

TV Review: Sundance Channel Continues Excellent Year with ‘The Returned’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on October 31, 2013 - 2:10pm

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CHICAGO – They have already made a statement in 2013 by broadcasting Jane Campion’s brilliant “Top of the Lake” and the riveting “Rectify” but Sundance Channel goes for the hat trick, starting tonight, as they debut the French supernatural hit “The Returned,” a brilliant twist on the undead genre that places the emphasis on mood, dread, and emotion instead of the unexpected. The subtitled program can get a bit melodramatic but it’s more often mesmerizing in its effort to capture a small town in which the past seems to have been erased. It’s like “Broadchurch” meets “The Walking Dead,” but even that doesn’t capture the unique tone and subtle accomplishments of this gem.



Television Rating: **4.5/5.0**

“The Returned” opens with a bus crash. 38 students go over the edge of a mountain road. Four years later, one of them, a girl named Camille (Yara Pilartz), climbs out of the ravine and heads home as if nothing has happened. She hasn’t aged. She’s not hungry for brains or lumbering like a zombie. She’s just back. She comes home and complains about being left in the middle of nowhere but seems otherwise unaffected.



The Returned
Photo credit: Music Box Films

Of course, her parents are stunned. Claire (the great Anne Consigny of “A Christmas Tale”) has dealt with her grief over the last four years and is rendered speechless by the arrival of her dead daughter in her kitchen. She greets her almost in stunned routine, getting her a towel for a bath, even as this mother’s breathing becomes heavier and she begins to shake. What is happening? And how will Camille’s father Jerome (Frederic Pierrot), who split from her mother in the emotional turmoil that followed his daughter’s death, respond to the arrival? Camille has a twin sister named Lena (Jenna Thiam) who is now four years older than her doppelganger. You can imagine how that reunion will go.





The Returned
Photo credit: Music Box Films

Quickly, we discover that Claire is not alone. Simon (Pierre Perrier), who we will learn has been dead ten years, returns to his apartment, looking for his fiancée Adele (Clotilde Hesme), who presumes he is merely a ghost when they do meet up. A young boy who will be named Victor follows a woman home without much explanation. An elderly gentleman finds his wife, who died three decades ago, in his kitchen, and essentially responds with the assumption that the apocalypse is upon us. What else would it mean if our long-dead loved ones returned? Would it mean that WE had died or were about to? One hears stories of ghostly visions before the end all the time. Perhaps this is the end for an entire small French town.

"The Returned" is effective because it balances supernatural questions with tones that other showrunners don't even consider. We're in an era of action-driven television and "The Returned" is more interested in mood – creating an atmosphere of tension and dread that doesn't let up. The returned characters take a behavioral turn in the second episode that's fascinating. Without spoiling anything, they begin to lash out at the world around them, almost as if they know they don't belong in it. Is it a purely emotional reaction or is something wrong with them? Why were they brought back? And what will it do to the living?

"The Returned" takes a very relatable "what if" scenario – we can all imagine the blend of shock, fear, and happiness that would occur if a deceased loved one rang the bell right now – but doesn't use it purely as a "Twilight Zone"-esque twist, as would be the case with lesser writers (or, I worry, with the inevitable American remake of this one). There's very little in this universe that's more impactful than the death of a loved one. What if that was reversed? What emotional impact would it have in the other direction?

Don't worry. "The Returned" isn't all existential angst. There's a serial killer who comes back with the undead. There's character-based drama that sits beside the supernatural twists. And that's what's so effective about the show in the end. It's about the people, dead and living, dealing with the unthinkable and not just the unthinkable itself.

"The Returned" debuts on The Sundance Channel on October 31, 2013 at 9pm CST and runs for eight weeks.



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