

“THE SILENT HOUSE” (Film Review)

Written by Samuel Zimmerman
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THE SILENT HOUSE (opening theatrically at New York City’s IFC Center today and hitting VOD May 11) has an admirable aim. Through one continuous take, it leads the audience down a singular path with Laura (Florencia Colucci), discovering the secrets and evils of a possibly haunted rural Uruguyan home as she does. It’s an admirable gambit, but not quite successful—as in, it ruins the film.

SILENT HOUSE (a.k.a. LA CASA MUDA) opens with the arrival of Laura and her father Wilson (Gustavo Alonso) at the titular home, an abode once inhabited by family friend Nestor (he “lives in the city now,” that posh bastard) that needs to be cleaned and prepared for new owners. Tasked with getting the wildly messy interior into shape, Laura is soon distracted by strange noises from outside and upstairs (where they’ve been warned not to go) and her tour of the Silent House begins.



What’s disappointing is that beyond being an eye-catching approach, THE SILENT HOUSE never truly justifies its shooting style. As the picture ramps up in the first and second acts, the long, unbroken shots do create a funhouse effect of wondering what’s behind each corner and dwelling in darkness in each room, but even that dwindles. Whereas IFC’s upcoming KIDNAPPED utilizes intricately choreographed long takes to bring the audience face to face with its action in a visceral and unsettling manner, THE SILENT HOUSE never feels as well-thought-out. It can be argued that it shouldn’t, that Laura’s journey should feel chaotic, spooky and spontaneous, but that isn’t truly achieved either. Sequences of her senseless wandering lack nervous apprehension. Instead, there’s just boringly waiting for something to happen. The moments of fright that do occur are conveyed very well, but it’s hard to escape the feeling that in making his specific stylistic choice, director Gustavo Hernandez has bypassed one of the strongest tools of film—editing, with could’ve been made the more uninspiring stretches quietly creepy or atmospheric.

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Despite its none-too-endearing photography (the film is shrouded in the murky, ugly and distracting blackness that comes with shooting digital in the dark), THE SILENT HOUSE would be easily tipped in favor of the aspects that work if its major climax and reveal didn't so utterly undercut what comes before. It incorporates a major narrative flaw that's gaping and impossible to forgive—and, sadly, is directly the fault of the one-take approach that has previously been so intriguing.



{comments on}