man behind *Eraserhead*, *Blue Velvet*, and *Twin Peaks*. This is another jewel in his magnificent, macabre crown, thanks in no small part to Naomi Watts. Her transformation in the film from impossibly perky innocent to complex, shockingly tragic figure has the immensity of a sobering slap in the face. Just as Betty shows us how well she can act at her audition midway through the film, so does Watts. Her courageous, breakthrough performance suffuses MULHOLLAND DRIVE with humane warmth, sensuality, and sorrow amidst the madness. So, sit back and surrender yourself to another perplexing, terrifying, seductive, utterly distinctive world from David Lynch.

– Chris Kriofske