

Recap: "AMERICAN HORROR STORY 208, Unholy Night"

Written by Samuel Zimmerman
Thursday, 06 December 2012 11:04



For an episode that promised one of horror's favorite motifs (sullyng the sacred/cheerful) in Killer Santa, "Unholy Night" ended up a relatively minor holiday treat. Of course, there's nowhere else in the world for Ian McShane and Jessica Lange to come together in a verbal sparring-cum-caning as a deranged Santa and pious nun act out a warped staging of the war for Christmas, and all of our holiday reverence. So, Merry Christmas AMERICAN HORROR STORY, you've kicked off December in a just deranged-enough manner.

Returning for his second episode this season, FINAL DESTINATION and X-FILES writer James Wong (who penned ASYLUM's Halloween-ish "Tricks and Treats") placed the ensemble of ASYLUM into various mini face-offs, something the series frequently excels at. Whether *tête-à-tête*

or human connection—like Grace and Kit in solitary—when ASYLUM's dialogue isn't overly expository or overwrought, it can be its most engaging, enthralling factor. Thus, we saw Sister Mary and Sister Jude, Sister Mary and Dr. Arden, Lana and Kit and Thredson and finally, Sister Jude and Santa go at it; with the latter being the only to come with any sort of finality. This was probably obvious from the beginning, as the great McShane was only at Briarcliff in a guest-starring capacity, but do we finally have an idea of where we're headed? ASYLUM has been so watchable in its batshittery this run, and much like the Murder House arc, often feels like once something's building to a head (Sister Jude off to confront Sister Mary), a layer of homicidal, holiday hating victim of Christmas rape is added on.

There's still a certain element of starting/stalling here, though. Plenty happened on Briarcliff's "Unholy Night," and there was a cathedral-full of Sister Mary Demon sass to get excited about (once again, Lily Rabe, queen of ASYLUM), but is AMERICAN HORROR STORY stretching here, or do we trust Ryan Murphy has a lot more horror dolls to stuff into his playhouse? Both Sister Jude and Lana & Kit came out on top of their respective matches. Was this a warm-up to their ascent? Is Sister Mary the biggest bad of ASYLUM or like MURDER HOUSE's grander scope of the Antichrist birth, is there something much bigger looming on the horizon? Do the little-seen aliens have something to do with it?



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Ignoring the aspects of AMERICAN HORROR STORY that makes us ponder, let's explore what made us cringe with delight. Sister Mary hit some of her highest notes in "Unholy Night," using the hair and teeth of Briarcliff's patients to adorn the Christmas tree (recalling Dada/Surrealist Marcel Duchamp as Monsignor Timothy* put it!), flaunting the ruby earrings stained with the internal blood of a Holocaust victim (and somehow seeming mean for calling Arden a Nazi, even though he totally is) and finally orchestrating Arden's double cross of Jude. Then there was Ian McShane's gusto, spending much of the episode murdering, attempting to murder, or attempting to have his Jingle Bells rocked. Here's hoping he's a regular next go-round.

Next week, Dylan McDermott returns to AMERICAN HORROR STORY, and as his Twitter revealed, as modern day Bloody Face. Is he a copycat? Fan of? Child of?

**Speaking of Monsignor, why has Joseph Fiennes had so little fun this season? Is there something truly despicable in Timothy Howard yet to be seen?*