

Delightful docudrama recounts shooting of horror classic “Psycho

Written by Kam Williams, Film Review



It wasn't long after the Hollywood premiere of "North by Northwest" in July of 1959 that Alfred Hitchcock (Anthony Hopkins) was already searching for his next project, since he was at his most content making movies. After passing on all the scripts being pitched by Paramount, the master of suspense became curious about a recently-published novel inspired by the gruesome exploits of a Wisconsin serial killer (Michael Wincott).

Hitchcock found the book "Psycho" captivating, and acquired the rights to the pulpy page-turner over the objections of his agent (Michael Stuhlberg), accountant (John Rothman), assistant (Toni Collette) and studio's president (Richard Portnow). He even had a hard time convincing his skeptical wife, Alma (Helen Mirren), whose support was always critical as his longtime collaborator and sounding board.

But once the couple decided to finance the picture themselves, they turned their attention to casting. They settled on relatively-unknown Anthony Perkins (James-D'Arcy) in the pivotal role of Norman Bates, while opting for Janet Leigh (Scarlett Johansson) over a fading star (Jessica Biel) as their ill-fated leading lady.

However, pressures continued to mount after the filming got underway, with concerns ranging

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from the director having to massage actresses’ egos to having to figure out how to get the graphic shower scene past the censors. Unfortunately, Albert’s flirtatious behavior on the set would take a toll on the relationship with a fed-up Alma disappearing with a friend (Danny Huston) to a beachfront pied-a-terre he hid from his wife.



Will she cheat or choose to reconcile with her rotund hubby, despite his roving eye? That is the real tension at the heart of Hitchcock, since everybody knows that Psycho was completed and went on to be feted as a cinema classic.

Directed by Sacha Gervasi, this delightful docudrama is based on “Alfred Hitchcock and the Making of Psycho” by Stephen Rebello. What makes the movie so compelling is the badinage between Alma and Alfred as capably played by Oscar-winners Helen Mirren (for The Queen) and Anthony Hopkins (for The Silence of the Lambs).

Who knows whether their alternately acerbic and admiring interaction is accurate or pure fabrication? It almost doesn’t matter when delivered oh so convincingly, ostensibly allowing the audience a rare “fly on the wall” opportunity to watch a genius and his better half weave movie magic together.

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A cinematic treat offering rare peeks behind the scenes and behind the closed doors of a legendary director and the love of his life.

Very Good (3 stars)

Rated PG-13 for sexuality, violent images and mature themes

Running time: 98 minutes

Distributor: Fox Searchlight

To see a trailer for Hitchcock, visit:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3rQuRLERl6A>