

Pearl Diver

4 STARS

“A beautiful movie!”



By DAVID JOHNSON
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Sidney King’s “Pearl Diver” is a beautiful movie with simple characters intertwined with a history and plot that’s as complex as real life.

The movie starts with a nightmarish setting of a little girl running scared through a cornfield at dusk — running from a mysterious man with motives unknown to the viewer.

His motives, the events leading up to little Hannah running through a cornfield, and events decades later are revealed in a movie that intermixes character complexities of two sisters affected by the murder of their mother. One sister still holds firm to her conservative Mennonite upbringing, and another finds recent success as an author in Chicago.

The once-close sisters became different people and more casual acquaintances than loving siblings. Supportive nonetheless, Hannah Eberly (Joey Honsa) and Marian Miller (Amy Jean Johnson) are reunited after Marian’s daughter was badly injured in a farming accident, causing the family to come together under tragic circumstances and, in turn, causing them to revisit the night of their mother’s murder.

Each scene is skillfully photographed, whether the scene has a nightmarish feel of a dream revisiting the night of the murder, a sunny summer day on the outskirts of Goshen on a corn-swept country road, inside a Mennonite church or the Elkhart County Courthouse tower, cinematographer John Rotan uses light, motion and composition with a honed eye of a trained professional.

Being from Goshen, I can attest for Rotan’s ability to transform Goshen’s unappreciated landscape, and causing me to notice the unique and beautiful vastness of fields upon fields of corn.

And as each scene was accompanied by emotion-steering photography and music, the story is filled with enough highs, lows and enough complexities to keep you guessing.

When you finally think you understand Hannah and Marian, an eye-opening twist in the story unlocks a secret that shows the viewer’s previous analysis of the girls was in large part wrong. Though the secret is beyond predictable, hindsight reveals that King foreshadowed climactic events with the skillfulness of a natural story teller.

The acclaimed “Pearl Diver” took awards from the East Lansing, Heartland, Indianapolis International, Winnipeg International and Woods Hale Film Festivals.

The film is rated PG.

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