



Publicity still from *Mulholland Drive*.

Mulholland Drive

Film review by Megan Spencer

David Lynch's [*Mulholland Drive*](#) is a surreal, psycho-sexual melodrama which originally began life as a television pilot.

Rejected by the US TV network ABC for being too dark and just plain 'freaky deaky' for a mass TV audience (ironically the same network which gave Lynch's iconic *Twin Peaks* series a home in the 80s) *Mulholland Drive* was given a reprieve by a French investor.

Armed with more than enough money to shoot extra scenes and thus shape the pilot into a standalone feature, [Lynch](#) went on to scoop Cannes last year (he shared the 'Best Director' plaudit with *The Man Who Wasn't There*'s Joel Coen). Ever since, the critics haven't stopped talking about it.

And so David Lynch - the button-down, former Eagle Scout from Missoula Montana and dedicated film artist (really, love or loathe Lynch is there any other way to describe him?!) - delivers his ninth feature to Australian audiences.

Lynch-ophiles - those who dig his more surrealist, dreamscape nightmares at least - shouldn't be disappointed with *Mulholland Drive*. While it perhaps doesn't reach the superb heights of *Eraserhead* (1977), *Blue Velvet* (1986), *The Elephant Man* (1980) or even his previous gentle masterpiece [*The Straight Story*](#) (1999), it's a terrifically fun and playful film filled with dark, craven images and lurching possibilities.

Last year John Carpenter homaged his own back catalogue of work in the [*Ghosts of Mars*](#) (2001), and Lynch does same in *Mulholland Drive*.

There are stricken women wandering from car wrecks, velvety torch singers, ponderings about dreams and nightmares, bogeymen who lurk in the dark and an innocent lead character with insatiable curiosity a la *Blue Velvet*'s Jeffrey Beaumont.

Mulholland Drive most closely resembles *Lost Highway* (1997) with its ethereal style and labyrinthine structure. And while previously Lynch's films have contained strong and central roles for women, perhaps none have had such a strong female presence as *Mulholland Drive*. Lynch hands the film over to a very capable 'yin and yang' pair, Australian actress Naomi Watts (*Gross Misconduct*) as Betty and Laura Elena Harring (*Little Nicky*) as Rita. Both women give career-making performances in this uber-mystery; they sway with each other on screen in beautiful synchronicity.

In *Lost Highway* David Lynch overtly reveals his 'disdain' towards plot and logic, splitting the story's reality plane with a 'through the looking glass' event. He does the same in *Mulholland Drive*, using Watts' Betty as that vehicle. (If Bill Murray had encountered Watt's Doris Day-esque Betty in *Mulholland Drive*, he might've laid that immortal line on her from *Groundhog Day*, "gosh you're an upbeat lady".)

She's a starry-eyed young actress who's followed the yellow brick road to Hollywood, seeking fame and fortune. Instead she encounters a voluptuous and mysterious stranger living in her actress-aunt's apartment. They embark together literally and figuratively on a road fraught with danger, dreams and deception. Then she really starts to worry - it's a bewitching transformation.

Mulholland Drive might be the closest thing David Lynch has made to a political film in his career: his attacks on Hollywood in it are priceless.

And so is this film. It's perhaps not "his *Raging Bull*" as one critic put it, more a warped *Wizard Of Oz* (like *Blue Velvet* was, only with less violence.)

Nonetheless, it's a fabulous dreamlike movie mystery.

Words by Megan Spencer © 2004



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