Horror is Worth a Visit in 'Annabelle Comes Home'

Submitted by JonHC [1] on June 26, 2019 - 6:48am

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Rating: **3.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – There is such an unnerving quality to older dolls, which is why they lend themselves so perfectly to horror stories. There's just an unsettling feeling when looking at their static expression, usually plastered with a permanent smile that gives me terrible flashbacks to when I worked retail. Oddly enough, "Annabelle Comes Home" similarly elicits familiar feelings of terror but channels it through an 80's horror homage.

We've strayed far enough from the ground zero franchise, "The Conjuring", to forget where it all even began. I can gladly say that it doesn't matter how we were introduced to Annabelle, the plucky, demon-possessed doll that fuels our nightmares because we're at a point where this side-franchise has been pardoned of its past sins. What started out as a prequel spin-off ("Annabelle"), which then got a much superior prequel of its own ("Annabelle: Creation"), has finally had a homecoming as it partially rejoins the original "The Conjuring" timeline by focusing on the Warren family; namely on the daughter Judy Warren (Mckenna Grace).



Photo credit: Warner Bros.

Don't worry, we still get to spend some time with Lorraine (Vera Farmiga) and Ed Warren (Patrick Wilson), but they're really more like bookends to the story rather than the main plot characters. I will answer the burning question that is probably haunting your mind at this moment. The answer is no, we don't get Patrick Wilson playing another cover of an Elvis song, but he does sing a little and play a little guitar, separately. Despite the lack of Patrick's Presley performances, "Annabelle Comes Home" still has a great deal more to offer that we initially thought, proving to us that this doll franchise still has life in her yet.

Gary Dauberman, with the help of horror hotshot James Wan, continues on as writer of the "Annabelle" franchise. Following his last

“Annabelle” run, he’s reached career highs (with “IT”), and a devastating dip (with “The Nun”). We find Dauberman having found the right compromise between the two by keeping it a period piece and having our main protagonists be adolescents. By having this take place in the 80s, and using a pre-teen/teenage perspective, he is able to imbue the film with horror/comedy elements that fit well within that decade and serve as a nostalgic throwback for us. At times it feels more “The Monster Squad” than “Fright Night”, but luckily never goes full-on “Scooby-Doo” even though it does come pretty close.

Much like what was done in “Annabelle: Creation”, Dauberman strictly keeps to the 80s aesthetic, making sure every technical aspect is reminiscent of the iconic monster movies he’s clearly influenced by. As a first time director, he does a surprisingly good job at recreating the feel of those types of flicks, often to the film’s detriment. Just because something has reached cult status doesn’t mean it doesn’t have flaws. Examples include gems like “Troll 2” and “The Room”; each considered a horror, but not in any complementary way. Dauberman manages an overall impressive balancing act, even when the tone and the pacing threaten to derail his ghost train.



Photo credit: Warner Bros.

Typically, with these type of dime-a-dozen demon offshoots that Warner Bros. has been steadily releasing, the scares are painfully obvious. We know all the tricks and recognize when something is going to jump into the frame just for a cheap chill. For the first half of the film, before everything shifts into a horrific high-gear, there are several set-ups for scares that are never carried out, which left me feeling fantastically frustrated by how little they seem to care about instant-satisfaction. There’s almost a slow-burn quality that toes the line between becoming a failure or being fun, with fun overtaking in the end. The tone faces the same equilibrium issues, but with much smoother success when it comes to switching between comedy and terror.

Although “Annabelle Comes Homes” doesn’t offer much in the way of meaningful messaging or genre-redefining radicalism, it does provide a solid summer scarefest that is equal parts humorous and horrifying. Aside from “Conjuring” veterans Farmiga and Wilson, the new cast and characters make all the difference in shaping this new adventure. Babysitter Mary Ellen (Madison Iseman) and her best friend (Daniela Rios), are both there to offer an outsider’s perspective into the world that Judy (Mckenna Grace) has grown up in and known all her life. Equal parts skeptic, saccharine, and sacrosanct, this film covers all of its bases when it comes to representation, and each actress plays their part to perfection, even when their characters seem a bit hollow.

“Annabelle Comes Home” opens everywhere on June 26th. Featuring Vera Farmiga, Patrick Wilson, Mckenna Grace, Madison Iseman, Daniela Rios, and Michael Cimino. Directed by Gary Dauberman. Written by Gary Dauberman and James Wan. Rated “R”

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