

'Braid': Film Review

Three young women play dangerous psychological games in Mitzi Peirone's stylized horror thriller.

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An audacious feature directorial debut.
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Playing doctor takes on a whole new twist in Mitzi Peirone's fever dream of a horror film that nearly manages to make the recent *Suspiria* remake seem stodgy by comparison. The frenzied tale of two young women who attempt to victimize their clearly insane childhood friend, *Braid* ultimately offers far more style than substance. But it provides many memorable moments and stunning visuals along the way, making it a cinematic ride worth experiencing for more adventurous viewers.

The story revolves around Petula (Imogen Waterhouse) and Tilda (Sarah Hay), two enterprising drug dealers who find themselves in trouble when their latest haul is rudely interrupted by the unexpected arrival of NYC cops. Fleeing their downtown apartment, they find themselves deep in hock to their supplier as a result. So they decide to pay a timely visit to their childhood friend Daphne (Madeline Brewer), a rich heiress now living alone in a palatial gated mansion. Their goal is to find the hidden safe in the house, which they believe contains a fortune in cash.

As flashbacks to when they were all little girls reveal, the trio used to play elaborate games together. And the obviously dotty Daphne is more than eager to resume the fun when her old chums return. The game she has in mind has strict rules, which also provide the chapter headings dividing the film. They include "Nobody Leaves," a dictum that is eventually revealed to be very strictly enforced. The playacting features Daphne as the mother, Petula as a

visiting doctor, and Tilda as the rebellious daughter.

That description makes the film sound more straightforward than it actually is. Director-screenwriter Peirone, making her feature debut, is much less interested in conventional horror film plot mechanics than in creating a surrealistic atmosphere of sultry tension. There's a decidedly trippy aspect to much of the proceedings, especially a drug-induced hallucinatory episode suffused with varying shades of turquoise and magenta. A little of this sort of psychedelia goes a long way, and *Braid* definitely suffers from narrative lethargy, only becoming fully arresting in its ultraviolent, gory final act involving an ill-fated visit to the mansion by a suspicious detective (Scott Cohen).

But it's never uninteresting, thanks to the acute visual stylization that's particularly impressive coming from a neophyte director. **Todd Banhazi's gorgeously colorful cinematography**, Amit Gajwani's imaginative, sexy costumes and Annie Simeone's stunning production design provide invaluable contributions, **combining to produce one eye-popping image after another** (some of them, admittedly, over the top). The film also benefits immeasurably from its central location, a historic Yonkers estate that virtually serves as a major character itself.

The trio of female performers fully commit to the material, embracing the intense emotional and physical demands placed on them by the extreme goings-on. If Brewer, familiar from *The Handmaid's Tale*, makes the most powerful impression, it's only because her character is the most gonzo onscreen. Not that she doesn't have heavy competition.

Production companies: Wandering Bard, Somnia Productions

Distributor: Blue Fox Entertainment

Cast: Madeline Brewer, Imogen Waterhouse, Sarah Hay, Scott Cohen, Brad Calcaterra, Rob Leo Roy, Zoe Feigelson

Director-screenwriter: Mitzi Peirone

Producers: Arielle Elwes, Logan Steinhardt

Executive producers: Viviana Zarragoitia, Ali Jazayeri, Richard Schlesinger, Joseph Lubin, Dino Mark, Mitzi Peirone, Todd Slater

Director of photography: Todd Banhazi

Production designer: Annie Simeone

Costume designer: Amit Gajwani

Editor: David Gutnik

Composer: Michael Gatt

Casting: Michael Glasner

Rated R, 82 minutes