

BUYING & BOOKING GUIDE

VOL. 118, NO. 6

LOVE & MERCY

ROADSIDE ATTRACTIONS/Color/1.85/Dolby Digital & Datasat Digital/120 Mins./Rated PG-13

Cast: John Cusack, Paul Dano, Elizabeth Banks, Paul Giamatti, Brett Davern, Kenny Wormald, Jake Abel, Graham Rogers, Bill Camp, Max Schneider.

Directed by Bill Pohlad.

Screenplay: Oren Moverman, Michael Alan Lerner.

Produced by Bill Pohlad, Claire Redneck Polstein, John Wells.

Executive producers: Ann Ruark, Jim Lefkowitz, Oren Moverman.

Director of photography: Robert Yeoman.

Production designer: Keith Cunningham.

Editor: Dino Jonsäter.

Music: Atticus Ross.

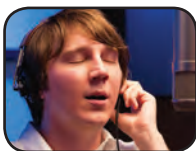
Sound design: Eugene Gearty.

Costume designer: Danny Glicker.

A Lionsgate, Roadside Attractions and River Road Entertainment presentation of a River Road Entertainment and Battle Mountain Films production.

Unconventional but fully fleshed-out and adoring (but not too adoring) portrait of brilliant Beach Boys leader Brian Wilson and his personal ups and downs.

This music-driven biopic, blessed with two excellent performances from Paul Dano as the younger Brian Wilson and John Cusack in the older



PAUL DANO

role, gives us the rock legend as a driven, uncannily gifted original. *Love & Mercy* demands our attention every step as it covers the remarkable working and romantic life of Wilson, who struggles with mental challenges and a formidable live tormentor by way of his abusive doctor, Eugene Landy (Paul Giamatti).

Classy work from the filmmakers, *Love & Mercy* is also a sparkling slice of rock 'n' roll history and further rewards with the twists and turns every great story carries. Beach Boys fans, certainly, and all those who value high-quality filmmaking—whether art-house habitués or the easier-to-please—should get in line.

Producer/director Bill Pohlad, working from Oren Moverman and Michael Alan Lerner's script, triumphs but takes no easy route in tackling so daunting a subject. Little time is spent on the easy part—the band's rise to fame when Brian was only in his early 20s, working with younger brothers Carl (Brett Davern) and Dennis (Kenny Wormald), cousin Mike Love (Jake Abel) and their friend Al Jardine (Graham Rogers). Instead and as befits so talented a musician, the focus is on Brian's

remarkable creativity and the psychological problems—hallucinations, imagined voices, a need to withdraw—that went along with it.

The band was best known for its signature harmonies, Brian Wilson creations inspired by his love of pre-rock groups like The Four Freshman. But after the California-style beach and surf hits, he needed to break new ground and met resistance on several fronts. His father Murray Wilson (Bill Camp) had been a problem in his life early on. A musician himself, he competed with his son, often denigrating him and seeking to extinguish any confidence Brian managed to maintain.

And the band, Mike Love especially, were losing patience with him. As Brian grew more restless with the band's old sounds and sought new directions, he drifted from the others and found himself isolated and obsessed in his tasks of creating new sounds. But his growing demons, beginning to crest in 1966 along with his creativity and obsession with cutting-edge arrangements, brought The Beach Boys historic breakthroughs like the *Pet Sounds* album and singles like "Wouldn't It Be Nice" and "Good Vibrations," among many others.

As Wilson aged into the decades to follow, his mental health and hold on reality diminished. The faux-cool con man and über-schmoozer Dr. Landy—consumed by his need for control—stepped in to fill a void and provide a lot of sedatives. When he couldn't be close by to watch Brian, he had bodyguards and caregivers hovering every moment.

A key moment was when the older Brian slipped into a Cadillac showroom and met car salesperson Melinda Ledbetter (a terrific Elizabeth Banks), a former model. Brian got the car and eventually the "girl," but that's jumping way ahead. On this initial encounter, Brian's wasn't a known face and he had already become a recluse, so she was unaware of the man she was flirting with. They grew closer, had an occasional date, and love was blooming until Landy tried to put a stop to it all.

The film moves continually yet fluidly back and forth from the '60s and Dano through the '90s with Cusack as the more troubled talent. The upshot is that *Love & Mercy*, mercifully lensed in California though cheaper locations tempted and generously packed with Beach Boys hits, is satisfying and coherent wherever it lands in time.

What sets the film soaring from a neat "Jersey Boys"-style arc of triumph and setbacks are those dual interpretations, even

though Cusack bears little physical resemblance to his character. Nor are the problems bedeviling the chief Beach Boy obscured, whether it's Brian being haunted by inner voices or freaking out on a plane or at the dinner table or needing to pull out of touring to go manic in studio sessions with the seasoned musicians he hires as he stretches the pop genre in exciting new directions.

The intensity, genius, creative forces and mental pain of Brian Wilson are all there and borne by both actors. And finally, here's a rock 'n' roll film in which sex, drugs and hunger for fame take a back seat and, appropriate to Wilson, the mystery of creativity and obsession for the music itself powers the story. And for a bit of old-fashioned sizzle, there's Brian's wonderful romance with Melinda and her battle to wrest control of him from the villainous Dr. Landy. —Doris Toumarkine

I'LL SEE YOU IN MY DREAMS

BLEECKER STREET FILMS/Color/1.85/Dolby Digital/95 Mins./Rated PG-13

Cast: Blythe Danner, Martin Starr, Malin Akerman, Sam Elliott, June Squibb, Rhea Perlman, Mary Kay Place.

Directed and edited by Brett Haley.

Screenplay: Brett Haley, Marc Basch.

Produced by Rebecca Green, Laura D. Smith, Brett Haley.

Director of photography: Rob C. Givens.

Production designer: Eric James Archer.

Music: Keegan DeWitt.

Costume designer: Mirren Gordon-Crozier.

A Two Flints production, in association with Jeff Rice Films, Northern Lights Films and Part2 Filmworks.

Based on the premise that growing old is both bitter and sweet, as in every other stage of life, this perfectly pitched romantic tale extols the virtues of trying new things—even when the odds are against it.

I'll See You in My Dreams is that rare slice-of-life movie that doesn't strike a false note anywhere. Which is quite astonishing, considering that the film's central story,



BLYTHE DANNER

about a widow in her 70s, was actually conceived and written by a couple of hip young guys in their 30s.

The second astonishing thing about this film—although some might put it first—is Blythe Danner's performance as Carol, a 71-year-old California widow. Danner is a natural for the part, of course, as she really