

A Beautiful Mind

Movie Review:

"A Beautiful Mind" stars Russell Crowe as Nash, and Jennifer Connelly as his wife, Alicia, who is pregnant with their child when the first symptoms of his disease become apparent. It tells the story of a man whose mind was of enormous service to humanity while at the same time betrayed him with frightening delusions. Crowe brings the character to life by sidestepping sensationalism and building with small behavioral details. He shows a man who descends into madness and then, unexpectedly, regains the ability to function in the academic world. Nash has been compared to Newton, Mendel and Darwin, but was also for many years just a man muttering to himself in the corner. John Forbes Nash Jr., The Nobel Prize winner, still teaches at Princeton, and walks to campus every day. That these commonplace statements nearly brought tears to my eyes suggests the power of "A Beautiful Mind," the story of a man who is one of the greatest mathematicians, and a victim of schizophrenia. A core of goodness in Nash inspired his wife and others to stand by him, to keep hope and, in her words in his darkest hour, "to believe that something extraordinary is possible." Crowe, who has an uncanny ability to modify his look to fit a role, always seems convincing as a man who ages 47 years during the film.

The movie's Nash begins as a quiet but overconfident young man, who gradually turns into a tortured, secretive paranoid who believes he is a spy being trailed by government agents. When loses at the game, he explained that the game was flawed. He is aware of his impact on others. It is Alicia who helps him find the heart. She is a graduate student when they meet, is attracted to his genius, is touched by his loneliness, and is able to accept his idea of courtship. Nash's schizophrenia takes a literal, visual form. He believes he is being pursued by a federal agent, and imagines himself in chase scenes.

He begins to find patterns where no patterns exist. One night he and Alicia stand under the sky and he asks her to name any object, and then connects stars to draw it. Romantic, but it's not so romantic when she discovers his office thickly papered with countless bits torn from newspapers and magazines and connected by frantic lines into imaginary patterns. The movie traces his treatment by an understanding psychiatrist, and his agonizing courses of insulin shock therapy. Medication helps him improve somewhat--but only, of course, when he takes the medication. Eventually newer drugs are more effective, and he begins a tentative re-entry into the academic world at Princeton.

The movie fascinated me about the life of this man, and I sought more information, finding that for many years he was a recluse, wandering the

campus, talking to no one, drinking coffee, smoking cigarettes, paging through piles of newspapers and magazines. And then one day he paid a quite ordinary compliment to a colleague about his daughter, and it was noticed that Nash seemed better.