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# [Review] 'My Name Is 'A' By Anonymous' Is Thought-Provoking, But Polarizing

By *Pat Torfe* on October 7, 2014 @pattorfe

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In this world, there are some films that can only be described as pretentious. You know the ones: the art-house films that try to be more than what they really are by appealing to a certain niche, but in reality are so full of themselves that they fool everyone (including the director and writer) into thinking that they should be shown in film schools for all eternity. And yes, I've seen more than a few of these films. I'm not one to rant about them, but needless to say, some art films rub me the wrong way. So when writer/director Shane Ryan's *My Name Is 'A' By Anonymous* showed up on my doorstep, I was a little apprehensive about watching the film. But, having an open mind is kind of a requirement for this thing called reviewing, so I gave it a shot.

Loosely based on an actual murder case, we follow four girls, each with their own dark secrets. Alyssa (Katie Marsh) and her friend identified as "The Sidekick" (Demi Baumann), in between tormenting Alyssa's younger brother, videotape themselves in angry teen moments, which include instances of self mutilation. "The Angst" (Alex Damiano) is a painfully skinny young woman struggling with the torture of bulimia. "The Performer" (Teona Dolniova) frequently confides to her camera phone of her aspirations to be a pop star, all the while suffering from bouts of self-harm and abuse from her father. This all culminates in the murder of Alyssa's 9-year-old neighbour, Elizabeth



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(Kaliya Skye).

The film pulls very little when it comes to its realism. It's very believable thanks to the cast. Being a low-budget affair doesn't seem to be a problem, as for the most part the cast delivers their lines in a frank and genuine way. That's only part of it, as the acting also feels natural. It makes you appreciate the performances more when you realize the gravity of the situations each character is in, and the subject matter. Abuse and mental illness aren't feel-good topics, and this isn't your typical Hollywood gussying up. From The Angst storing her vomit in jars, to the cutting of wrists while fantasizing of suicide, it's very raw and not at all easy in numerous ways to realistically portray on camera.

Speaking of which, the camera work in *My Name Is 'A'* also helps to give the film a heavy dose of realism. Making frequent use of handheld shots using smartphones and other cameras, as it's primarily supposed to be one of the characters doing the filming, the shakiness of the image really at times helps convey the immediacy of each situation. Remember, these are basically teens just doing their thing, and so again, the rawness is very much there, just as you are very much there watching the events unfold.

As I mentioned, I'm not the biggest fan of art films. And while there was a lot to like about *My Name Is 'A'*, there were moments where things dipped into the art-house realm which had me doing a few eyerolls. The music video-style interludes and the video diary vignettes started to aggravate. The same goes with the handheld shots. I understand the purpose, but moderation isn't in the cards. It all just came across as a very disjointed slow burn (an understandably necessary slow burn for this film), and coupled with the subject matter, I just didn't have the patience.

This is one of those weird situations. You acknowledge that there's some truly great stuff involved in a film, but you didn't like it in the traditional sense. And really, that's what I have to say about *My Name Is 'A'*. It's not a horror film in the traditional sense, and it really is an art film. The acting and dialogue is very much real and integral, as is the look of the film. However, the subject matter will turn off folks, as well as the sad and harsh feel of the film. It's beautiful, but at the same time hits every synapse in your brain with a "don't watch" signal. Polarizing in every sense of the word, I'd recommend watching it for the realism and the non-traditional story, but everyone else will probably want to pass it by.

#### Video/Audio:

Shot using a variety of cameras and formats, the film is primarily framed in 1.85:1 anamorphic widescreen. Colours are for the most part consistent across the various formats, though details can vary. There is some edge enhancement and chromatic aberration with some shots, though it's not distracting. There's no print damage to speak of (save for any post effects), and overall, the quality of the footage is consistent with the tone and the style of the film.

Like the video, the quality of audio varies. Presented in Dolby Digital 2.0 Stereo, there are some scenes where the audio sounds tinny due to the source being a smartphone, while in other scenes it sounds much better. Dialogue is for the most part fairly clear, although there are moments where low-level speech makes it difficult to hear what's being said. It doesn't help that there aren't any subtitles included. Again, the audio matches the tone and style Ryan was going for with the film.

#### Extras:

Not content with having just one version of the film, we're given two additional cuts of the film. The first one, The Columbine Effect, crunches *My Name Is 'A'* into a twenty-minute short film that contains the most effective scenes from the original cut. The second alternate, I Hate Me, Myself, And Us, clocks in at 57 minutes and is credited to the Katie Marsh's character, Alyssa.

