

## “BABY JANE?” (Film Review)

Written by Siobhan Greene  
Friday, 27 August 2010 15:42

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At first glance, William Clift’s *BABY JANE?* looks like an over-the-top send up of 1962 Grand Guignol/black-comedy classic *WHAT EVER HAPPENED TO BABY JANE?*, which united Hollywood legends Bette Davis and Mommie Dearest herself, Joan Crawford. But appearances can be deceiving. It is much more a reimagining of that film, with male actors taking on the roles originally portrayed by women. Sure, there is humor throughout the movie, but much of it is sly and subtle, not the extravagant, flamboyant type often seen in drag cinema.

If you’re not familiar with the original source material, there is a serious gap in your knowledge of horror/exploitation fare. If it has been a while since you’ve seen it, don’t worry—the salient points come back quickly and you’ll find yourself enjoying Clift and co.’s treatment, with Matthew Martin and J. Conrad Frank playing dueling sisters Baby Jane and Blanche, respectively. Martin plays the bitchy Baby Jane to near perfection, utilizing a withering stare and manipulating everyone who gets in her way. Frank’s Blanche, meanwhile, is a true martyr, suffering in her room while her movies play on television.



The supporting cast is a lot of fun as well. The maid Elvira is played by Alotta Boutte—perhaps the funniest drag name I’ve seen in a long time. Boutte provides a protective spirit for Blanche while holding on to her own dignity. Mike Finn is wicked as the scheming Edwin, Baby Jane’s pianist, while Heklina and Mark Sargent are the nosy neighbors always trying to sneak a peek at the reclusive Blanche.

Writer/director Clift has delivered not only a well-written movie, but one that is visually delightful. If I hadn’t known this was a new movie, I would have sworn it was straight out of the late 1940s or early 1950s. The set is an amazing suburban gingerbread house—all sweet-looking on the outside, but a prison to those who live there.

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I must confess that when I first watched BABY JANE?, I found it slow and missed the big-time drag humor; however, upon second viewing, I found the movie was much better than I initially thought. It reminded me of Charles Ludlam’s portrayal of the title role in CAMILLE, in which the audience was treated to a leading lady with an abundance of chest hair—and nobody cared because they were so moved by Ludlam’s performance. Yes, there are some hysterical one-liners, usually delivered by Martin, but it’s not a rapid-fire satire like a YOUNG FRANKENSTEIN or AIRPLANE! Instead, BABY JANE? is a smart, sassy and fun movie that’s worth searching out. It’ll be screening this fall at festivals like [Cinema Diverse: The Palm Springs Gay & Lesbian Film Festival](#), the [Pittsburgh Lesbian and Gay Film Festival](#) and others, and the film’s [Facebook page](#) just announced that BABY JANE? has been picked up by [Ariztical Entertainment](#), with release tentatively set for January. The film is a ton of fun, so check it out!



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