

## “THE DOUBLE BORN” (DVD Review)

Written by Samuel Zimmerman  
Wednesday, 03 March 2010 19:00

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The documentary accompanying THE DOUBLE BORN on Celebrity’s recently released DVD explains that writer/director Tony (HELLBOUND: HELLRAISER II) Randel’s motivations for making the film involved his weariness of shallow big-studio product. There’s no doubt this is a noble intention—many of us have the same issues with Hollywood and safe, big-budget horror fare—but this was not the way to go about retaliating.

Going for an air of Southern Gothic, THE DOUBLE BORN follows Sophie (Sammi Davis), a middle-aged housewife who’s been badly affected by the disappearance of her young son Declan. Home alone much of the time due to her husband Ephraim’s work and sister Hallie’s education, she attempts pull herself out of grief and loneliness by having Declan’s room gutted and repainted. Of course, her efforts only serve to bring tragedy even closer when she learns that Ephraim most likely isn’t fertile enough to give her a new baby, and through the choice of hiring Harry (Jake Bern) and Tommy (Alex Weed), two local outcasts with severely dark secrets—one of which may have something to do with her lost boy.



To put it bluntly, there’s a lot wrong with THE DOUBLE BORN, and much of it begins with production value. It seems that in Randel’s total rejection of the mainstream, he rushed into this project without much funding. THE DOUBLE BORN looks grainy and cheap (at least, in this transfer), and if the rest of the movie had anything to offer, that would probably seem like the result of a rebellious spirit. Instead, despite Randel’s longstanding experience, it comes off as amateurish and a little bit of a patience test. His direction is completely devoid of style, pointing and shooting his way through a story and setting that should be dripping with atmosphere.

There also seems to be a total lack of lighting, which the aforementioned docu confirms as another of Randel’s misguided efforts at being “indie.” This also incorporates the use of red and

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blue camera gels for what are supposed to be trippy scenes, but not to any interesting effect; they're just there.

Also quite lacking is the script, which could've used a good deal of development. Sophie is intended to be tragic and complex, as the onset of insanity due to extreme loneliness and the loss of a child doesn't seem too farfetched, yet the character is so stock that, coupled with Davis' complete lack of subtlety (her performance suggests a high-school actress' grandiose portrayal of Blanche DuBois), it comes off laughable—especially when she concocts a plan to have Harry and Tommy both try to impregnate her. The lack of interesting acting choices extends to Bern and Weed; granted, they aren't given a whole lot to work with, plus murderous teenagers are hard enough to pull off in the first place. It seems that aside from Hallie and Ephraim, everyone in THE DOUBLE BORN is mentally unhinged with only a skeletal establishment of how they got that way, allowing no real opportunity for character arcs. When a film begins with the heroine already having melodramatic crying fits on the floor and spouting ridiculous lines, there aren't a lot of places she can go.

Then there's the fact that not much really happens. There's an attempt at a slow burn here, but it won't hold your interest long enough. When Sophie begins her affair with Harry and Tommy, their resulting scenes together are meant to be disturbing; after all, they showcase the debauchery of three individuals, none of whom are 'all there.' There are also snippets peppered throughout of Harry and Tommy's past exploits that also go for shocking, but none of them have the intended effect; they just kind of keep the film meandering.

The only real-deal special feature included is that documentary, the 40-minute (!) “Juggling Fire: Making an Independent Film With Flashlights and Batteries.” It's essentially an extended behind-the-scenes featurette whose length doesn't necessarily mean quality. There are plenty of talking heads and a lot of info about making the film on such a low budget, but like THE DOUBLE BORN itself, it's a bit of an endurance test, since it's not terribly exciting. It's sad when veteran genre filmmakers try to embrace new technologies or alternative means and don't quite succeed, but hopefully Randel will learn from THE DOUBLE BORN about ways to make a small budget work for him, as so many others have.

MOVIE: \*

DVD PACKAGE: \*1/2

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