

## Algorithms

India/United Kingdom 2012  
 Director: Ian McDonald  
 Certificate U 100m 18s

REVIEWS



Board meeting: *Algorithms*

### Reviewed by Roger Clarke

An opening shot, completely out of focus, accompanied by the twang of an Indian stringed instrument, coalesces into a hand resting on a chess piece. It is a crushing hand, a dead-weight hand. The chess piece is a humble pawn. It's an almost gothic image. Then we see the hands of the opponent – they are more animated, more slender. We notice the chessboard is different, with pegs and holes, and the fingertips of the chess players seek out every piece and every hole in a constant buzz of tactile efficiency. These are the hands of young blind chess players in India, and this is the journey of three of them hoping for international fame.

"Chess is a mind game," says Charudatta Jadhav, a blind former chess champion on a mission to find and foster the first blind Grandmaster. "Chess is the only game where a blind player can play at par with the sighted," he says. He's not wrong. From the outset we see that the young players can memorise whole games in their

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Geetha J.  
**Screenplay**  
Geetha J.  
**Edited by**  
Ian McDonald  
**Original Music**

**Prasanna Sound**  
Harikumar N.  
**Production Companies**  
AkamPuram presents with the participation of Interventions &

Gamakam a film by Ian McDonald  
An AkamPuram production  
**In Black and White**  
[L78-1]  
Part-subtitled  
**Distributor**  
OurScreen

A documentary following blind former chess champion Charudatta Jadhav as he holds a competition in Mumbai in 2009 to find a new generation of junior unsighted chess players. He is evangelical about his task, and believes that it is only a matter of time before a blind player will become a Grandmaster. The film focuses on three teenagers: Sai Krishna, Anant and Darpan. They are blind for different reasons, deal with their situations differently and hail from different backgrounds. The poorest of them, Anant, fails in part because of lack of encouragement from his parents. The teenagers compete in competitions in Stockholm, Belgrade and Rhodes, but in the final showdown the most talented of the team, Darpan, is forced to concede defeat.

The documentary ends where it started, in Mumbai, with Jadhav beginning the whole process all over again.

head, and have perfect recall and visualisation, with a kind of fluency that seems a natural part of their condition, of their coping mechanism. If anything, perhaps they have an advantage. This is never claimed outright, but by the end of the film the viewer may feel that Jadhav truly believes it. Jadhav, by the way, seems an admirable man – inspirational at the right moments, but very tender to his charges, especially to the youngest, homesick during his travels to competitions in Stockholm, Belgrade and Rhodes.

One of the three boys is 12-year-old Sai Krishna, who seems like any other bright 12-year-old and doesn't even like people knowing that he's blind. He's naturally gifted but unable to formulate advanced tactics, and his cockiness proves his undoing. He begins as the star of the film but ends up being left behind. Anant's story has elements familiar to all those born into poverty; his parents are unable to comprehend the point of his chess-playing, despite a visit from an official, and his game slowly deteriorates. The real star is the eccentric Darpan, middle-class, blinded and horribly damaged by a medical mishap; he is all good-humoured intensity with more than a dusting of camp, unfazed by his extraordinarily pushy and guilty mother.

The film looks gorgeous. It's black-and-white, full of close-ups and the occasional zoom, and the handheld camerawork feels intimate without ever being intrusive. The music alternates between Indian and acoustic and electric guitar. The sound of birds nesting in a Mumbai chess hall is also allowed to integrate into the soundscape.

This is the world of Satyajit Ray and it's impossible to talk about *Algorithms* without mentioning his 1977 Mughal meta-drama *The Chess Players*, a great meditation on the imperial chess games of the East India Company and Wajid Ali Shah in the year before the Indian Mutiny. It couldn't be more different in its themes of geopolitics, grandees and shapers of history. *Algorithms* (a title that remains slightly puzzling) is really the world of Apu, and in this sense, director Ian McDonald has made a film about chess that is more Ray than Ray's film about chess. But it shares with the 1977 film a sense of greater worlds being formed, of tactics, of stabilising a problem through careful thought, of advancement, and chess finally as a metaphor for conflict and resolution. Ⓢ

## The Best of Me

USA 2014  
 Director: Michael Hoffman  
 Certificate 12A 117m 40s

### Reviewed by Thirza Wakefield

The ninth adaptation of a novel by *The Notebook* author Nicholas Sparks is – no surprises – a gluey lovers' tragedy, reuniting stricken sweethearts after 20 years apart. James Marsden's Dawson is a typical Sparks creation: a placid, strapping, green-fingered, working-class labourer and bookworm (as *The Notebook's* Noah read Whitman, so Dawson pores over Hawking). He and his 'Juliet' Amanda (Michelle Monaghan), who's now married to another man, recommence their romance in the same locations they started it as teenagers, but it's a rhyming that's more monotonous than poignant. The film builds by flashbacks to a first heartrending reveal (the reason for the ruin of their earlier relationship), before the whole melting pot of misery boils over in the present, serving up more than a lifetime's worth of suffering.

As is always the danger with a story spanning decades, the inner lives of its players genuflect to plot. Dawson's defining characteristic is a written-in-the-stars acceptance, while the greater complications for the adult Amanda come from the fact that she has a family. After much arduous to-ing and fro-ing between eras, *The Best of Me* rests on our expectations of the ill-starred love story – or, more particularly, of a Sparks film, which is fast becoming a genre of its own. Ⓢ

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Denise Di Novi  
Alison Greenspan  
Nicholas Sparks  
Ryan Kavanaugh  
Russ Kavanaugh  
Theresa Park  
**Written by**  
Will Fetters  
J. Mills Goodloe  
Based upon the novel by Nicholas Sparks  
**Director of Photography**  
Oliver Stapleton  
**Editor**  
Matt Chesse  
**Production Designer**  
Patrizia von Brandenstein  
**Music**  
Aaron Zigman  
**Sound Mixer**  
Michael B. Koff  
**Costume Designer**  
Ruth E. Carter

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**Production**

**Companies**  
Relativity Media presents a Relativity Media, Di Novi Pictures, Nicholas Sparks production  
A Michael Hoffman film  
**Executive Producers**  
Tucker Tooley  
Robbie Brenner  
Ron Burkle  
Jason Colbeck  
Jared D. Underwood  
Andrew C. Robinson

**Cast**  
Michelle Monaghan  
Amanda Collier  
James Marsden  
Dawson Cole  
Luke Bracey  
young Dawson Cole  
Liana Liberato  
young Amanda Collier  
Caroline Goodall  
Evelyn Collier  
Sebastian Arcelus  
Frank

Jon Tenney  
Harvey Collier  
Gerald McRaney  
Tuck

Dolby Digital  
In Colour  
[2.35:1]

Distributor  
E! Films

New Orleans, present day. Oil worker Dawson and married mother Amanda are former sweethearts who rekindle their romance. Flashbacks trace their teenage relationship, which was cut short by Dawson's imprisonment for the accidental manslaughter of his cousin Bobby during a brawl with Dawson's abusive father.

Though they are still in love, the pair go their separate ways. Amanda's son is involved in a car accident; he survives thanks to a heart transplant from an anonymous donor. Shortly afterwards, Amanda learns that Dawson was shot dead by his father, who served a longer sentence for Bobby's killing.

One year on, Amanda discovers that Dawson was the heart donor.