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Note from Roger â?? Last chance to see The Handmaiden

Description

Dear Cinephiles,

Tonight is the last chance to see the spectacular film THE HANDMAIDEN which just won Best Foreign Film and Production Design from The Los Angeles Film Critics. This is a sexy and extraordinary film.

We are attaching the review from The Atlantic and the headline says it all.

It plays tonight (Wednesday) at 7:30pm at the Riviera Theatre.

See you at the movies!
Roger Durling



Click here for tickets







The Handmaiden Is a Cinematic Masterpiece

Park Chan-wookâ??s new romantic thriller is a sumptuous tale of shifting identities, forbidden love, and colonialism.

By David Sims â?? The Atlantic

The Handmaiden contains multitudes: Itâ??s a sumptuous romantic period piece, as well as a sexy spy thriller, replete with secret identities and triple-crosses. Itâ??s an extended commentary on Japanâ??s occupation of Korea in the 1930s, and itâ??s an intense piece of psychological horror from one of the masters of the genre, Park Chan-wook. But more than anything, The Handmaiden is just pure cinema, a dizzying, disturbing fable of love and betrayal that piles on luxurious imagery, while never losing track of its storyâ??s human core. For Park, the Korean director of crossover genre hits like Old Boy and Thirst, the movie feels like an evolutionary leap forward in an already brilliant career.

The film is, surprisingly enough, an adaptation of Sarah Watersâ??s 2002 novel Fingersmith, a Victorian crime novel about a petty thief who gets entangled in a long con against a noblewoman, with whom she then falls in love (after that, many further twists ensue). Park and his co-writer Chung Seo-kyung have taken Watersâ??s investigation of Victorian repression and its limits on female empowerment, and translated it into a tale that delves into the dynamics of Korean culture during Japanâ??s pre-war occupation. This is a movie about the costumes people wear, both literal and psychological, and that focus extends outward to its setting, a peculiar mansion that mashes up Japanese and Victorian architecture. Parkâ??s film is one where every gesture or period detail is loaded with double meaning, and where his heroines have to wrap their feelings in layers of deception just to try and survive.

The plot plays out the same way that Fingersmith does, following a a three-part structure where each successive chapter sheds new light on the last, and a series of three grand cons bound up into a larger, swooning tale of misandry, romance, and liberation. Sook-hee (Kim Tae-ri, making her film debut) is a crafty young pickpocket plucked from a den of orphans to be the new handmaiden to a Japanese heiress, Lady Hideko (Kim Min-hee). Sheâ??s part of an elaborate scheme cooked up by the conman Count Fujiwara (Ha Jung-woo), who plans to marry the emotionally fragile Hideko for her money and then swiftly have her committed. Sook-hee is hired to facilitate his deception, manipulating Hideko into the Countâ??s arms, but of course, things donâ??t go exactly as expected.

Hideko is a prisoner in a gilded cage, a manse designed to reflect the culture of Koreaâ??s occupying power, of which she is a prized example. In interviews, Park has said what fascinated him most about

transposing Fingersmith to 1930s Korea was the opportunity to comment on the occupation. The chief villain of the piece, Hidekoâ??s uncle-by-marriage, Kozuki, is a Korean intellectual who fetishizes Japanese cultureâ??but heâ??s also keeping the Japanese Hideko under his thumb as some petty act of supremacy. While he delves into a budding romance between Hideko and Sook-hee, Park burrows into the twisted relationship between the two countries, and the foolishness of the Korean characters gunning for social ascendency by imitating the Japanese way of life.

The filmâ??s dialogue is subtitled in two colors (Korean in white, Japanese in yellow) to underline the disguises the characters are constantly donning in their efforts to blend in. Park has never been a subtle director, which is why heâ??s worked so well with more lurid genres (most of his movies fall in the thriller or horror category). With The Handmaiden, he makes use of a smorgasbord of tropes and somehow gets away with it. Itâ??s not every film that can feature astute historical commentary, explicit lesbian sex, prolonged bouts of torture, and a giant foreboding octopus without seeming ridiculous. But in The Handmaiden, each of these elements is as wonderfully surprising as the plot itself, which never lets the viewer guess whatâ??s coming next.

The first part of the film charts Sook-heeâ??s manipulation of Hideko, a con job that turns into a seduction, and then, a seemingly authentic romance; the power dynamic is clearly tilted against the timid heiress. After 45 minutes, the story is abruptly inverted, then re-told through the eyes of Hideko, revealed as far more self-aware than initially imagined; for its third act, the film upends itself again, each time layering a deeper understanding of its four major characters. You might see each twist coming in isolation, but when theyâ??re all knitted together, the effect is stupefying.

The Handmaidenâ??s identity shifts as much as its sinuous ensemble; itâ??s as exciting to watch Park keep his grasp on its changing tone as it is to watch the characters double-cross each other. To say much more would spoil a dazzling climax, but this is at its core a tale of liberation, of costumes being thrown off, and of the delight (and terror) that comes with embracing oneâ??s true self. The Handmaiden is long, occasionally demented, and intense enough that it wonâ??t suit everyone. But itâ??s moviemaking that demands to be enjoyed, a thrill ride in service something far grander and more important.

(Source: sbiff.org)

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