

## TENDER MERCIES

US, 1983, Bruce Beresford



Mac Sledge is a country and western singer who goes on alcoholic binges. After a big one, broke, he is taken on to help out in a motel run by a Vietnam War widow, Rosa Lee, who has a young son. Mac begins to work again and writes a song about his absent daughter but it is rejected and he seems to have no prospects.

The angry Mac is comforted by Rosa Lee and her prayerful reflection about God and his tender mercies. Rosa's son, Sunny, befriends Mac and they all attend Church together. Sunny wants to be baptised. Mac says that he has never been baptised. The bonds grow between Mac and his new family.

He begins to compose again and goes to visit the Opry where his estranged wife is singing. He almost breaks but returns to the family and together he and Sunny are baptised.

His daughter dies in a car accident and he goes to attend the funeral. When he gets back, Sunny has talked about his father's death in Vietnam and goes out to join Mac playing. God has wrought his tender mercies.

Tender Mercies is a somewhat autobiographical screenplay from Horton Foote, writer of a number of plays and movies about Texas: 1918, On Valentine's Day, The Trip to Bountiful and the adaptation of To Kill a Mockingbird. There is a blend of toughness and gentleness in all his work and the flavour of simple people in the countryside of Texas.

This was Australian director, Bruce Beresford's first American movie and it was nominated for several Oscars, winning for screenplay and for Robert Duvall as best actor. Beresford went on to make many movies in the US (including Crimes of the Heart and Double Jeopardy) and in Africa and Australia (Paradise Road). Duvall has had a significant career since his role in 1962 in To Kill a Mockingbird and received Oscar nominations for The Great Santini, Apocalypse Now and The Apostle, which he directed.

Foote and Beresford are not afraid of playing the religious themes straight and sincerely, portraying sympathetically the earnest religion and Church-going of the South.

Duvall composed his own songs for the movie. Actress singer, Betty Buckley, plays his wife, Ellen Barkin his daughter.

