

“THE HAUNTING IN CONNECTICUT 2: GHOSTS OF GEORGIA” (Movie Review)

Written by Michael Gingold
Friday, 01 February 2013 13:18



The most unwieldy sequel title in a while indicates that the movie is not really a sequel at all. While this and the original THE HAUNTING IN CONNECTICUT are based on a pair of Discovery Channel documentary features, the new movie has nothing to do with Connecticut or the events that took place there—and the association is rather unfortunate, since in some ways GHOSTS OF GEORGIA is superior to its predecessor.

For one thing, the film (in limited theatrical release and on VOD today from Lionsgate) never tries to pretend that the apparitions bedeviling heroine Lisa Wyrick (Abigail Spencer) are anything other than supernatural, though she’s been trying to chase them away by pharmaceutical means. Shortly after the movie opens, she and her husband Andy (Chad Michael Murray) and their preteen daughter Heidi (Emily Alyn Lind) move out of the city and into a new home in the Georgia sticks that, it turns out, has quite a lot of history. It’s also got a dilapidated mobile home in the back, which comes in handy when Lisa’s irresponsible sister Joyce (Katee Sackhoff) turns up, having just gotten out of her latest bad relationship and needing a place to stay.



It soon turns out that Lisa’s ability to see dead people is a family “gift,” and Heidi begins showing the first signs of inheriting it. In particular, she makes the acquaintance of “Mr. Gordy”

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(Grant James), an elderly spirit who hangs out in the woods surrounding the Wyricks' new home. The dates flashed on screen to lend the proceedings an air of it-really-happened legitimacy notwithstanding, what ensues are the usual cinematic haunted-house trappings, as the characters slowly become aware of the place's tragic history, and the specters begin showing more of themselves amidst lots of flash-frames, altered colors and other gratuitous visual tricks.

There's a little more going on in David Coggeshall's script than usual in this kind of paranormal fare, though (certainly more than is suggested in the film's generic, LAST EXORCISM-esque poster). Lisa's mix of fear and denial regarding Heidi's adoption of her spirit-seeing ability adds to the tension, there are (unlike in ...CONNECTICUT) reasonable explanations offered why the Wyricks don't just split when the freaky stuff starts and the unfolding of the haunting's source reveals a connection to the region's broader history. That puts the movie on touchy ground, as said history involves slavery; the house, as it turns out, was a stop on the Underground Railroad back in the 1800s. No doubt it's a coincidence that THE HAUNTING IN CONNECTICUT 2: GHOSTS OF GEORGIA is coming out in the very close wake of DJANGO UNCHAINED, but all the brouhaha that film inspired points up how tricky it can be to adapt one of history's greatest horrors into a genre entertainment.

For the most part, Coggeshall and first-time director Tom Elkins (who edited ...CONNECTICUT) pull it off, approaching the subject with the appropriate gravity and keeping the focus on one specific incident rather than attempting to make an overall statement. They even got no less than Cicely Tyson to appear in the film as blind Mama Kay, and one wishes she could have made more than her brief appearance here, bonding with the child with the sight. The many scenes in which that young girl is subjected to horrific and traumatizing situations also had the potential to be uncomfortable, with Lind's resilient and sympathetic performance doing a lot to take that curse off. It's possible to share her fear as the movie goes on, too, as Elkins cranks up the intensity, transitions from the ethereal to the visceral and delivers a few sustained, powerful scare setpieces in the second half. Particularly effective are those set in an underground chamber near the Wyricks' property, where the secrets of the past are finally given up.

The revelation of just what went on down there muddles things up a bit, as the film can't seem to decide whether the central malefactor is a true villain or a tragic victim. And the film closes with a coda that'll likely be a groaner for some of the horror fans watching. Still, even in the midst of a genre scene cluttered with paranormal projects, so many of them presented as or inspired by true events, GHOSTS OF GEORGIA finds ways to breathe a bit of new life into the dead.

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