

Lynch's Latest Builds a Dream Palace: "Mulholland Dr.," "Heist," and "Life as a House"

Written by Mike Schulz

Tuesday, 13 November 2001 18:00

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MULHOLLAND DR.

We've all had the experience: It's the middle of the night, and you awaken from a dream so vivid, so unreal, so funny and terrifying in equal measure, that your only thought is to go back to sleep immediately, to re-enter that astonishing dream state and keep it going.

That's *Mulholland Dr.* To call David Lynch's latest the best work of his career is to risk overpraising it – he did, after all, create *Blue Velvet* and *Twin Peaks* – but I'm also afraid I can't come close to doing this picture justice. For *Mulholland Dr.*

is nothing less than a work of art from a true master, the most enthralling, satisfying, brilliantly constructed movie of the year. And a lot of people are going to absolutely hate it. (And already do: Just ask Rex Reed. Or better yet, don't.)

Mulholland Dr. is proof positive that the *least* important question you can ask about a David Lynch movie is, "What's it about?" – the less you know, the better off you are. For those who care about such things, though, the plot ostensibly deals with bright, chipper Betty (Naomi Watts) and dark, voluptuous Rita (Laura Elena Harring), two Hollywood hopefuls who attempt to unravel the mystery behind Rita's identity after she loses her memory in a car wreck. But what *Mulholland Dr.*

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is really about is Los Angeles itself; the film is a blistering, horrifying, hilarious satire on The Land of Dreams, where the quest for stardom can lead to madness, and where nothing is what it seems. For those of us on Lynch's wavelength, his latest film works as comedy, as drama, as thriller, but most of all, as the quintessential David Lynch Movie.

Images are everything with Lynch, and *Mulholland Dr.* features at least a dozen sequences with images so powerful you might never forget them; just try to shake the sight of the sinister homeless man, or the beyond-dazzling Naomi Watts' first Hollywood audition, from your mind. But unlike some of Lynch's weirder offerings, these aren't just images in a void.

Everything

that happens in the film adds up in its twisted dream logic; some have complained of

Mulholland

's late-in-the-film plot switch – a true doozy – but it makes absolute narrative sense, and actually enriches the experience of the film by turning a marvelously original and clever work into a heartbreaking and empathetic one. Movies like

Moulin Rouge

and now

Mulholland Dr.

transform the movie theatre into what it once was – a true dream palace – and make you wish the dream would never end.



HEIST

With most heist pictures, the execution of The Big Score isn't nearly as much fun as the preparation for The Big Score; in David Mamet's *Heist*, the preparation isn't nearly as much fun as the dialogue *tangential* to the preparation for The Big Score. In this outing from the creator of those juicy cinematic jigsaw puzzles *House*

of Games

and

The Spanish Prisoner

, four jewel thieves (Gene Hackman, Delroy Lindo, Rebecca Pidgeon, and Ricky Jay) attempt to make off with the booty while keeping their partners/adversaries (Danny DeVito and Sam

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Rockwell) at bay; as you might imagine, all sorts of double-crosses and sneaky reversals – Who's gonna wind up with the loot? – keep the plot chugging along. Despite fine work by all and outstanding work from Hackman (71 years old, and looking and acting more fit than most performers two decades younger),

Heist

is a rather routine affair, with Mamet's direction, always methodical, surprisingly listless. Yet Mamet's dialogue, in all its patented, staccato wit, makes the film well worth seeing. Who can resist a movie where Hackman's character is described as "so cool that when he sleeps, sheep count

him

," or where Pidgeon's moll is explained with "She could talk her way out of a sunburn"? Add about three dozen verbal goodies along those lines and you've got a hell of an entertaining

Heist

.



LIFE AS A HOUSE

In Irwin Winkler's *Life as a House*, architect George Monroe (Kevin Kline) discovers that he only has a few months to live and decides to use that time rebuilding his dream home and, not coincidentally, rebuilding his crumbling relationships with his ex-wife (Kristin Scott Thomas), son (Hayden Christensen), and friends. The film strives to be

American Beauty

minus irony, and the similarities between the two are frighteningly obvious.

House

's subplots include a relationship between George's child and a brazenly confident teen (Jena Malone) and the goings-on with George's sexually repressed neighbors; we're given lots of beautiful overhead shots of suburban California; there's final, voice-over narration from a dead man; and if all that weren't enough, included in the cast are Scott Bakula and Sam Robards, who played Kevin Spacey's neighbors Jim and his lover, Jim. Irwin, we get it already!

I, for one, *prefer* a little irony in my domestic dramas, so I wasn't wowed by *House's* schmaltziness; it's a Stop and Smell the Roses movie, filled with groan-inducing Life Lessons and predictable tearjerker resolutions, and with all the characters' traumas neatly handled and

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tied up in a bow by the end of the picture. But amazingly, the cast keeps you alert even while Winkler and screenwriter Mark Andrus are mucking up everything in sight. In addition to the talents previously mentioned, the movie allows Mary Steenburgen, Jamey Sheridan, and John Pankow a fine moment or two, and Kevin Kline and Hayden Christensen are really something to see. Christensen (he who will be Darth Vader in the next two

Star Wars

installments) brings enormous passion to his confused, alienated teen, and Kline partners him with tremendous dexterity; his angry, frightened, resolute performance might be his best screen work yet. This

House

might be in shambles, but the cast, Kline and Christensen in particular, holds it together.

NOVA 6 INDEPENDENT SERIES

Moline's Nova 6 Cinema will be wrapping up its six-week series of independent releases with two of the year's most acclaimed works: *Hedwig & The Angry Inch* (running November 14-16) and *Startup.com* (November

17-20). Based on the off-Broadway smash,

Hedwig

is like

The Rocky Horror Picture Show

taken straight – pun intended – as it follows a struggling rock star dealing with a botched sex-change operation; its mixture of humor, sentimentality, and sensational music has already turned it into a cult classic. And the documentary

Startup.com

, about the rise and fall of a late-'90s Internet business, is an incredibly funny and moving achievement, and would be one of my three favorite films of the year if

Mulholland Dr.

hadn't arrived. Kudos to Nova 6 for bringing Quad Cities audiences a rare glimpse of this year's world of independent cinema; we eagerly await the sequel.