



COMEDY

TED

(15) 106min ●●●●●

Anyone familiar with TV comedy *Family Guy* will know that Seth MacFarlane, the show's creator, specialises in both hilarity and vulgarity. His first big screen outing *Ted* offers more of the same and is one of the comedies of the year.

Mark Wahlberg stars as good-natured John, a grown man still living with the potty-mouthed, bong-smoking, womanising teddy bear who came to life as the result of a childhood wish, and who is now threatening to place a strain on John's relationship with his long-term girlfriend Lori (Mila Kunis), especially once she delivers an ultimatum.

What ensues is a consistently inspired relationship comedy that successfully riffs on the bro-mance versus romance template by virtue of its zany central premise and the quality of its performances. Wahlberg is terrific as the endearing John, displaying faultless comic timing, while his relationship with the CGI Ted (voiced by MacFarlane) is utterly convincing. The two have an easy-going chemistry that gives rise to several laugh-out-loud verbal exchanges, whether firing insults or talking pop culture references. There's strong support too from Kunis, suitably feisty as Lori, and Giovanni Ribisi, as a dark, eccentric and distant admirer of Ted.

And while the humour is refreshingly non-PC and often resolutely filthy (either sexual or toilet-based), it's also intelligently crafted to not seem gratuitous and comes with enough heart to make you care, especially once things take a predictably more sensible direction towards the film's conclusion. But this minor criticism aside, MacFarlane has created a lovable, unique adult comedy that bears comparison with the likes of *Bad Santa* for the way in which it makes laughing at things that are 'wrong' seem so right. (Rob Carnevale)

■ General release from Wed 1 Aug.



DOCUMENTARY

SEARCHING FOR SUGAR MAN

(12A) 86min ●●●●●

Some documentaries hook you right from the start. Malik Bendjelloul's *Searching For Sugar Man* does just this, introducing us to the remarkable story of Sixto Rodriguez with the nugget that the Detroit-born 70s folk musician set himself on fire on stage and killed himself. Admittedly, it sets us up for a fall – suggesting that the little-known Rodriguez is going to be another tragic diva who died, like his contemporaries Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin and Jim Morrison, before his time.

What emerges is a story so much richer. While his two albums *Cold Fact* and *Coming From Reality* flopped in the US and Europe, in Apartheid-blighted South Africa they went platinum. Bendjelloul lets the story unfold from the South African perspective, led by the two fans – music writer Craig Bartholomew and record store owner Stephen 'Sugar' Segerman – who instigated a search into Rodriguez's background, only to find, contrary to popular belief, that he was alive and well. What follows is a story as heart-warming as it is genuine, as the humble Rodriguez gets his long overdue recognition on a triumphant return to South Africa. (James Mottram)

■ Selected release from Thu 26 Jul.



DRAMA

ELECTRIC BLUE

(12A) 95 mins ●●●●●

Is it possible to get pregnant through simply listening on a tape recorder to a cover version of Blondie's 'Hanging on the Telephone'? That's what 15-year-old Mormon Rachel (Julia Garner) believes, and consequently she runs away from her family's farm in southern Utah to the bright lights of Las Vegas, hoping to track down the song's male vocalist.

Escaping with Rachel is her teenage brother Mr Will (Liam Aiken), whom their parents wrongly suspect of incest.

The debut feature of twentysomething Rebecca Thomas, who herself grew up in the Mormon faith, this US indie is a decent coming-of-age yarn, adorned with some magic realist flourishes.

The writer-director is guilty of wrapping up too many plot strands in order to provide an upbeat ending, but she effectively contrasts the film's rural and urban locations, while newcomer Garner – glimpsed in *Martha Marcy May Marlene* – could be a real find: her angelic-looking Rachel is an interesting mixture of disarming innocence and fierce determination. (Tom Dawson)

■ Selected release from Fri 27 Jul.



DRAMA

IN YOUR HANDS

(15) 80min ●●●●●

Virtually a two-hander, and physically confined enough that it might have been written for the stage, this film is a risky proposition even before the plot asks you to believe that a woman might find more than just sympathy for her violent kidnapper. With performers less compelling than Kristin Scott Thomas and Pio Marmai, it could have turned out both drab and offensive – but their joint commitment to their flawed, edgy characters creates a fierce momentum.

Scott Thomas plays Anna, a doctor whose past resurfaces unexpectedly in the form of Marmai's Yann, whose life she unknowingly and inadvertently blighted two years before. He wants revenge. She wants – well, one look at Marmai, plus the fact that this is a French film, should provide an indication of the turn things take. Scott Thomas is getting peerless at this point: not only does she continue to get more beautiful as she ages but her brittle, ambiguous female protagonists conspicuously challenge the overarching convention for onscreen women to be either wholly ingratiating or out-and-out bad. (Hannah McGill)

■ Selected release from Fri 20 Jul.