Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: «««« out of 4

Running Time: 121 minutes

Don’t say I didn’t warn you. The new and extremely eccentric drama from director Darren Aronofsky (*Black Swan*, *The Wrestler*, *Requiem for a Dream*) is his strangest work yet. *Mother!* most definitely is not a crowd-pleaser and will ultimately polarize viewers. Heck, the film earned some extreme reactions even at a local press-only screening. However, there is a lot going on under the surface of the film and it ultimately sticks in the brain long after the credits roll. On that level alone, it’s an interesting and intriguing experiment.

Mother (Jennifer Lawrence) is the title character, who is never given a specific name. She lives a quiet and almost solitary existence in a green and picturesque home in the country that she has been renovating from scratch. Her husband (Javier Bardem) is a distracted writer, struggling with the creative process and looking for inspiration. Their lives are interrupted by the strange and unexpected arrival of a Man (Ed Harris) and Woman (Michelle Pfeiffer). The husband is polite and accommodating to the guests, but the odd behavior of the visitors raises concerns, especially when they make themselves a little too comfortable in the household.

To try to explain exactly what’s going on without giving too much away would be nearly impossible, as increasingly strange bizarre and surreal events befall the protagonist. Not to mention the parade of decidedly unusual visuals. There are somewhat supernatural elements at work here as the central character begins to see the house as some sort of living organism. It’s all the more disturbing for the Mother when she learns that she is expecting a child.

In a subtle way, the lead performance and filmmaking techniques do an excellent job of creating a constant sense of unease. The camera exclusively stays with the Mother, often keeping her a mere foot or two away from the camera lens. She moves and the camera moves with her, spinning and following her in a dizzying manner, as well as getting snippets of secretive conversations that add a sense of paranoia and instability. The approach doesn’t give the performer a break or anywhere to hide, but the actress is more than up to the task.

After establishing a palpable sense of dread, things do go completely bonkers in the last 30 or 40 minutes. Guest after guest arrives, creating factions and causing all sorts of conflict. This section may go on a bit too long for its own good, but it is appropriately distressing. The movie never explicitly states its message, but the themes should be obvious by the close; it’s ultimately an allegory with specific, individual moments left open to interpretations.

One thing is for certain. There are plenty of sequences that linger in the mind for further consideration. As chaos reigns throughout the house, one imagines the anxiety and fears facing any future mother at the dangerous world she is about to bring a child into. Some of the failures and worst aspects of humanity are depicted, which include a couple of scenes that are difficult to watch. The act of creation is also examined, along with the joys and disappointments of the process. Ultimately, the film becomes more perceptible in its final moments as identities are clearly implied. Some of the symbolism gets a little obvious towards the close, but it’s a minor issue.

As far as this reviewer is concerned, there are more positive attributes here than negative. This is a dark and disturbing movie designed to make one uncomfortable (in some cases, it will anger viewers), but it’s an exceptionally well made nightmare that demands some examination on the part of the viewers. *Mother!* doesn’t always work, but it’s a bold, unpredictable and visceral experience that one can’t help but admire.

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