Following that are two more short films by Shane Ryan, Oni-Gokko and Isolation. Oni-Gokko is a 5-minute short in Japanese involving a girl tormented by her sister after a game of tag went seriously wrong. Isolation is a 2001 15-minute primarily black-and-white film that features Ryan drifting through a town after the murder of his girlfriend.

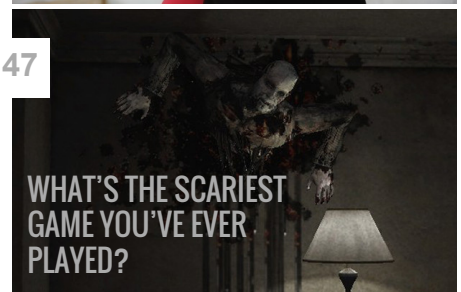
Also included are a deleted scene which has more of Teona Dolnikova singing, an alternate scene

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focusing on Teona Dolnikova, an alternate music scene that features scenes with Elizabeth from the beginning of the film with alternate music, a music video which features Teona Dolnikova once again singing while clips of the film are shown, a Teona Dolnikova Music Video Spotlight, and finally several trailers (including one for My Name Is 'A') for other releases by Wild Eye.

While the alternate cuts of the film make for interesting extras, it would've been nice to have had some input from Shane Ryan in the form of an interview or commentary. As it stands, the extras are more arty than informative. I know that's probably what Ryan's objective was, but even David Lynch explained his stuff.

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**Chandler Of-Adelaide** • 19 hours ago

"It's not a horror film in the traditional sense"

By the sounds of it, it's not a horror film in any sense.

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**K. Lee Adams** • 21 hours ago

I won't be watching this, as the director's previous efforts were absolute shit. Totally pretentious bs with no redeeming value and I doubt this will be any different. Not to mention it's a cheap looking dramatization of a horrific real life crime and the director was talking about how people were calling the killer a "witch" and no one was asking why it happened. That's bullshit, of course people were asking why and trying to figure it out but the fact that this guy thinks the real life murderer deserves any kind of sympathy is enough to make me never watch anything he does again. That and the fact that his previous work was shit. I know someone will disagree with me and I welcome it. We're all entitled to our thoughts on both movies and real life events.

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**The\_Whore\_Whisperer** → K. Lee Adams • 20 hours ago

Amateur Porn Star Killer 2 had it's moments.

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**K. Lee Adams** → The\_Whore\_Whisperer • 19 hours ago

Well, I mean no one any offense if they like those movies. I just found them to have no redeeming qualities. It seems to me this guy just grabbed a video camera and shot something with no script, convincing a few women that they could be famous if they'd fuck him on camera. So many people (like people who troll on IMDB) say stuff like that is "art" and you must not understand it if you don't like it, which is total crap. It makes me think we're at a point where one could take a shit and wipe it on a blank canvas and say "this is art!" and some people would go "wow, that's amazing!". I appreciate you not attacking me for stating my opinion. But what moments in that movie are you referring to? I'm not asking that in a douche way, I'm genuinely curious.

^ | ▾ • Reply • Share ›

**The\_Whore\_Whisperer** → K. Lee Adams • 4 hours ago

What I meant to say is that the chick in APSK 2 was hot and I liked the real sex scenes with her. Other than that the movie, and the other 2 in the series, were as boring as watching hair grow.

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Richter Belmont — I can easily picture her as Lara Croft in the planned Tomb Raider film reboot.

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john — If the film has been an art house hit that had no solid impact on filmmaking (ie found footage) and you

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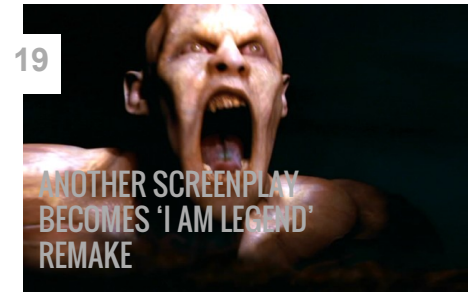
J Jett — I liked Zombie's H movies too. H2 had some of the most brutal kills out of the whole franchise. seeing lovable ...

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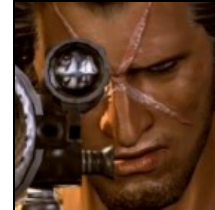
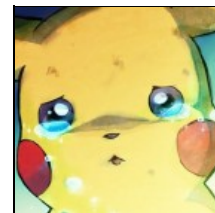
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Phil Mucci — Thanks Jonathan!



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