



FILM: **SOUND OF METAL**

FDG RATING: 4.1 ☺☺☺☺○

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Darius Marder: *director, writer*

Riz Ahmed: *actor, Ruben*

Olivia Cooke: *actress, Lou*

DATE: May 16, 2021

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **SOUND OF METAL**

If you're not into heavy metal music, the film's opening scene was auditory torture. This is Ruben's sound screeching universe. He forcefully blasts the rhythm on his drums to the similarly cacophonous singing/guitar playing of his girlfriend, Lou, as their band performs on tour. What happens next turns Ruben's world inside out. He completely loses his hearing minutes before going on stage. Panicking, he books an appointment at a doctor's office where he decides to get a cochlear implant, believing his hearing would be restored and he could get back to his heavy metal universe. The cost of the operation forces him to sell all his possessions including his music equipment and trailer, but he envisions buying it all back after he recovers and returns to his musician life.

What we hear as we watch Ruben sink into despair, are muffled, seemingly underwater sounds, high-pitched whines, and conversations that have a scratchy scraping quality. We experience exactly what he is experiencing as he tries to hear the sounds and voices around him. The movie deservedly won two Oscars for best sound and film editing. Riz Ahmed also deservedly was nominated for a best actor Oscar. His performance was captivating.

Frustrated, depressed, and very angry, Ruben goes to stay at a backwoods community for the deaf, at Lou's insistence. Understandably, he doesn't like it and struggles with the rigid routine that takes away his cell phone as well as other outside connections. The residents also suffer from addiction which fits Ruben's profile. The softspoken leader, Joe, explains the group's philosophy, that deafness is not a disability, not something that needs to be fixed, and encourages Ruben to find comfort in quietness, a state that Ruben avoids.

As one published critic noted, the community section is the heart of *Sound Of Metal*. We watch as Ruben reluctantly participates in the group's activities that include learning sign language. A favorite part is his interactions with young deaf children at school and their teacher. Slowly, Ruben seems to be adjusting to his new world and even leads kids in a drumming session. We see him animatedly signing during a boisterous communal lunch. All discussion participants were very impressed with the way the community was organized to really support the residents. A memorable scene was watching the student's joy feeling the vibrations from percussion instruments. One discussion participant thought there was some chemistry between Ruben and the pretty female teacher and hoped he would come to his senses, forget about returning to his metal music world and start a relationship with the teacher. But he doesn't. He flies to Paris to reconnect with Lou believing they could resume their life of performance tours. It's here that we learn the troubling back story of Lou.

We agreed that the film was a compelling exploration of a hearing loss "disability" and how traumatic it is for someone whose entire world depends on his hearing. The director/co-writer, Darius Marder, struggled to make his debut feature film that nearly consumed the 46-year-old's life. The film took more than a decade to produce and actually emerged from Derek Cianfrance's unfinished documentary-narrative hybrid about a heavy-metal drummer with ruptured eardrums. One resident critic said the film initially didn't interest him and would have skipped it but is glad he watched it. Another discussion participant appreciated the story but thought the execution was a bit choppy. The director cast all deaf actors for those characters with hearing loss except for Riz Ahmed. The final scene is undoubtedly the most powerful as Ruben removes his hearing implants to escape the irritating cacophonous city sounds around him. He gratefully accepts and relaxes into total silence.

One very loud score of 5 was quieted by slightly softer ratings to result in a very melodious 4.1 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best.)



See you at the movies!

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