

## 'Poltergeist' Remake Has a Soul of Its Own

Submitted by [NickHC](#) [1] on May 22, 2015 - 5:22pm

- [David Lindsay-Abaire](#) [2]
- [Film Reviews](#) [3]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [4]
- [Jane Adams](#) [5]
- [Jared Harris](#) [6]
- [Kennedi Clements](#) [7]
- [Kyle Catlett](#) [8]
- [Nicholas Braun](#) [9]
- [Poltergeist](#) [10]
- [Rosemarie DeWitt](#) [11]
- [Sam Raimi](#) [12]
- [Sam Rockwell](#) [13]
- [Saxon Sharbino](#) [14]
- [Steven Spielberg](#) [15]
- [Tobe Hooper](#) [16]



Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Whether it's the 1982 original or the remake just released in theaters today to the wrath of numerous fans, the lesson of "Poltergeist" remains the same: Don't do a half-assed job when relocating skeletons for corporate greed, or suffer the supernatural consequences. Fear not, however, as this is one remake that doesn't just dress up a nostalgic skeleton for the modern horror crowd, but one that reminisces, and looks forward, with a mostly intelligent, genuine heart.

Produced by Sam Raimi and crediting its story to the one made Steven Spielberg, this remake of the 1982 Tobe Hooper film involves a new family, the Bowens, as they move into a house with its own bad mojo. There's a weird electric air in their new home, which husband Eric (Sam Rockwell) and wife Amy (Rosemarie DeWitt) have brought young Madison (Kennedi Clements), son Griffin (Kyle Catlett), and older daughter Kendra (Saxon Sharbino) into. At first it's a zapping stair rail, and later it's a closet that won't open, but it has a strange case of static electricity.

Push comes to shove, and in fact the Bowens' new home is charged by evil spirits, who want nothing less than to terrorize the family and find a way out of their purgatory. The youngest, Madison (Kennedi Clements) is sucked into her bedroom closet, leaving the family to consult paranormal experts (Jane Adams and Jared Harris) who tell them that they've got a poltergeist.

Keen with its doses of horror and comedy, "Poltergeist" has a tender grip on its audience, enough to keep them involved with these characters, but nothing too ridiculous where a viewer feels to recoil and laugh at it in defense; the expected jump scares are not overzealous. It's all about the atmosphere created by Kenan, which intelligently sticks to a blatantly Spielberg-ian sense of youthful wonder as it goes hand-in-hand with nightmarish terror. Even the forces of evil do their part to keep the film alive, acting out in specific bursts, never becoming predictable, and not blowing their cool when it comes the denouement most films stumble at (Re: "Insidious," "Sinister," etc.)

Kenan directs this haunted house story well within the appeal of a family's shared nightmare. As visual entertainment, it's an accomplished, slick package with floating cameras that make the 3D into a treat, as it welcomes audiences to its first-person creeping. Like the drone that provides a POV in the third act, the top-notch horror cinematography creates its own tension in displaying a fluidity and physical freedom. It keeps us close to the family's personal space, and the spirits that lurk even closer.



'Poltergeist'

Photo credit: MGM

Whether one has the context of the original movie or not, within its retro sense "Poltergeist" can be a stubborn relic to images of family of past. The movie can often feel older than it does new, such as when pasty Griffin acts like he's been ripped from a 1950's cereal commercial. Or, in more cringing nostalgia, when the movie needlessly takes on dated sexism about domestic roles (when Rockwell's albeit lovable character tells his children that they are his unemployed mother's job).

Thankfully, the family that provides our surrogate back into "Poltergeist" has well-tempered youth performances, and game adult turns with DeWitt and Rockwell fulfilling in a sense of panic, sense of humor and grief that can makes this experience (a family film, essentially) work so immediately. Even supporting performances from paranormal detectives played by Jane Adams and Jared Harris efficiently help transition the story into a mystery, or adventure, by its second act.

And now the moment that you've all been waiting for: How does this compare to the original? Is it sacrilegious? And then the question that some (most) of you may declare: How dare they remake a classic?!

A modernized cover, Kenan's riffs on the beloved nightmare make some improvements to the "Poltergeist" juju. Adapting writer David Lindsay-Abaire's script efficiently streamlines the haunting narrative, initiating the terror as a claustrophobic moving day nightmare post-paranormal films like "Insidious" or "The Conjuring," and fitting neatly within those comparisons. Like its camerawork (which uses far more close-ups than Hooper's original), this "Poltergeist" keeps viewers trapped in this haunted house. Not for nothing, it's not a neighborhood affair as in the 1982 film, but one experienced by the Bowens, together. (There isn't a scene in which little Griffin hops into a cab, as followed by the family dog, and disappears for half the movie.)

In its 2015 context, Kenan's "Poltergeist" is well-behaved in its technophobia, especially in a time of movies that damn themselves by worrying about the disconnection inherent in our screen screen culture, those reflective dramas that want to become horror stories, but turn into comedies. In a sense, such is also an upgrade from the type of menace created about TV in Hooper's original film, which had the 1982 version of Madison face-to-face with a TV's selected images. Or when the programming was over, looking into the 2:37 AM life after programming, after "The Star-Spangled Banner" has signed off. This remake of "Poltergeist" realizes enough can be said with only images of static on the screens.



'Poltergeist'

Photo credit: MGM

When it comes to which film is the best, or the scariest, that's probably up to which you saw first, or how long ago you saw the original. (And, let's not forget that they are from two drastically different eras of filmmaking.) With Lindsay-Abaire's script taking specific nostalgic cues from Spielberg's story, it comes down to a sense of discovery. The story of "Poltergeist" still works, even with its modern horror trends (soaking up its creepy clowns as if trying to give them a spin-off, offering plenty of jump scares, and succumbing to overzealous CGI). Nonetheless, Kenan's take on "Poltergeist" features the required charismatic performances, and a remake's rare sense of discovery, that it stands apart from the nostalgia of he film. This remake has a soul of its own.

*"Poltergeist" opens wide on May 22. Featuring Sam Rockwell, Rosemarie DeWitt, Kyle Catlett, Kennedy Clements, Saxon Sharbino, Jared Harris, and Jane Adams. Written by David Lindsay-Abaire, based on the story by Steven Spielberg. Directed by Gil Kenan. Rated "PG-13"*



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