

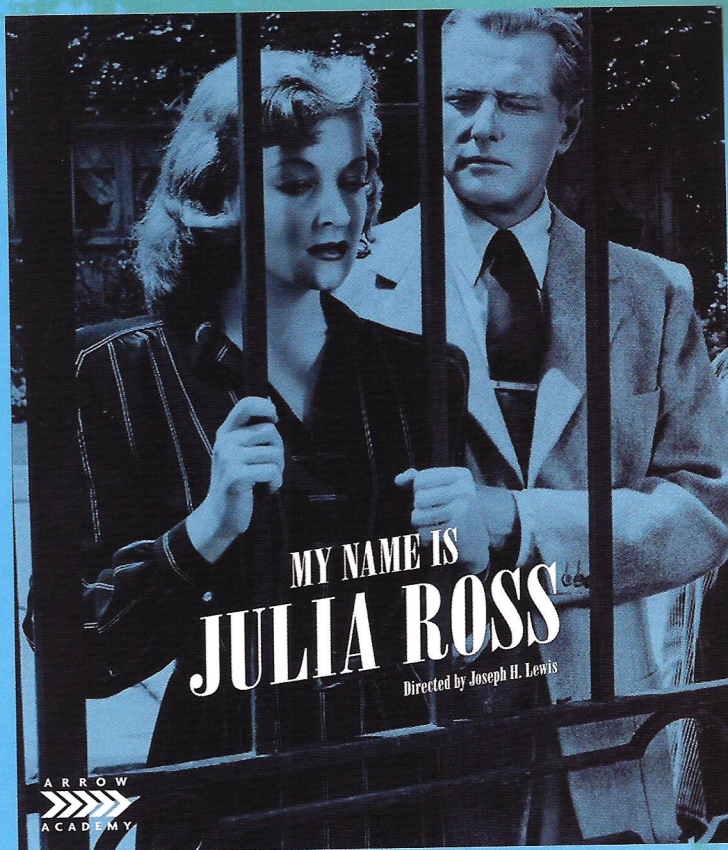
My Name Is JULIA ROSS

Joseph H. Lewis' taut noir finally makes it to Blu-ray courtesy of Arrow Video.

By CHRIS ALEXANDER

The joy of loving cinema—and I'm not talking about devouring the latest juggernaut product being fed to us every Friday night at the multiplex, or cheapies lazily streaming on Netflix—is that no matter how much we know or see, there are *always* hundreds upon hundreds of pictures hiding, waiting to be discovered. And if you're a fan of film noir, there are so many of them out there, from Poverty Row potboilers to major-studio B-movies. And thank God for boutique labels like Arrow Video, which take the time and effort to dig up many of these mini-masterpieces and give them the affection and attention they deserve.

Among Arrow's recent offerings is director Joseph H. Lewis' *MY NAME IS JULIA ROSS*, a lulu of a thriller that served as the basis of the almost equally obscure 1987 mystery-chiller *DEAD OF WINTER*. That unofficial remake is certainly a fine diversion, with a cast including the great Roddy McDowall and Mary Steenburgen, but it can't hold a candle to Lewis' original. This is prime



nastiness, with a damsel in deep distress, reptilian, money-crazed villains of both genders and suspense so thick you can cut it with a knife.

The film stars Nina Foch as the titular heroine, a mild-mannered administrative assistant who travels to London to take a job as a secretary for kindly rich widow Mrs. Williamson Hughes (Dame May Whitty from Hitchcock's *THE LADY VANISHES*). Almost immediately, she is drugged and dragged to the lady's looming seaside manor, where both the matriarch of the house and her sinister son Ralph (George Macready) begin spinning a narrative that Julia is in fact *not* Julia and all, but Ralph's mentally unstable wife Marion. Though the horrified Julia protests, she soon finds herself held prisoner, part of an insidious ruse to cover up the fact that Ralph has in fact murdered his rich fiancée. Now, mother and son are attempting to use Julia in order to claim the dead woman's inheritance. And to do that, Julia will naturally have to have "an accident"...

Lewis got his start making downmarket programmers, and his quick-and-dirty, no-nonsense approach to the filmmaking process is what makes this breakneck, bigger-budgeted Columbia production such a thrill. It's unpretentious, direct and moves like a bullet from a gun, with shadowy black-and-white photography (by future *BONNIE AND CLYDE* DP Burnett Guffey) capturing the serpentine narrative. The wicked mother and her psychotic son are truly vile, and Foch gives it her all in an intense performance that is both strong and vulnerable. You're with Julia every step, trying to find a way out and collapsing in frustration when every possibility is ruthlessly sabotaged by her tormentors. There's also a Gothic, swoony romantic urgency to the film, much of it engendered by the lovely coastal imagery, accentuated by a rousing score by Mischa Bakaleinikoff (*EARTH VS. THE FLYING SAUCERS*). And the trick ending makes for a thunderous finale.

Arrow's startling 2K transfer (commissioned by Sony Pictures) is a grainy, gorgeous delight, and is accompanied by a brisk commentary by noir know-it-all Alan K. Rode as well as a new appreciation of Lewis' work with Columbia and liner notes by critic Adrian Martin. It's a hugely recommended film, and an essential disc release.

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