



★★★★ *“Part murder mystery, part family drama, part love story, PEARL DIVER is an amazing moving drama that deserves to be seen on the big screen.”*

## Pearl Diver - the movie

From Director Sidney King.

Official selection of the Woods Hole Film Festival.

By Patricia Freeman

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This year Woods Hole Film Festival director Judy Laster offered the audience several diamonds in the rough, those rare films where passion and skill combust on the screen to truly ignite the audience. One of this years true gems was “Pearl Diver,” by Sidney King. King begins “Pearl Diver,” his journey of two sisters attempting to recover from past and present family tragedy, with a focused attempt to deftly develop both setting and character. The film opens with King’s camera pinned to the picturesque, yet mysteriously framed Goshen, Indiana countryside.

Shot either at dusk or dawn, it eerily tracks a young girl coming into focus as she runs down a field. The muted lighting and shaky camera overemphasize the nightmarish quality of a flashback sequence to the night of a murder. Yet as the camera eventually jumps into the present, King’s wonderful direction, which centers on an equally mysterious family of Mennonite descent, truly begins.

This shocking murder of their mother some twenty years before caused sisters Hannah, featured in the flashback, and Marian to drift apart both emotionally and geographically. But a horrific farm accident presently threatens to take yet another member of their family’s life, becoming the catalyst for the sisters to revisit their old wounds. King’s attention to his Goshen setting after the flashback helps to familiarize the audience with the stark beauty that surrounds lives so equally filled with pain, creating another character in the mysterious and powerful world of the farm. King reminds us that this world can be as giving as it can be dangerous.

Sister Hannah, played with an understated strength and beauty by Joey Honja, has chosen to leave her urban writer’s life. While Sister Marian, played by Amy Jean Johnson with sterner stuff than Kelly McGillis’s comparable Rachel in “Witness,” has chosen to remain on her family’s Mennonite farm. She stoically has chosen to raise crops, husband and daughter. Both of King’s female protagonists are unique and strong, and it is their passions that drive the film. As writer Hannah attempts to reconcile her past through writing, sister Marian chooses to find strength and comfort

in family and religion. She allows faith to suppress emotional pain. However, just as King's script draws us into this calm world, he artfully turns it upside down with the near fatal accident that threatens Marian's daughter's life, and forces Hannah to return to her roots.

While King's pacing starts out staggeringly slow, he quietly builds his compelling story by carefully weaving together the clashing worlds of past and present, of younger and older sisters, of farmers and non-farmers. The editing wisely chooses to follow the outsider, Hannah, as her reentry into this once familiar world helps the audience to empathize with this family and enhances the conflict that drives the plot. Hannah's secular ways clash with Marian's religious views about justice and dignity. Hannah finds solutions to the accident that threatens to take away both life and farm by utilizing the legal system and publishing her grief, while Marian fights to hold her family together utilizing her Mennonite beliefs. King uses well-timed flashbacks to the tragic night of their mother's murder to heighten suspense and to unveil the mysteries that surround their mother's death. As these sequences become more developed, we see the role that both daughters played that night their mother died and we realize that the worlds these sisters inhabit are ultimately more alike than they realize.

In the end, King's direction so subtly integrates various elements of plot and emotion that his resolution is both satisfying and startling. For example, just when you think that the title bears no resemblance to the action on the screen, King hits you with a revelation so simple and small that its multiple layers of meaning snowball with each successive scene. Part family drama, part murder mystery, part love story, "Pearl Diver" is an amazingly moving drama that deserves to be seen on the big screen.