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Accidental Icon: The Real Gidget Story (2011/MVD Visual DVD)/Beautiful Wave (2010/Anchor Bay Blu-ray)

Picture: C+/B- Sound: C/B- Extras: C/D Main Programs: B-/C

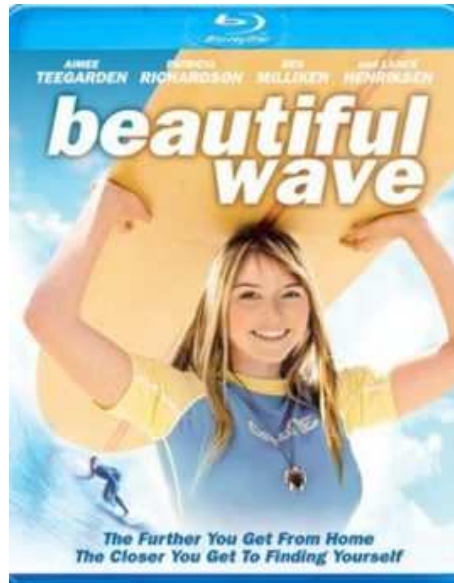
Surfing, like all sports and recreation, was sold as a male-only world or it was assumed that only males would be interested. However, a few things happened that would make things different in this case. One, the men would inadvertently become objects of the female gaze (and incidentally of course, gay males) which is a role-reversal that no other sport offered while both wrestling and diving might be considered to dirty and rough like boxing for mainstream females. Then the surf craze happened in the 1960s, as the counterculture and second wave of Rock music (replacing bobby soxer pop music) arrived.

Yet young ladies were also interested in doing more than watching and some started to surf as well, and in one case, the father of one of those young ladies wrote a fiction novel that would change everything and **Gidget** would join The Beach Boys and California Dreaming as a new permanent discourse in pop culture and American Mythology. **Accidental Icon: The Real Gidget Story** (2011) tells us both the real life story of surfing's rise and who the real Gidget was.

In 1956, Kathy Kohner decided to surf and when her father's book that exaggerated some items about this new kind of living surfaced, it was a hit and led to a series of feature films and a few TV shows (plus an animated TV special) about that girl midget, Gidget. First played by Sandra Dee and later on TV by an unknown Sally Field, Columbia Pictures and Screen Gems helped spawn what became the subgenre of the beach movie and this culture would rise in the late 1950s to be followed by it permanent place as part of 1960s culture and beyond. This Brian G. Gillogly-directed piece (which he also wrote and co-produced) is thorough for the hour it takes to tell its story with great stills and clips throughout, though I wish this was longer because there might be a bit more to say.

Field is among the many interviewees who also include major landmark figures in all of surfing and it connections to so much of that world including films like Endless Summer (see our Blu-ray review elsewhere on this site) and Grant Rohloff, one of the most prolific filmmakers of the sport in its early years, starting in 1958 (he did 12 in all) as noted in one of the extras. But the rise of Gidget takes center stage over and over, but since this is also biography, I should note it is not a documentary on the history of the franchise. **Accidental Icon** finally shows how it helped make women the equal of men in the world of surfing all because a single girl just wanted to have some fun... in the sun. Extras include three mini clips on the story and an extended ending that should have remained on the final cut of the documentary.

Six decades later, we have a cycle of surfing drams, especially female



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 > Danny Phantom – Season 2: Part 1 (Shout! Factory DVD)

centered and mostly lame. **Blue Crush** was the most commercially successful and there have been many imitators cine, but David Mueller's **Beautiful Wave** (2010) is one of the most boring, flattest and any ideas of idealized dreams of beach, surfing and the good life goes down the drain with each scene in this really poor production.

Aimee Teegarden (from lame features like **Scream 4** and **Prom**) trying to get over her father's death, so when she leaves New York for California to be with her Grandmother, more ugly news comes her way (no, not the script for this either) and she makes new friends and this includes surfing. Though there is a sincere effort to make this work and the actors are trying, the actors also look very, very bored all the way to the cover art. Patricia Richardson and Lance Henriksen (of **Aliens** and the TV hit **Millennium**, making wonder if this would have been better if a serial killer or killer alien showed up!) cannot save this either.

As a matter of fact, it collapses embarrassingly into clichés and to be honest, I have never seen anything at a beach like this (Aldrich's **Kiss Me Deadly** does not count) come across as so joyless, flat, dull and boring. With all the sun and fun, why are these people looking nearly clinically depressed? Do people really talk like this anywhere? No. Could this be more unmemorable? Barely. Like **Prom**, this is made for an imaginary audience of teens and pre-teens (and tweens, if you must) who do not exist and someone needs to tell the makers that the 1980s are long over, because the ideology of this wreck is partly out of that relic of thinking. Tellingly, there are no extras.

The anamorphically enhanced 1.78 X 1 image on **Icon** is mixed as you would expect for a documentary, but it can be colorful and the clips (especially from the Columbia archive for Gidget film and TV projects) are in much better shape than expected, yet there are still older film and analog video clips that show their age and you also get softness, aliasing errors and other flaws. The 1080p 1.78 X 1 digital High Definition image on **Wave** should be much better, but this is not only actually styled down in the dumbest way possible, but has its share of motion blur, detail issues, color limits and manages to denature the sights and sounds of the water and beach to its detriment. This should have been a winner on Blu-ray, but I know of HD-shot beach footage on travelogue discs that look far better, not to mention the best-condition beach footage on the **Icon** DVD.

The lossy Dolby Digital 2.0 Stereo on **Icon** is a mix of mono and stereo sources, including some location audio with issues and some older mono with compression, yet it is well edited and just fine for a documentary. The Dolby TrueHD 5.1 mix on **Wave** should have also been much better and even a sonic winner, but the mix itself is too limited to the front channels and dialogue too much in the center channel for its own good. The result is, with its HD image added, like a bad TV movie someone just threw together.

- Nicholas Sheffo

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