

Under The Raven's Wing (2007)



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Review by Jane Rose

Written and directed by Susan Adriensen

Featuring: Kimberly Amato, Coy Deluca,

Kamilla Sofie Sadekova, Jessica Palette

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www.undertheravenswing.com



Much of the reason that I'm so enthusiastic about women making horror movies comes from my belief that they really have something new to add to the genre that could help lead audiences to expect more than the same ol' tired blood and guts. Susan Adriensen's feature directorial debut *Under the Raven's Wing* has definitely helped to reinforce these crazy ideas of mine. Not so much a horror movie as it is a dark, psychological drama, *Raven* uses an interesting story structure and varied, visually compelling style to tell the story of three troubled girls and the young film school dropout who is obsessed with them, all they way to its disturbing, yet satisfying, ending...

Right away we are introduced to Raven (Kimberly Amato), Angel (Kamilla Sofie Sadekova) and Jessie (Jessica Palette), and right away we know that all is not well since the filmmaker (who remains unnamed, played by Coy Deluca) describes them as people he wishes he had "never met." A murder (or "transcendence" as the girls would have it) has been committed, not so much in cold blood as under the influence of a dementedly new-agey philosophy that the three young women share. As the (always off-screen) filmmaker follows them and attempts to tell their story, he seems equal parts intrigued by their personal stories, driven by hormones, and determined to get to the bottom of their alleged murder claims, his narrative swinging between deep musings on the state of the girls' lives and horny male comments. Goth-looking Raven, the ringleader and easily the most intense character, attempts to control the direction of what she considers "her" documentary, at the same time exerting strong influence over Angel and Jessie. Angel, while dedicated to Raven, tries to subvert Raven's authority in small ways and has "unauthorized" relations with the director. Jessie, the most innocent of the three, is alternately bullied and babied by Raven. Throughout the course of the doc the girls' troubled histories come to light and the true story of what happened that "glorious" night is revealed, ultimately climaxing in an equally terrible incident.



Overall the performances are strong, particularly that of Kimberly Amato who plays the disturbed Raven very believably (no wonder, since apparently Ms. Amato works with crazy people in real life). A couple of her private interactions with the filmmaker are quite chilling, but you still want to like this weird, misfit chick with the tough past... or at least I do... or at least until she gets *really* crazy. Coy Deluca plays the filmmaker dumb enough that you believe that he would continue to follow these bad news girls, but not so dumb that you get frustrated with him. His constant provocations of Raven make him interesting and move the story while his silly comments make him real (props also to Susie for the writing). Kamilla Sofie Sakekova's Angel is a tease who turns out to have a lot more to her, while Jessica Palette does a great job playing Jessie who... well, I just feel bad for Jessie.

Shot at different frame rates (which must have been a real headache for Susie to edit), *Raven* employs a number of different looks to tell the story, inter-cutting music video-esque bits and reenactments (which really seem more like the imaginings of the film maker character) with handheld "documentary" footage. While the stylized music vid bits are neat to look at and bring added visual interest to the film, the reenactments are sometimes disruptive, bringing you out of the narrative, and maybe a bit confusing or unnecessary. At other times the reenactments are so trippy and weird that they add a cool, phantasmagoric quality to the movie. Some of the locations (like a half-deteriorated building) are really nice, and overall there is a good variety in lighting style, which keeps things interesting. Some standout bits in terms of both acting and visuals include a grainy, black and white scene in a parking lot (Raven is particularly terrifying here), a reenactment sequence with anonymous paper bags over a young Raven's head (this part is so weird I couldn't decide what I thought, so I decided I liked it), and a handheld scene where the filmmaker makes a terrible discovery (the Blair Witchy-ness of this part can be forgiven because it was quite effective).



Angel and Jessie

Where this movie really shines, though, is in its ability to portray (or recall, for those who may have experienced such things) the peculiar view of reality held by lonely, desperate young people and the magnetic hold that a charismatic figure can have on their confused lives (echoes here of *Gingersnaps* or the recent Jack Ketchum adaptation *The Lost*). Many people have felt like this at one point or another, and by a stretch of the imagination one can see these common feelings culminating in extremism, in horror, even in death. *Under the Raven's Wing* is hardly meant to be a "serious" movie or a social commentary, but it's the underlying presence of something fateful that gives it extra kick.

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