

Recap: "AMERICAN HORROR STORY 210, The Name Game"

Written by Samuel Zimmerman
Thursday, 03 January 2013 11:49



It seems AMERICAN HORROR STORY can still surprise. Midst the madness that is ASYLUM, there was the question of Monsignor Timothy Howard, and if his cowering ways would remain intact throughout or if Joseph Fiennes would really get his hands on something. The tenth episode, "The Name Game" saw him take serious responsibility and do away with the show's greatest character. It was a somber affair, and maybe all a bit unceremonious.

But maybe that's a point AMERICAN HORROR STORY is endlessly trying to make. Death is often unceremonious, and often freeing. Frances Conroy's Angel of Death is a peaceful character, doling out moments of reprieve, moments of ease. It's the heinous, difficult events that befall characters both before and after their time of death that make up the bulk of this series. Sister Mary Eunice, before her untimely demise, even spells it out, taunting the Monsignor with just how punishing the act is. Was that supposed to prepare us, or build up to what was surely a difficult moment for the clergyman? On a second viewing, it's certainly more powerful, but as the "The Name Game" ended, there couldn't help but be a feeling of, "That's it?" Was that really the end of Sister Mary and her affliction? Did Sister Mary, or for that matter, her demon aggressor deserve more? Maybe not in the world of AMERICAN HORROR STORY.

At least Mary got a few more moments to shine. Lily Rabe, as usual, was tops. Sass was abundant, as was electro shock therapy; she brought a jukebox to the rec hall and at the height of her wicked ways, sexually devoured Timothy Howard. In her final moments, we got a flinch of the real Mary Eunice. Rabe hit every note before she hit the floor. Get down girl, go 'head, get down.

{vimeo}54222899{/vimeo}

And as we mourn Mary, we say goodbye to Dr. Arden as well, whose last straw was the Nun's rape of Monsignor (Nunsplotation achievement unlocked). It wasn't her clearly evil plans or disturbed ways, but sexual betrayal and rejection of purity that did him in and (as it is with her defeat) a second look at the episode reveals his resignation. After murdering his mutated experiments, Arden cremates himself alongside Mary's body. He has nothing to strive for anymore, and it's time to face the Hell he knows he's headed towards.

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The weight of this episode—didn't it seem unusually deprived of color?— was relieved by the one thing this series was missing: a dance number, and a nod toward creator Ryan Murphy's main squeeze, GLEE. The parallel was unavoidable, given the connection, but not wholly irrelevant. Both shows, at heart, are about outcasts, misfits and the troubled and both musicals and horror operate on similar levels of heightened emotion and scenario. Whether examining true-to-life troubles through song and dance, or murder and fright, it's all gripping and visceral.

With "The Name Game" number—an episode in the ongoing saga of Sister Jude—it became clear that again, this is Jessica Lange's show. However the remaining mysterious figures/bads come into play in the next three episodes, Briarcliff belongs to Judy Martin and likely no amount of Bloody Face or extraterrestrials will take that away.

Next week, Lana gets out?