

MUDBOUND

USA | 2017 | 134' | Drama | Rated R

Directed by

Dee Rees

Written with

Virgil Williams

Hilary Jordan
(from the novel by)

With

Carey Mulligan
Garrett Hedlund
Jason Clarke
Jonathan Banks
Jason Mitchell
Mary J. Blidge
Rob Morgan

Original Music by

Tamar-Kali



Première:

Sundance Film Festival
21 January 2017

World release:

17 November 2017 (web)

Budget: \$10.000.000

Gross: \$?

REVIEW

Mississippi countryside, a farm and two families: these are the ingredients of the story. Both of them have someone off to fight in World War II and difficulties of their own: the McAllans are white, middle-class, and are forced to live in a little wooden cottage after being fooled into buying a house already inhabited; Henry is unhappy with the situation and Laura with the marriage. The Jacksons are black, they live happily serving the McAllens and they try to be thankful for everything they have. The stories evolve differently, revealing the characters' secrets, failures and accomplishments whilst America, though winning the war, still struggles between racial equality and private justice.

There are more than a few issues in reviewing a movie like this. First of all, it is important to state that there is little novelty in the racist themes the story rests on, and in my opinion also in how the issue is presented: there is a black family and a white one, both with specific issues, some similar, some different, and they have to deal with their own problems and in the meantime interact, creating new arguments and new fighting grounds. Of course the director Dee Rees, though short of experience, relies deeply on the mise-en-scene, with good color choices and some of the greatest shots I can remember in last year's production. Even so, there is a lack in rhythm which I didn't understand, mostly because it is broken with some very engaging scenes every now and then.

Not much for one of the most appreciated movies of last year, I guess; anyway, I have to admit that I can see why it has been so. The characters live a struggling life, there is very little space for empathy or to build up a moral: it's just their everyday lives, their difficulties, their efforts to carry on through their earthly days. And, in an attempt to avoid spoilers, I'll just say that there is a very sharp ending, not happy but not that sad either.

And if the movie is so brutal and incredibly realistic, great merit must be given to a well chosen cast, where no one is truly leading and everyone is. The Oscar nomination for Mary J. Blidge (Florence) becomes a sort of attempt to acknowledge the high level of all of the actors without monopolizing the acting categories, mainly because it would be truly too much; I think even the great actress and singer acts as well as her

colleagues, which is high level but not stunning as other great performances this year. Was Blidge better than Carey Mulligan (Laura) or Jonathan Banks (Pappy)? Or even than the two Jason(s), Clarke and Mitchell (Henry and Ronsel)? I don't think so. They all (just!) portray this story as well as it could be done, and that's that.

Nothing new about the soundtrack either, in the end, even if it flows with the story: Tamar-Kali, at her first composing experience for a movie, makes a safe bet, with old American country sounds and a huge use of the violin family sounds and sad moods, once again leaving Mary J. Blidge the honor to the end-credit song ("Mighty River", also Oscar nominated).

The judgment on this movie is as difficult as it gets, at least for me, since there are a number of good things in a quite ordinary setting. Is this sufficient to make it one of the best movies of 2017? Guess I'll leave it to you!

ASSESSMENT	
POSTER	65%
TAGLINE	-%
TRAILER	80%
SATISFACTION	85%
DIRECTING	88%
SCREENPLAY	84%
PRODUCTION DESIGN	80%
CINEMATOGRAPHY	89%
CAST	86%
MUSIC	90%
TOTAL	85% = B