



The Searcher

Presenting His Holiness the Dalai Lama

10 QUESTIONS FOR THE DALAI LAMA: Written and directed by Rick Ray. Cinematography, Elana Ben Amir and Rick Ray. Music, Peter Kater. Starring the Dalai Lama and Rick Ray. Monterey Media, 2006. Unrated. 85 minutes. ★★☆☆☆

It was not without anticipation that I viewed *10 Questions for the Dalai Lama*, a documentary about the exiled leader of Tibet. After all, by virtue of his commitment to nonviolence, the Dalai

Lama is a spiritual leader to the world; if he's become a *cause celebre* in the process, he's also that rarest of public figures whose notoriety derives from an overwhelming moral authority. But while *10 Questions for the Dalai Lama* opens new dimensions into His Holiness, including an unexpected sense of humor, the film has the tone and pace of a travel video, which in fact it originally was. I'll probably be reincarnated as a squirrel for saying so, but

10 Questions for the Dalai Lama is a mild disappointment.

When making a film about a beloved populist ruler like the Dalai Lama, access to the man and his advisors is everything. Without access, you have *In Search of J.D. Salinger* — a fine book, but few of us are clever enough to make lemonade in the absence of lemons. Promisingly, early in *10 Questions* director Rick Ray is granted an interview with His Holiness to occur "in three months' time." The delay allows a natural structure to emerge: Ray sets out to make a personal quest film, immersing himself in Tibetan customs in preparation for the eventual interview. At the end of three months, he'll have 45 minutes with the Tibetan ruler at his government-in-exile in Dharamsala, India.

The trouble is, Ray doesn't have the resources to carry out the task before him. He has a decent eye for the natural world, but in his hands the history of Tibet is reduced to some archival footage of the invasion by

gravitas necessary for this project. (Speaking of voices, who would have guessed that His Holiness has inflections similar to those of Julia Child? His voice is positively loopy, and it's wonderful.) Ray visits a monastery and village in search of authentic Tibetan culture, but other than some lovely images of a mandala — the elaborate but temporary sand paintings of Tibetan Buddhism — I felt distant from Ray's crash course in Tibetan life.

The subject of the cultural destruction of Tibet deserves a much longer lens than this, as does the complex and contradictory Dalai Lama (consider his views on Marxism or homosexuality). But even when His Holiness appears, *10 Questions* fails to connect. The humor, warmth and generosity of the Dalai Lama are evident during the interview, but it may as well have been conducted by telephone. There is little rapport between the filmmaker and his subject; the insights are probably too subtle for a general Western audience, but even so I felt under-

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China in 1950. There is some attention paid to the current crisis in Tibet, but Ray's footage and commentary don't feel authoritative. Ray's voice, a more nasally version of Matthew Broderick, is ill-suited to the role of narrator; it lacks the confidence and

whelmed by the exchange. Ray may yet find success with another, less elusive public figure. Or perhaps a broader canvas may better suit the well-intentioned director. **EW**

10 Questions for the Dalai Lama opens Friday, July 13, at the Bijou.



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