

Audition-1999: Where the psychology of horror is even more horrifying than you think....

We all audition, don't we, whenever we meet somebody new? We look at their face, their body, their body language, their mode of dress, trying to figure out who this is, what makes this person tick, and so on. And the person we meet does the same for us, right? Most of the time, we're okay, but sometimes, what we see is not what we get: instead we get the truly horrific, something that you never want to meet ... not in your whole life.

Auteurs like David Lynch, David Cronenberg *et al* habitually provide Western audiences with "our" brand of horror – true horror, and not that mealy-mouthed terror stuff you see in things like *Nightmare on Elm Street*, *Halloween* and other slasher films that merely pretend to be horrific - but which are actually simply terrifying. We're comfortable with the Lynchs and Cronenbergs of our world, sort of. But, if that's your limit, then don't see this one, because you won't like this one at all. Not one bit.

This is the type of movie you only see when you think you've seen them all ... because you'll never forget this one. Even now, as I think about it, my skin crawls and my scalp prickles.

Why is *Audition* so horrific? Because it goes right to the core of what can be un-human - truly alien - about the human condition: the ability, the willingness, and the joy – yes, the sheer joy - of committing the unspeakable upon a fellow human being. In a sense, it's almost as horrific to think that the writers and director were able and willing to put the story to film. But I'll stop short of suggesting that they felt any joy in doing so.

The actual narrative is simple: an older man, Shigeharu Aoyama (Ryo Ishibashi) wishing to remarry finally, seeks help in finding a new wife. Using his friends in the media, he interviews various would-be candidates under the guise of auditioning each for a part in a movie, and finally settles upon a beautiful young woman, Asami Yamazaki (Eihi Shiina) who, without mincing words, is a cold, unfeeling sociopath of your worst possible nightmare. Beside her, Hannibal Lecter looks positively benign; at least *he* had a sense of humor.

Notice how the story has two people who are taking each other at face value, while they both lie to each other about their true motives. Is this the true state of the human condition? In many cases, that is so; and that makes this story all the more menacing. And believable. Moreover, as I follow that line of reasoning, it may well be that the story is an allegory – from the female perspective – about how men have treated women as prisoners and slaves through the ages, and with the character of Yamazaki cast as an Avenging Angel. Well, she looks like an angel, but....

Aoyama begins to court and romance Yamazaki and, while doing so, discovers that other men she has known have disappeared. Puzzled, he begins to investigate and inevitably is drawn deeper into her enveloping web of deceit. If you see this film, be prepared for the

gut-wrenching turning point when, as the viewer, you find out what she's been doing with the men who've disappeared. Worse, you now know also what Aoyama has waiting for him....

Which leads into one of the most suspenseful final acts in movie history, I think; and one of the most gruesome, if not the most. None of the blood and gore from any of Kurosawa's epics comes even close – simply because you've seen that sort of thing in other movies and, in a real sense, we've all been desensitized. But, nothing can prepare you for the final meeting between Aoyama and Yamazaki. It's so awful to watch, I've advised my adult children not to see it until they're much older, I kid you not. Of course ... they ignored my advice.

We all know that we can do bad things. If you want to find out just how bad it can be, then see this film. But, I doubt that you'll ever want to see it again. Instead, see Psycho (1960) again, for the umpteenth time, okay, to brighten up your day. And you'll also know why no Western film company has dared to make a Western version of Audition. Quiet simply, it just wouldn't be Western now, would it?

Definitely not for kids and only for those who think they can handle it.

Rating: 9

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