

## “THE PERFUME OF THE LADY IN BLACK” (DVD Review)

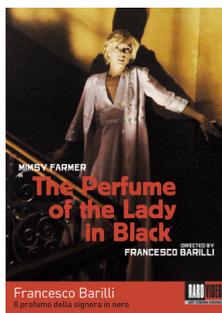
Written by Samuel Zimmerman  
Tuesday, 05 April 2011 15:11

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There's something skin-crawling about horror when it has real vibrancy, when ghastly acts of the body and mind take place in living, energetic color. Oftentimes, classic Italian frights were saturated in a wide palette, where even the blood is bright yet simultaneously off-putting. Raro Video's recent DVD release of Francesco Barilli's THE PERFUME OF THE LADY IN BLACK showcases nothing short of a soaring example of such, both stunning to watch and eerie when considered.

A descent into madness, PERFUME sees chemist Sylvia (Mimsy Farmer) become plagued by hallucinations and long-forgotten traumas that appear to her so vividly, they intrude on her reality and shake her life apart. The elegantly crafted PERFUME plays like a dream wherein the horror doesn't arrive through shocks but a rising dread in the viewer as the film puts together the seemingly random manifestations of Sylvia's damaged psyche. Barilli, through striking direction and atmosphere, slowly reveals the implications of Sylvia's long-suppressed past and her complicated relationship with her mother and long-lost father (and, subsequently, the sweaty, grunting brute who replaced him).



Farmer does a lovely job at the center of the story. Starting in a secure, rational place, with her science-based career and headstrong independence (willfully and quickly refusing a whimsical

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Monday off with her boyfriend to be at work), it’s an eerie journey watching Sylvia fall victim to the throes of hysterics. What’s even more troublesome are those who surround her and all that’s underneath her affliction. To say any more would surely spoil where THE PERFUME OF THE LADY IN BLACK goes (and an incredible finale it is), and as the film hasn’t been as widely seen as many of its *giallo* brethren, its secrets should remain as such.

Raro Video’s 1.85:1 transfer looks beautiful; the Dolby Digital audio greatly compliments Nicola Piovani’s score, and thankfully, there’s no dub track to be found. The main attraction feature-wise is a candid talk with Barilli (who also penned 1972’s WHO SAW HER DIE?), who details his introduction to the script, the producers’ intentions, his thoughts on Farmer and his own personal interests and how they played into his shaping of the story. It’s lengthy enough that the lack of a commentary shouldn’t be a bother. A booklet with a brief essay placing THE PERFUME OF THE LADY IN BLACK in the context of its time and place in horror is also included with the package, and while it’s a fun read conveying the many praiseworthy and original traits of Barilli’s film—especially in relation to its being born out of an attempt to emulate the success of previous horror winners—it’s ultimately too short for any real critical analysis, and one shouldn’t be expecting such.

THE PERFUME OF THE LADY IN BLACK really is a bit of a treasure. It’s a haunting look at possible insanity only made scarier by the paranoid fears that one’s psychological downfall (SPOILER ALERT) can be orchestrated by the most casual of acquaintances. Representing what audiences love about late-’60s/early-’70s psychological horror, PERFUME isn’t just a lesser Xerox, but its own beast worthy of discovery.

MOVIE: 🍷🍷🍷🍷

DVD PACKAGE: 🍷🍷🍷🍷

{comments on}