

Helen Mirren Takes Another Ride in ‘The Leisure Seeker’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on March 11, 2018 - 10:21am

- [Aging](#) [2]
- [Alzheimer's Disease](#) [3]
- [Christian McKay](#) [4]
- [Dana Ivey](#) [5]
- [Dementia](#) [6]
- [Donald Sutherland](#) [7]
- [Helen Mirren](#) [8]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [9]
- [Janel Moloney](#) [10]
- [Movie Review](#) [11]
- [Patrick McDonald](#) [12]
- [Retirement](#) [13]
- [RV](#) [14]
- [Sony Pictures Classics](#) [15]
- [The Leisure Seeker](#) [16]



Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Helen Mirren keeps establishing herself as an international treasure with each new role. She is the prime motivator in the new film “The Leisure Seeker,” about a retired couple taking one last spin in their RV, which takes its nickname from the title of the film. Along the way secrets are revealed and the devastation of dementia is exposed, but the story never gets too serious or heavy handed.

Donald Sutherland portrays the dementia-riddled husband in the couple, and he delivers a spot-on interpretation of the “needle skip” nature of the disease. The film is adapted by four screenwriters, including director Paolo Virzi (“Like Crazy”), from a novel by Michael Zadoorian. The story is the star, and it is rendered precisely by Virzi, with even the supporting roles having interesting significance... kudos to the casting of Janel Moloney and Christian McKay as their nervous adult children. The themes of aging, dementia and the “final journey” are all present, but its not a downer and is quite light in its comic touch. Mirren is fantastic as usual, the glue of everything swirling around her character... her inner performing spirit never ages.

Siblings Will (Christian McKay) and Jane (Janel Moloney) are shocked when they find out that their parents Ella (Helen Mirren) and John (Donald Sutherland) had fired up the old family RV – nicknamed “The Leisure Seeker” – and have taken to the road. John has dementia, and Ella is not well herself, but the two hit the road to drive from the Boston area to Ernest Hemingway’s Key West home attraction.



Ella (Helen Mirren) is On the Road Again in ‘The Leisure Seeker’

Photo credit: Sony Pictures Classics

Along the way, they experience several adventures, many having to do with John’s tendency to drift due to his condition. As part of his memory therapy, Ella hooks up a nightly slide show of faces and places in John’s life. It is that show that spurs a secret that inadvertently is blurted out by John at a crucial juncture. Ella then takes on the responsibility of the final miles in the journey.

This is Mirren’s film, and the old pro knows how to influence the balance of the story. She is doing a honeypot Southern accent, and is hiding her own disease while knowing what she wants in regards to the trip. Her understanding of the character is the key to the whole film, in her usual take-charge persona. From a scene where she’s not afraid to shoot, to a comic ride on a motorcycle, Mirren is game to provide uplift for the story.

The casting of the other characters is precise and essential to the various scenarios as well. Sutherland, with an amazing career of over 50 years, is representing the Baby Boomer generation once again with his aging, professorial character (he can’t remember his daughter’s name, but can still recite quotes from Hemingway’s works). There is always a delicate equilibrium with characters like this, and the creative team behind this film gives Sutherland the room he needs to communicate what this condition can do to somebody... it’s sad and hopeful at the same time.



John (Donald Sutherland) and Ella in ‘The Leisure Seeker’

Photo credit: Sony Pictures Classics

And what a great casting decision to bring in Christian McKay and Janel Moloney as the adult children of the travelers. In a few scenes they are able to sum up their relationships with their parents, and establish a few tics that reveal their character truth. The indication is that each had a rocky time in their interaction with John and Ella over the years, and they’re both interesting interpreters of seemingly simple material, to give it more depth.

There are some very convenient moments in the screenplay, especially in the drive to reveal some secrets. But “The Leisure Seeker” is a life lesson, one that many families have had to endure in their day-to-day lives. We’re all “on the road” in a sense, driving towards whatever destiny is at the dead end.

“The Leisure Seeker” has a nationwide release on March 9th. See local listings for theaters and show times. Featuring Helen Mirren, Donald Sutherland, Janel Moloney, Christian McKay and Dana Ivey. Screenplay adapted by Paolo Virzi, Stephen Amidon, Francesca Archibugi and Francesco Piccolo. Directed by Paolo Virzi. Rated “R”



[17]

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Links:

- [1] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/users/hankq>
- [2] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/aging>
- [3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/alzheimer-s-disease>
- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/christian-mckay>
- [5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/dana-ivey>
- [6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/dementia>
- [7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/donald-sutherland>
- [8] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/helen-mirren>
- [9] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/hollywoodchicagocom-content>
- [10] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/janel-moloney>
- [11] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/labels/review.html>
- [12] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/patrick-mcdonald>
- [13] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/retirement>
- [14] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/rv>
- [15] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/sony-pictures-classics>
- [16] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/the-leisure-seeker>
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