

Blu-Ray Review: Underrated ‘Orphan’ Deserved Better Blu-Ray

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on November 5, 2009 - 11:25am

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CHICAGO – “Orphan” is a surprisingly effective thriller that delivers exactly what audiences should expect from it. This is B-movie filmmaking elevated by A-list actors Vera Farmiga and Peter Sarsgaard in a clever mix of honest emotion and ridiculous, over-the-top, “Mommie Dearest”-esque insanity. The film deserved a better Blu-Ray release.



In theaters, some questioned whether or not the more ridiculous moments in “Orphan” were meant to be played for laughs or horror. I honestly don’t care. Movies are enjoyable for what they are, not what they mean to be. And I enjoyed “Orphan”. It runs way too long and features lot twists that stretch credulity but it is as genuinely intriguing and entertaining as any of the adult thrillers released this past summer.



Orphan was released on DVD, Blu-Ray, On Demand and Digital Download on October 27th, 2009.
Photo credit: Warner Brothers Home Video

The great Farmiga (who will next be seen giving the performance of her career in “Up in the Air” and who you may recognize from “The Departed” or “Nothing But the Truth”) and the consistent Sarsgaard (nomination-worthy for his work in “An Education,” currently in theaters) play Kate and John Coleman, a composer and an architect who we meet after a series of tragedies.

The Colemans have recently suffered the unbearable pain of a stillborn child that they named Jessica, Kate is dealing with alcoholism that nearly caused more tragedy in her life, and past infidelity on John’s part is implied. They have one precocious child named Daniel and a sweet girl named Maxine who happens to be deaf. With all of these issues already in their life, perhaps this isn’t the best time to adopt a foreign pre-teen? Stop asking questions. They won’t get you anywhere in “Orphan”.



Meet Esther (Isabelle Fuhrman). As the tag line on the front of the Blu-Ray release says “There’s something wrong with Esther.” You can say that again. Esther is purportedly a Russian child whose family died in a random fire. (Hint – If a possible new member of your family has a mysterious past that includes death and potential arson, do some research before you sign the papers.)

When she first joins the family, Esther is a well-spoken, interesting, and unique child, but John and Kate like to encourage individuality. She wears dresses to school and ribbons around her neck and wrists. The fact that she NEVER takes the ribbons off and screams if you come near them might be a red flag to most normal people. Not the Colemans.

Life with Esther gets weird when the new arrival crosses paths with a girl that she doesn’t like on the playground. She pushes her backwards off the slide and the girl breaks her ankle. When the nun (CCH Pounder) who handled the adoption comes to check on Esther, the girl panics and thinks that the playground incident is going to force her to be taken away. That’s not going to happen.

From here, “Orphan” becomes an escalating series of true lunacy. When a nine-year-old Russian girl turns to her younger deaf sister and signs for her to help dispose of a body, the over-the-top ridiculousness of it all might appeal to B-movie fans more than they would like to admit.

Farmiga and Sarsgaard wonderfully ground their characters in reality and everything else is allowed to go off the rails. The script is flawed and the film never should have run over 120 minutes, but I have a soft spot for this ugly duckling horror movie, one of the weirdest major studio movies in years and one of the more oddly enjoyable genre films of 2009.

The Blu-Ray release of “Orphan” boasts Warner Brothers’ typically-fantastic 1080p picture and a fantastic Dolby TrueHD 5.1 track but the special features are shockingly thin with no commentary track and a hyped “Alternate Ending” that makes no sense with no commentary track to explain how it would have been inserted in the film. A few deleted scenes and a so-so featurette called “Mama’s Little Devils: Bad Seeds and Evil Children” round out a lackluster release for a cult hit in the making.

‘Orphan’ is released by Warner Brothers Home Video and stars Vera Farmiga, Peter Sarsgaard, Isabelle Fuhrman, Jimmy Bennett, and CCH Pounder. It was written by David Leslie Johnson and directed by Jaume Collet-Serra. The film was released on DVD, Blu-Ray, On Demand and Digital Download on October 27th, 2009. It is rated R.



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