

SHILOH – TMFF Review

It is hard to find the right words to describe *Shiloh*. It is certainly not a typical kind of story, but that's precisely where its brilliance relies on... its original premise and its unique approach to a series of subjects that might be too heavy but that the writer manages to transform into a fantastic dark story of people searching for their roots, dealing with dark family secrets, and embracing their mortality.

While it is possible to say that *Shiloh* might not be for everybody, audience members searching for a different kind of experience will find a blast of dark, fun, and creepy moments of the kind that only a Banshee could create.

For those unfamiliar with the term, a Banshee is a spirit from Irish culture that comes to people when they are about to face death. Such is the case of our protagonist, Rowdy, a terminally ill history teacher who is trying to solve the death of his grandfather while suffering from spectral hallucinations about the Civil War.

While these three plots might seem to have little in common, the writer manages to tie them all together in a paranormal mystery that is brilliantly executed. Every detail, every vision, every family secret, it all ties together in an unexpected ending that will make Rowdy face the horrors of his family's past and question his whole identity.

Ultimately, that's what this story is about – the ugly truth that not too many people want to see. The truth of American history and their sins, and the impossibility of simply ignoring the past. Even those with the best intentions, such as Rowdy himself, must do it. There is a lot of suffering and sick cruelty in American history. Does that mean that younger generations are the ones to blame as well? No. At the end of the day, what defines each individual as a good or bad person is the way he or she treats other people, and they are not their parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents. But they can't (nor should) ignore the fact, and perhaps the only hope for the nation to heal is to accept such an ugly past and confront it, much like Rowdy does.

Such is the kind of reflection *Shiloh* leaves its audience with. An unexpected one, for sure, given how hallucinatory the entire experience is, but nevertheless one that is always there. The closer watcher surely will find some references and even symbolism in the middle of Rowdy's ghoulish visions – and it has to be said that the writer does a terrific job creating an atmosphere that would certainly be fascinating to see on screen.

To a certain degree, this script seems to go in the vein of films like *Mandy* or *Suspiria* as it creates an energetic, confusing atmosphere of madness with a unique style – and, much like those films, *Shiloh* will demand a particular mode to be fully appreciated. After all, the script makes sure to be as confusing as it can be.

Beyond its exotic visuals involving violent ghosts seeking revenge and even time travel, the dialogue itself seems to be purposely bizarre, with characters either talking to themselves, changing their minds from one line to the next and talking about

completely different things at the same time – all of which is just a representation of Rowdy's confused estate of mind.

But while such confusion might put some people off, the script has a great asset that will make its audience stay, and that is no other than its title character, Shiloh the Banshee. For as much as Rowdy's hallucinatory adventure is fascinating, it is Shiloh who manages to bring balance to the story and Rowdy himself with a strong presence that somehow elevates the madness and clarity at the same time. Be it with either funny discussions or dramatic moments in which her advice is what solves a situation, Shiloh is the key not only for Rowdy but for the audience itself to understand and appreciate this unique project. She certainly brings an energy that makes it impossible to put down the page and, for the viewers of the film, to get distracted from the screen.

In conclusion, much like its title character, *Shibh* might demand attention and a particular mode, but audience members with the patience and curiosity to do so will find themselves enjoying a very particular kind of movie that offers a deeper reflection than people might think of.