



Log Out [! Online Subscription Help](#) [Slanguage Dictionary](#)

Search variety.com  SEARCH

Home | 4/4/2011 4:50 P.M. | Text size: a<sup>-</sup> A<sup>+</sup>

[Subscribe to VARIETY at 73% off the cover price](#)

[Latest News](#) [Latest Reviews](#) [Features](#) [People News](#) [Charts](#) [Opinions](#) [Events](#) [Photos](#) [Videos](#) [VarietyMediaCareers.com](#)

**FILM** **TV** **LEGIT** **MUSIC** **TECH** **INTERNATIONAL** **Archives**

## Film Reviews

Posted: Sat., Mar. 26, 2011, 11:30am PT

Share Print

New U.S. Release

### Soul Surfer

By ROB NELSON

A TriStar Pictures release of a TriStar, FilmDistrict, Enticing Entertainment presentation, in association with Island Film Group, Affirm Films, of a Brookwell McNamara Entertainment, Life's a Beach Entertainment, Mandalay Vision production. Produced by David Zelon, Douglas Schwartz, Dutch Hofstetter, David Brookwell, Sean McNamara. Executive producers, David Tice, Dominic Ianno. Co-producers, Becky Hamilton, Noah Hamilton, Shelley Trotter, Ronald Bass, Jennifer Smolka, Christina Lambert, Corey Schwartz, Susie Singer Carter, Joey Paul Jensen. Directed by Sean McNamara. Screenplay, McNamara, Deborah Schwartz, Douglas Schwartz, Michael Berk, from the book by Bethany Hamilton, Sheryl Berk, Rick Bundschuh.



'Soul Surfer'

- Bethany Hamilton - AnnaSophia Robb
- Cheri Hamilton - Helen Hunt
- Tom Hamilton - Dennis Quaid
- Alana Blanchard - Lorraine Nicholson
- Sarah Hill - Carrie Underwood
- Dr. David Rovinsky - Craig T. Nelson
- Malina Birch - Sonya Balmore
- Holt Blanchard - Kevin Sorbo
- Noah Hamilton - Ross Thomas
- Keoki - Cody Gomes
- Sydney Blanchard - Arlene Newman-Van Asperen
- Young Bethany - Irie Driscoll

**OTHER RECENT REVIEWS:**

- [Mia and the Migoo](#)
- [The 5th Quarter](#)
- [Sucker Punch](#)
- [Mia and the Migoo](#)
- [Drawing With Chalk](#)
- [Mirai](#)

[Read other reviews about this film](#)

POWERED BY

**The true story of one-armed surfer girl Bethany Hamilton keeps its balance in "Soul Surfer," a kind-hearted coming-of-age drama with killer waves. As played by AnnaSophia Robb, the pic's Hawaiian heroine gradually uses her limb-losing encounter with a tiger shark as a way of calling attention to the resilience of disabled persons -- and not only those riding giants. Distinguished by splashy cinematography, engaging performances from Dennis Quaid and Helen Hunt as the girl's go-get-'em parents, and understated scenes of the family practicing its Christian faith, "Soul Surfer" likely won't break waves at the B.O., but it'll stay on the board.**

Beautifully lensed by d.p. John R. Leonetti, the film opens with born-to-surf Bethany proclaiming in voiceover her near-fatal attraction to big swells. The introduction of the Hamiltons and their dog goofing around at their Kawai beach house has a few too many canine reaction shots for its own good, but it clearly establishes the family's fun-lovin' life force, which will be put to the test when Bethany, in a scene that pushes the PG rating almost as much as "Jaws" did, gets her arm chewed off while riding the waves with teen gal pal Alana (Lorraine Nicholson) and Alana's father, Holt (Kevin Sorbo).

That Bethany's dad happens to be on an operating table for knee surgery when he gets the news of his daughter's attack is but one example of the movie's penchant for high-pitched melodrama. But co-writer/director Sean McNamara ("Bratz") wisely keeps the focus on his articulately faith-spouting characters, who struggle to comprehend how their God can permit such suffering. Only in a scene of armless Bethany tearing a limb off her old Barbie doll does the fact-based soap give way to excessive lather. (Shame she doesn't instead take out her frustration on her bedroom poster of "The Endless Summer.")

Email or Share Print  
 RSS Feed Bookmark

**Get Variety:**  
 Mobile Digital Newsletters

[Subscribe to Variety](#)

## VARIETY CONFERENCES

**Britweek Film and TV Summit**  
 April 29, 2011  
 Beverly Hilton Hotel, Los Angeles, CA

**Entertainment & Technology Summit**  
 May 2, 2011  
 The Ritz-Carlton, Marina Del Rey, CA

**2nd Annual International Film Finance Forum**  
 May 13, 2011  
 Hotel Majestic Barriere, Cannes, France

**Film Finance Forum @ Screen Singapore**  
 June 7, 2011  
 Capella Resort, Sentosa Island, Singapore

**NY Mobile Entertainment Summit™**  
 June 21-22, 2011  
 Hilton New York, New York, NY

[View all Conferences and Events](#)

*Variety* **Luxury**  
**REAL ESTATE**  
[CLICK HERE FOR LISTINGS](#)

Repudiating prosthetics, as well as a coveted slot in the Hawaiian Island Regionals, Bethany travels with her Christian youth group, led by Sarah (Carrie Underwood, making her bigscreen debut), to Phuket, Thailand, to help victims of the 2004 tsunami. It's here that "Soul Surfer," like its real-life heroine, reveals a stirring commitment to humanitarianism, one that's exceedingly rare among American movies. Nevertheless, McNamara heads back to the surf for a rousing sports-film finale set at the Rip Curl Nationals, where Bethany, enjoying her new celebrity, faces off against her archrival, the mercilessly competitive Malina Birch (Sonya Balmores).

Thesping quality is strong across the board, but Quaid stands out, delivering even the script's shakier lines with humor and sincerity. The well-toned Robb makes a convincing surfer, thanks in large part to excellent stunt coordination and a judicious deployment of digital effects. Action scenes are set to blaring pop-rock tunes that, while bordering on cheesy, help get the blood pumping anyway. Leonetti's widescreen images remain razor-sharp above and below water.

Camera (color, widescreen), John R. Leonetti; editor, Jeff W. Canavan; music, Marco Beltrami; music supervisor, Julia Michels; production designer, Rusty Smith; art director, Rosario Provenza; set decorator, Julie Smith; costume designer, Kathe James; sound (Dolby/DTS/SDDS), John M. Reynolds; supervising sound editor, Daniel Pagan; re-recording mixers, Andy Koyama, Chris Carpenter; visual effects supervisor, Dan Schmit; visual effects, Engine Room VFX; stunt coordinators, Gregory J. Barnett, Brian Keaulana; associate producers, Laurie Koris, Tiffany Hofstetter, Rob Deege; assistant director, Jeffrey F. January; casting, Joey Paul Jensen, Niner Parikh. Reviewed at Kerasotes Showplace Icon Theater, St. Louis Park, Minn., March 22, 2011. (In Cinequest Film Festival -- closer.) MPAA Rating: PG. Running time: 106 MIN.

Contact the variety newsroom at [news@variety.com](mailto:news@variety.com)

**Read next review: [Mia and the Migoo >](#)**

© Copyright 2011 **RBL**, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc.

[Subscribe](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms & Conditions](#) | [About Us](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Sitemap](#) | [Help](#)

**Media:** [LA 411](#) | [New York 411](#) | [Variety](#)

**Construction:** [Reed Construction Data](#)

**Business Directory:** [HotFrog](#)