

# TORONTO REVIEWS

## KINSEY ★★1/2

*Starring Liam Neeson, Laura Linney and Peter Sarsgaard. Directed and written by Bill Condon. Produced by Gail Mutrux. A Fox Searchlight release. Drama. Rated R for pervasive sexual content, including some graphic images and descriptions. Running time: 118 min.*

"Kinsey" is a big, glossy pop biography of the legendary entomologist Dr. Alfred Kinsey (Liam Neeson), who in post-war America wrote a radical landmark study of human sexual behavior. By treating sex as a biological phenomenon rather than an instinct dictated by morality, Kinsey set the stage for the Sexual Revolution of the '60s. The film, however, isn't about to start any revolutions, even though (in its own superficial way) it remains reasonably engaging.

Writer/director Bill Condon ("Gods and Monsters") doesn't delve too deeply into the turbulent aspects of Kinsey's research because he sees Kinsey basically as the savior of sex in a repressed, puritanical culture. Although Condon's not entirely wrong, he turns the picture into a cartoon version of the sexual wars with Liam Neeson playing Kinsey as if he's doing a reprise of Oskar Schindler. When Kinsey and his associates start interviewing Americans about their sexual habits and fantasies, the tone has an element of camp, so that we laugh at their frankness rather than consider the discomfort they feel in revealing themselves. By the time Kinsey hits a gay bar, where everyone is happily expressing themselves, we start to wonder what decade we're in.

While most of the performers are caricatured, Laura Linney as Kinsey's scientific partner and wife brings a supple warmth to the role without sacrificing any of her idiosyncrasies. As one of Kinsey's bisexual assistants, Peter Sarsgaard has a beautifully balanced and sane understanding of his own sexual orientation.

Although "Kinsey" touches on the professor's own bisexuality, it doesn't address—or dispute—other touchy subjects like the allegations of pedophilia. For all its claims of delving into the messiness of human sexuality, "Kinsey" manages to keep its hands clean.—*Kevin Courrier*

## MILLIONS ★★1/2

*Starring James Nesbitt, Daisy Donovan and Alex Etel. Directed by Danny Boyle. Written by Frank Cottrell Boyce. Produced by Andrew Hauptman, Graham Broadbent and Damian Jones. A Fox Searchlight Release. Drama. Rated PG-13 for brief strong language. Running time: 97 min.*

"Millions" is a children's story about what money does to both inspire and corrupt people. Director Danny Boyle ("Train-spotting") initially brings a buoyant

visual flair to this tale of two Liverpool boys who have lost their mother and shortly come into a sack of stolen cash. Damian (Alex Etel) believes he's being advised by saints who help to guide him in making the right decision in dispensing the loot. His older brother, Anthony (Lewis McGibbon), is more inclined to keep it. Meanwhile, their father—and most of the new suburb they've moved to—are clueless about the nature of their acquisition.

The picture has a peppy, try-it-on spirit until the script develops some problems with credibility. For example, it's a little hard to believe that two boys handing out gobs of money wouldn't raise eyebrows. Furthermore, the film has a treacherous conclusion which becomes morally questionable. "Millions" may be visually rich but it's poor in logic.—*Kevin Courrier*

## BEYOND THE SEA ★

*Starring Kevin Spacey, Kate Bosworth, Bob Hoskins, Brenda Blethyn, John Goodman and Greta Scacchi. Directed and written by Kevin Spacey. Produced by Arthur Friedman, Andy Paterson, Jan Fanti and Kevin Spacey. A Lions Gate release. Drama. Not yet rated. Running time: 121 min.*

"Beyond the Sea," the story of pop singer Bobby Darin ("Dream Lover," "Mack the Knife"), may clearly be a labor of love for Kevin Spacey, but it's a laborious picture to sit through. Spacey, who portrays the singer, seems to be trying to outdo just about every Hollywood musical ever made by promiscuously using every genre cliché in the book. It's a major disaster by a major talent.

Spacey doesn't try to make sense of Bobby Darin as a singer and actor; he resorts instead to hero worship. He frames the story in a tired conceit where Darin is making an autobiographical movie and, by viewing the rushes, comes to understand the difference between his image and reality. But Spacey doesn't illuminate how Bobby Darin differed from the bland teen idols of his day. There's no mention of how Darin became part of the second generation of Tin Pan Alley performers like Neil Sedaka, Carole King and Neil Diamond. We never grasp what drove him to become an actor who was attracted to diverse roles in movies like "Pressure Point" (where he plays an incarcerated American Nazi) and his shell-shocked pilot in "Captain Newman M.D." (which earned him an Academy Award nomination). The movie is basically the rise and fall—and final redemption—of Kevin Spacey's idol.

Although the picture is aggressively ambitious, there isn't an ounce of common sense anywhere in it. When Spacey

performs Darin's songs, the renditions come across as creepier than mimicry—he fetishizes the singer. Worse, when Darin puts the moves on actress Sandra Dee (Kate Bosworth), he suggests a lecherous old man rather than a romantic matinee idol. "Beyond the Sea" is beyond belief.—*Kevin Courrier*

## RAY ★★★★★

*Starring Jamie Foxx, Regina Taylor, Kerry Washington, Richard Schiff and Larenz Tate. Directed by Taylor Hackford. Written by James L. White. Produced by Taylor Hackford, Stuart Benjamin, Howard Baldwin and Karen Baldwin. A Universal release. Drama. Not yet rated. Running time: 152 min.*

If Kevin Spacey's "Beyond the Sea" about the life of Bobby Darin, is an example of a Hollywood musical biography gone painfully wrong, "Ray," featuring the life of the great rhythm and blues artist Ray Charles, is a case of everything going perfectly right. Perfection begins with Jamie Foxx in the title role. Not only does Foxx capture the wary soul of this American genius, who radically fused gospel, blues and country into a potent musical force, he also captures his great warmth. Although Foxx sings some of the early material, he later lip-synchs Charles' hits. But he gets so far inside the character that, like Jessica Lange's Patsy Cline in "Sweet Dreams," he practically embodies the songs.

"Ray" sits firmly in the grand commercial tradition of "Lady Sings the Blues" and "What's Love Got to Do With It?," but director Taylor Hackford also tells Charles' story by dramatizing his art. It delves into his early childhood in the South, going blind, riding the chitlin' circuit with blues artist Lowell Fulson; his landmark years with Atlantic Records recording the classics, "Mess Around" and "I Got a Woman"; and his later period with ABC-Paramount recording the deeply rich "Georgia On My Mind" and "Hit the Road, Jack."

While the film deals squarely with his womanizing and his heroin habit, unfortunately, the domestic scenes with his wife Beatrice (Kerry Washington) are poorly structured. Hackford gives us no sense as to why she wants to stay married to him. However, Regina Taylor's powerhouse performance as Marjorie "Margie" Hendricks of Ray's backup group, The Rayettes, is a small classic. Sharing both his bed and his music, Taylor delves into Hendricks' sensual hunger for Charles, and how it was equaled by her passion for the music. "Ray" is the kind of joyous movie experience that can make you see the light.—*Kevin Courrier*