



SIGHT AND SOUND GREATEST FILMS OF ALL TIME 2022: 8=

Mulholland Dr.

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

For all its mood shifts from black wit to sheer terror (Peter Deming's camerawork creeps around corners and into darkened rooms to discover a Medusa-faced derelict or corpses glistening with rot), David Lynch's *Mulholland Dr.* is disturbingly all of a piece. This belies the fact that the first two thirds are a re-edit of a series pilot for ABC that was shot two years before, only to be shelved by the puzzled network. The sequences that comprise the rest of the movie, meanwhile, are add-ons, invented to transform an open-ended pilot into a film offering, if not closure, at least circularity. Either section can be read as a 'dream' version of the other's 'reality' – though things are never that simple in Lynch's world of dreams within dreams. Moments of explicit fantastica recur throughout, leaving wide open (and irrelevant?) the question of whether television or film is the more 'real' medium. It's as if Lynch had side-stepped a couple of seasons of up-and-down intrigue and segued directly from the *Twin Peaks* pilot to the theatrical *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*. He at once establishes and destroys a fictional universe, while probing the nature of narrative and performance, offering the practice of karaoke mime (demonstrated by Dean Stockwell in *Blue Velvet*) as a metaphor for all human activity.

The third act recasts what has gone before, as aspiring Hollywood star turned plucky amateur detective Betty Elms discovers that she is also Diane Selwyn, the corpse in the case she's been investigating. Since Peg Entwistle jumped off the Hollywood Sign in 1932, the story of the wide-eyed starlet who comes to Hollywood, only to find that it's a circle of hell, has been endlessly retold. *Mulholland Dr.* seems to have a contemporary setting, but sweet Betty is from another time and place, the winner of an anachronistic jitterbug contest. As herself, Betty is deliberately unconvincing, always bright and generous, sure of her predestined stardom and yet, while running over lines for an audition, a woefully amateur actress. As someone else, however, she is much more convincing: when she takes the audition, she delivers a calculated and impressive performance, setting up the third-act segue when Betty is reincarnated as Diane (much in the same way that Bill Pullman became Balthazar Getty for a stretch of *Lost Highway*). Here, Naomi Watts shows real attack as Diane, the tagalong girlfriend about to be dropped by the big star.

Betty comes to Hollywood not to be in films but to be in a story. She mixes with the melodramatic, voluptuous Rita, who takes her name from a *Gilda* poster and comes complete with noir baggage (amnesia, a purse full of cash, a mystery key). The two women run through several possible versions of an anecdote just as Jacques Rivette's Céline and Julie enter a house which is at once a cyclical ghost story and an endlessly recut film, while their identities meld and switch like Millie and Pinky's in Robert Altman's *3 Women* (1977). The knowing co-option of elements from previous films even extends to a lesbian love scene that appears modelled on an encounter in an obscure porno movie one suspects might have attracted Lynch's attention, Gary Wells' *Twin Peaks* (1990). After erotic fantasy, Lynch delivers a scene of literal self-abuse, as the rejected Diane angrily masturbates, one of several scenes that just might constitute a waking frame for the dreamed whole.

The prevailing spirit of the film is a figure from Hispanic-American folklore, *la llorona* ('the crying woman'). Like the Irish banshee, *la llorona* is a spectre, the ghost of a mother who has lost or killed her children, who wails in advance of tragedy. The film is infested with manifestations of this figure – anguished or fussy maternal characters such as Ann Miller's chatty landlady, or terrifying apparitions like the face-fried derelict. At Silencio, the midnight vaudeville theatre (latest of Lynch's luridly imagined infernal nightclubs) where Betty and Rita find the blue box that matches Rita's mysterious key, the star turn is 'la Llorona de Los Angeles', a chanteuse who outdoes Dean Stockwell's performance of 'In Dreams' by delivering an extraordinary mime in sync with a Spanish-language cover of Roy Orbison's 'Crying' only to collapse half-way through as the track continues. Miming to playback, with its implications of a willing surrender of one identity to usurp and yet undermine another, also features as the young film director Adam auditions actresses for his musical, by having them lip-sync terrifying kitsch – Connie Stevens' 'Sixteen Reasons (Why I Love You)'. All this points to the way Betty is somehow forced to life-sync for Diane, or Diane dreams of a happier ending as Betty.

The film concentrates on Betty and Rita, but the television series, now itself a might-have-been ghost, would presumably have developed the cops played by Robert Forster and Brent Briscoe as well as other intriguing but little-seen characters. Played with a Kyle MacLachlan squareness by Justin Theroux, Adam suffers most in the reshoot, a wooden support to the nuanced readings of Watts and Laura Elena Harring as Diane and movie star Camilla. He's marvellously unsettled, however, in his first, truncated storyline. There have been Hollywood horror stories before, but only Lynch would stage production meetings as ritual torture or ghostly encounters. The supposed power players turn out to be trapped between the wills of a Mabuse-Howard Hughes figure in the basement (Michael J. Anderson in a prosthetic body) and sinister backers who present their choice for lead role, Camilla, as a *fait accompli* ('This is not a suggestion'). His sharp black suit absurdly splattered with bright magenta, Adam learns his whole life is dependent on going along with the creative input of the money men, who have the power to ruin his credit at a cash-only flop-house. To get back on track, he takes a midnight meeting at the top of Mulholland Drive where a buzzing lightbulb flares to announce the arrival of the Cowboy, a successor to *Twin Peaks*' Killer BOB and *Lost Highway*'s mystery man as a representative of supernaturally organised crime.

