

Mulholland Drive [15]

2001 France/USA 147 mins

UK released **4 January 2002**

Director **David Lynch**

Screenplay **David Lynch**

Cinematography **Peter Deming**

Music **Angelo Badalamenti**

Cast **Naomi Watts** (Betty Elms / Diane Selwyn); **Laura Haring** (Rita / Camilla Rhodes); **Justin Theroux** (Adam Keshner); **Ann Miller** (Coco); **Robert Forster** (Detective McKnight)

Following his film *Blue Velvet* in 1986 and the groundbreaking *Twin Peaks* TV series in 1990, *Mulholland Drive* makes movies feel alive again. This sinful pleasure is a fresh triumph for Lynch, and one of the best films of a sorry-ass year. For visionary daring, swooning eroticism and colours that pop like a whore's lip gloss, there's nothing like this baby anywhere. *Mulholland Drive* opens in a fever dream, with a woman twisting and turning in bed. Then it's dark — Lynch dark, an inky black accentuated by Angelo Badalamenti's seductively unsettling score (no sound design this year is more vital to a film's success). It's night in Los Angeles. A limo slithers along Mulholland Drive, but just as the driver stops to shoot the gorgeous brunette (Haring) in the back seat, the limo is rammed by a carload of hard-partying teens. The only survivor is the brunette, who staggers in heels down a hill, taking refuge in a Hollywood bungalow just vacated by a woman on her way out of town.

Cut to the L.A. airport. Bright sunshine. Perky blonde Betty Elms (Watts) has just jetted in from Deep River, Ontario, to make it as an actress. An elderly couple she met on the plane wish her well. Sitcom stuff? Hardly. Those seniors give off a malevolent vibe, especially when they laugh. A feeling of dread infects everything except Betty, who keeps smiling even when she settles into her aunt's bungalow and finds the brunette in the shower. The brunette calls herself Rita, after Rita Hayworth (she spots a

poster of the 1940s star in Gilda hanging on the wall), but the limo accident has erased her memory of everything, notably where she got the cash stuffed in her purse.

When the name Diane Selwyn triggers a response in Rita, the girls play detective (Lynch's Angels?) and turn up no end of surprises, including a mysterious blue box and key, a dwarfish tycoon, a mobster, a bungling hit man, a threatening cowboy, a crazed psychic and — oh, yes — a rotting corpse.

The relatively unknown Watts and Harring are sensational in ways that go beyond the call of babes-in-distress duty. As Watts digs into the juiciest role for a young actress in ages, Lynch starts unveiling the method behind his madness. Rita whisks Betty off to a decaying nightclub; no one does glamorous old-Hollywood rot like Lynch. Whew! You can do one of two things: Scratch your head and curse Lynch as a freak or realize that what's transpired so far is the dream being experienced by the woman from the first scene, a woman who might be Betty.

Might is the operative word. In the film's final third, as identities shift and the world is thrown out of balance, we are encouraged to link the pieces of the puzzle cunningly devised by Lynch, cinematographer Peter Deming, production designer Jack Fisk and editor Mary Sweeney. The challenge is exhilarating. You can discover a lot about yourself by getting lost in Mulholland Drive. It grips you like a dream that won't let go.

Peter Travers, *Rolling Stone*, 19 October 2001 (abridged).

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