

movie reviews
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Pearl Diver

Reviewed by Russ Simmons

Don't let the title fool you. *Pearl Diver* is set about as far from a tropical locale as one can get.

A big winner at this year's Kansas International Film Festival, *Pearl Diver* is an austere drama that's set in the tiny rural Mennonite community of Goshen, Indiana. This low-budget, independent production is slowly making the rounds since it was first screened in 2004.

Joey Honsa plays Hannah, a young woman who left the community to pursue a writing career in the big city. A tragic event from her childhood has left her estranged from her sister, Marian (Amy Jean Johnson), who is still an active Mennonite.



Coincidentally, another tragedy brings them together. Marian's young daughter is the victim of a farming accident that threatens her life. Hannah travels to Goshen in hopes of being useful.

Back in Goshen, Hannah reunites with some old friends, including an elderly neighbor named Isaac Epp, played with restrained dignity by Yevgeni Lazarev, professor of Moscow Art Theater Studio School and the Theater Academy of Russia. (While his role does not seem immediately pertinent, Isaac holds a key bit of information that will be profoundly important to the sisters.)

Hannah also rekindles a friendship with Isaac's son Adam (Christopher Collard), a farmer who longs to be a concert pianist. Their relationship has all the underpinnings of a romance, but the filmmakers don't tip their hand.

It just so happens that Hannah is secretly writing a memoir about the childhood incident that has divided her and Marian. While writing this account of her childhood is a cathartic, therapeutic exercise for Hannah, Marian is distraught and angry when she discovers that her sister wants to publish it.

Writer/director Sidney King is in no hurry to tell his story. In fact, the pacing is so achingly slow that it will undoubtedly turn off many viewers. But he uses the time to create a tangible world that few of us have had the opportunity to visit, and the deliberate tempo also allows the actors to create characters that seem utterly authentic.

King also makes good use of the Indiana countryside. In the flashback sequences that are well integrated into the film, King helps us understand why this place is both so attractive and so alienating for Hannah.

While it utterly lacks the flash that most movies aspire to, *Pearl Diver* is a movie that has a quality that most films lack: dignity. (PG) Rating: 3 (Posted 11/03/06)