

TV Review: HBO's 'The Girl' Presents Intersection of Madness, Genius

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on October 20, 2012 - 11:21am

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CHICAGO – Alfred Hitchcock is inarguably one of the most important and influential directors in the history of cinema. There's no debate or controversy regarding his agreed-upon genius. However, fans of films like "Rear Window," "Psycho," "Vertigo," and "The Birds" may not know that Hitch had a much darker side behind the camera. HBO's "The Girl" sheds light on the demented psychosexual half of Hitchcock in relation to his torture of Tippi Hedren on the set of "The Birds" and "Marnie." Starring Toby Jones as Hitch and Sienna Miller as Tippi, Julian Jarrold's drama is a historically interesting recreation that misses the greater opportunity to tie the director's madness to his genius in a way that's any more insightful than, "well, this happened."



Television Rating: **3.0/5.0**

If you don't know what "this" is, you might have a stronger response to "The Girl" than those who know their Hitch history or have read Donald Spoto's "Spellbound by Beauty," which Gwyneth Hughes adapted into "The Girl." Of course, the title refers to Tippi Hedren, a fashion model who was plucked from obscurity at the peak of Hitchcock's fame as his newest damsel in distress. Alfred had more than stardom in mind when he chose Tippi to star in "The Birds" as his sexual obsession with the beautiful star was almost immediate. And when she rebuffed the married Hitch's sexual advances, the director turned cruel.



The Girl

Photo credit: HBO

How cruel? The stories are numerous and well-documented but he basically trapped Hedren in such a way that she felt she had no way out. He assaulted her in the back of a car, backstage, and even did horrendous things to Hedren in front of the camera. The most notorious story is how he told Hedren that mechanical birds would be used in the infamous attic scene in which her character is brutally attacked and that it

wouldn't take long to shoot. Right before stepping on set, Hedren was informed that it would now be real birds and then Hitch directed take after take of Hedren being physically assaulted for *five days*. And watching "Marnie" knowing the back story between Alfred & Tippi makes it an even more squeamish experience.



The Girl
Photo credit: HBO

Alfred Hitchcock was undeniably twisted but did that dementia inform his brilliance? Can one even look at a movie like "Vertigo," a story about a man shaping a woman into exactly what he wants her to be, without thinking of it in relation to Hitchcock's film career? How did Alfred Hitchcock's psychosexual obsessions inform his work? You'll get no answers to those difficult questions in "The Girl" as Hughes and Jarrold seem so intent on the trees that they miss the forest. It's well-written and well-directed in terms of historical accuracy and the performances certainly aren't bad but the film never finds a strong creative justification to exist. Why tell this story? What does it say about directors and actresses and the industry? These are the questions that would elevated "The Girl" and it doesn't feel like they were asked.

Jarrold's focus on history instead of giving the film a creative edge results in two interesting but never dynamic performances from Jones and Miller. No one can deny that Jones has the cadence and look of Hitch down and Miller gives a nicely subtle performance in a role that could have devolved into histrionics at multiple points. She plays Hedren with a quiet dignity, the kind of woman who was stuck in a horrendous situation in which she essentially had to choose between career and personal safety. The accuracy and subtlety of the performances are the best thing about "The Girl."

Perhaps I'm too close to the situation being such a Hitchcock fan. If you knew nothing of the production of "The Birds" and "Marnie" or how totally demented Hitch was behind the camera, there's an interesting history lesson here. I just wish that lesson had more creative drive and personality to capture something new about one of the most fascinating men to ever shout "Action!"

"The Girl" stars Toby Jones, Sienna Miller, Imelda Staunton, Carl Beukes, and Penelope Wilton. It was written by Gwyneth Hughes and directed by Julian Jarrold. It premieres on HBO on October 20, 2012 at 8pm CST.



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By [BRIAN TALLERICO](#) [14]

Content Director

HollywoodChicago.com

brian@hollywoodchicago.com [13]

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