A film bound to irritate audiences who want to emerge with a cut-and-dried sense of what they've seen, this follows the aptly-titled *The Straight Story* by taking a literally crooked road (Mulholland Drive, of course), with byways into Hollywood satire, criminal intrigue, horror and backstage musical. It certainly contains as much material as any television series could manage, never quoting, evoking or imitating without subsuming the raw material into its own unique world. Films as emotionally overwhelming as *Mulholland Dr.* often seem shallower with further acquaintance, but this shows signs of being a lasting work, a film that shifts and changes along with the viewer, upon which all commentary is necessarily provisional.

Kim Newman, *Sight and Sound*, January 2002

MULHOLLAND DR.

Director: David Lynch

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Production Companies: Films Alain Sarde, Asymmetrical Productions

Produced by: Babbo Inc

Executive Producer: Pierre Edelman

Producers: Mary Sweeney, Alain Sarde, Neal Edelstein, Michael Polaire, Tony Krantz

1st Assistant Directors: Mark Cotone, Scott Cameron

Screenplay: David Lynch

Director of Photography: Peter Deming

Visual Effects Supervisor: Scott Billups

Editor: Mary Sweeney

Production Designer: Jack Fisk

Art Director: Peter Jamison

Costume Designer: Amy Stofsky

Music Composed and Conducted by: Angelo Badalamenti

Sound Design: David Lynch

Re-recording Mixers: Ron Eng, David Lynch, John Neff

Supervising Sound Editor: Ron Eng

Cast

Justin Theroux (*Adam Keshner*)

Naomi Watts (*Betty Elms/Diane Selwyn*)

Laura Elena Haring (*Rita/Camilla Rhodes*)

Ann Miller (*Coco Lenoix*)

Dan Hedaya (*Vincenzo Castigliane*)

Mark Pellegrino (*Joe*)

Brent Briscoe (*Detective Domgaard*)

Robert Forster (*Detective Harry McKnight*)

Katharine Towne (*Cynthia*)

Lee Grant (*Louise Bonner*)

Scott Wulff (*limo driver*)

Billy Ray Cyrus (*Gene*)

Chad Everett (*Jimmy Katz*)

Rita Taggart (*Linney James*)

James Karen (*Wally Brown*)

Lori Huring (*Lorraine*)

Angelo Badalamenti (*Luigi Castigliane*)

Michael Des Barres (*Billy*)

Marcus Graham (*Mr Darby*)

Melissa Crider (*waitress at Winkies*)

Robert Katims (*Ray Hott*)

Jeanne Bates (*Irene*)

Dan Birnbaum (*Irene's companion*)

Maya Bond (*Aunt Ruth*)

Patrick Fischler (*Dan*)

Michael Cooke (*Herb*)

Bonnie Aarons (*bum*)

Michael J. Anderson (*Mr Roque*)

Joseph Kearney (*Roque's menervant*)

Enrique Buelna (*back of head man*)

Richard Mead (*hairy-armed man*)

Sean E. Markland (*cab driver at LAX*)

Daniel Rey (*valet attendant*)

David Schroeder (*Robert Smith*)

Tom Morris (*espresso man*)

Melissa George (*Camilla Rhodes*)

Matt Gallini (*Castigliane limo driver*)

Vincent Castellanos (*Ed*)

Diane Nelson (*heavy-set woman*)

Charlie Croughwell (*vacuum man*)

Rena Riffel (*Laney*)

Tad Horino (*Taka*)

Tony Longo (*Kenny*)

Geno Silva (*hotel manager*)

Lafayette Montgomery (*Cowboy*)

Kate Forster (*Martha Johnson*)

Wayne Grace (*Bob Booker*)

Michele Hicks (*Nicki*)

Lisa Ferguson (*1st assistant cameraperson*)

William Ostrander (*2nd assistant director*)

Elizabeth Lackey (*Carol*)

Brian Beacock (*backup singer 1*)

Blake Lindsley (*backup singer 2*)

Adrien Curry (*backup singer 3*)

Tyrah M. Lindsey (*backup singer 4*)

Michael Weatherred (*Hank, assistant director*)

Michael Fairman (*Jason*)

Johanna Stein (*woman in #12*)

Richard Green (*the magician*)

Conte Candoli (*trumpet player*)

Cori Glazer (*blue-haired lady*)

Geno Silva (*emcee*)

Rebekah Del Rio (*herself*)

Lyssie Powell (*blond in bed*)

Scott Coffey (*Wilkins*)

Kimberly Clever, Joshua Collazo, Lisa Ferguson, David Frutos, Peter

Loggins, Theresa Salazar, Thea Samuels, Christian Thompson (*dancers*)

France/USA 2001©

147 mins

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