

'Sound of Metal' packs emotional wallop

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: «««« out of «««««

Running Time: 130 minutes

This film will be available for streaming on Amazon Prime Dec. 4.

The majority of movies focus on images to tell a story showing the actions of its characters rather than explaining their story. While pictures certainly play a part in the new feature *Sound of Metal*

, this drama focuses on a protagonist whose life revolves around sound and what happens when that essential part of his life is suddenly taken from him. It's a heavy and occasionally draining drama, but one with exceptional performances that are likely to be recognized during awards season.

Drummer Ruben (Riz Ahmed) and his girlfriend Lou (Olivia Cooke) are heavy metal musicians touring the country in an RV and playing shows in various clubs. When the percussionist begins to experience hearing loss, he visits a doctor. Upset by the prognosis and the costs involved in receiving an elaborate procedure to help with the condition, Ruben tries to continue on, but it is too difficult. Lou insists that her boyfriend check into a facility in order to come to grips with the problem.

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Concerned about being separated from his significant other, Ruben is initially resistant to the idea. Facility manager Joe (Paul Raci) attempts to help the musician come to terms with and accept his condition, but the lead still hopes to repair his hearing and return to his old life.

Star Riz Ahmed is a talented actor who has made an impression in recent films like *Nightcrawler* and *The Sisters Brothers*

, but he is particularly strong in this leading role. One imagines that it must be a real challenge to accurately depict the feelings of being suddenly deaf and finding himself completely off-balance as a result. However, the actor hits the right notes throughout as Ruben attempts to deal with the situation and even try to solve it, only to hit roadblock after roadblock along the way. This isn't a big or showy performance, but a very believable and authentic one that clearly displays the internal struggle that the character is going through.

In order to properly define what the character is experiencing, the film uses audio in fascinating ways. It often cuts away from the normal sounds present in the streets to muffled tones as Ruben would hear them and shows his difficulty as he attempts to decipher words and noises. Intermittently, we are forced to strain to hear those speaking to him just as he does, and the effect helps viewers relate to his situation and the challenges and frustrations involved.

Naturally, his transition into the facility is a rough one, ultimately leading to plenty of internal and external conflict. The movie doesn't try to solve every problem that Ruben encounters, but does show all that is involved in restructuring one's life. Admittedly, the pacing does slow down during the middle of the film as the lead begins to interact with other residents at the facility. These sequences don't offer the same kind of drama as the film does during the opening of the story, but are still interesting to watch.

Even more authenticity is lent to the proceedings when the protagonist decides to return to the regular world and reconnect with his significant other. Rather than wrap things up cleanly, the movie instead focuses on giving its lead character new perspective after everything that he has endured.

This is an interesting and compassionate little story that benefits greatly from the exceptional lead performance, which feels like a very accurate portrayal of a man going through a

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momentous life change. *Sound of Metal* may not be loud and brash, or spend as much time in the clubs as one might expect, but it still manages to pack an emotional wallop over the course of its running time.

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