

“ENTRANCE” (Film Review)

Written by Michael Gingold
Friday, 24 June 2011 06:46



They say that a good horror film is all in the buildup, and ENTRANCE puts that idea to the ultimate test, in that the vast majority of it is buildup. This is not meant as a criticism, just an advisory; those approaching it as a horror film should know it requires patience, but also rewards it.

ENTRANCE, which world-premieres tonight at the [Los Angeles Film Festival](#), was directed by Dallas Hallam and Patrick Horvath, and it's about as far removed from the goofy gore of Horvath's previous DIE-NER (GET IT?), on which Hallam was the 1st AD, as it's possible to be. Mostly, it's an evocative, naturalistic character study of Suziey (Suziey Block), a barista in the Silverlake area of Los Angeles. (Block apparently really is a barista in Silverlake, using her real first name onscreen like the rest of ENTRANCE's cast.) She's attractive, not unfriendly, not lacking for male attention—from a customer who says he likes her sweater to a dude who briefly follows her on the street—and shares a house with her friend Karen (Karen Gorham). But her only close relationship seems to be with her dog Darryl, whom she dutifully feeds in the morning and walks at night on either side of dutifully going to work.



Hallam and Horvath efficiently establish the routine that Suziey's life has become—one involving a lot of solo walking, as she can't afford a car—and the alienation she has come to

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feel in the midst of the LA sprawl. Not much “happens” for long stretches of ENTRANCE, which instead holds your attention in large part due to Block’s expressive and relatable performance, which conveys with tangible emotional clarity the sense of a young woman disenchanted with the state of her existence. LA has lost any luster it might have had, and on top of that, there’s the slowly developing sense that something not quite right is hovering on the sidelines.

Just what that something is only gets hinted at during ENTRANCE’s first hour—a suspicious noise here, something glimpsed in the background there. Occasionally, we see or hear things that Suziey doesn’t, in particular one brief event about a half-hour in that makes the nature of the threat fairly clear even as we actually see almost nothing. It’s to the directors’ credit that they build up a sufficiently ominous mood, without any defined source of danger, that a simple stroll outside with Suziey, Hallam’s steady handheld camera following along with her, can be fraught with tension. The two directors also share writing credit with Gorham and co-star Michelle Margolis and the quartet produced it with Block, the billing reinforcing the idea of a workshopped, at least partially improvised production already suggested by the unforced, always convincing interactions between Suziey and the supporting characters.

The verisimilitude of the visual approach continues once ENTRANCE takes its sudden, decisive turn into horror territory, employing lengthy single takes as powerful as those in the currently playing KIDNAPPED. At the same time, the movie loses some of its sense of reality here, the observational style and rhythm giving way to a scenario with an only-in-the-movies ring to its genre tropes. It’s not that what goes on isn’t plausible as presented, but that the explicitness of the dialogue and action works on a different level that jars a bit with the quietude of what has come before. That’s part of the filmmakers’ point, obviously, and it’s chilling to watch the people we’ve intimately come to know become plunged into a nightmare, though at certain moments, you might find yourself even more impressed with Block’s physical fortitude than engaged with the plight of her character.

This long sequence builds to a conclusion that provides more thematic consistency than dramatic closure, yet it goes to black with a palpable chill hanging in the air. Even as it’s very much a movie of its time and the current independent filmmaking scene, employing a documentary aesthetic (albeit eschewing the found-footage gimmick), it establishes its own specific personality—one tied in to that of its heroine, who keeps you watching throughout in a state of nervous anticipation, contemplating what might eventually happen to her.



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