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CAST

Liam Aiken Francis
Joe Adler Jean Paul Luret
Annalise Basso Vivian
McNally Sagal Dr. Ricki

CREW

Written and Directed by Patrick Picard
Produced by Leal Naim, Thomas Burke, Jason Don,
and Alex Don
Director of Photography Jake Magee
Production Design by Arielle Ness-Cohn
Editing by David Scorca

HOUSE OF MELANCHOLY: DREAMS AND DEATH IN PATRICK PICARD'S *THE BLOODHOUND* (2020)

HOUSE OF ECHOES

“This really is quite a place, JP,” says Francis (Liam Aiken) in Patrick Picard’s feature debut *The Bloodhound*, having recently arrived at the house of his old friend Jean Paul (or “JP”) Luret (Joe Adler).

“Oh gosh, you don’t know the half of it,” JP replies. “It’s very much like you’ve entered a dream, for better or worse.” Later, after Francis has, along with the viewer, begun to succumb to the house’s strange vibe, JP will add, “This house is, you know, a beautiful place, but it’s a strange place. What can I say—the imagination is one of its oldest allies.”

JP speaks of this house—nestled up in the hills overlooking, and apart from, Los Angeles—as though it were an ancient place, although its interior decor seems not to go back much further than the seventies. Meanwhile it is hard to pin down the film’s two main characters to any specific time. “You sound like a hundred-year-old man,” Francis says to JP, and there is indeed a decidedly retro quality to JP’s buttoned-up shirts and cravats and leisure suits and turtle necks—yet there is something old world about both these thirty-something men, with their stiff postures and the goshes and hecks that regularly pepper their conversation. Amongst Francis’ few possessions are

an old analogue photographic camera and a vintage Super 8 cine camera—both of which he appears to own for actual use rather than merely as collectible antiques. JP’s television set may be widescreen (first released in 1993), but on it this odd couple watches (rewatches, in fact) an old black-and-white war movie in Academy ratio—and later they sit down to a recital of Mozart’s *The Magic Flute* performed live in the house—hardly the sort of entertainments that one might expect for two young bucks in contemporary LA. Even if the piles of \$50 bills that JP keeps in the house as “pizza money” seem to be of the design first introduced in 2004 (with its borderless portrait of Ulysses S. Grant, the small star to his right, the red stripes of the US flag in the background), these two men seem somehow to be out of step with their time, or indeed with the online age (no computers, mobile phones, or digital devices are seen in the film). These retro stylings complement a broader backward-looking attitude, as JP repeatedly tries to revive the simpler, more novel pleasures of his childhood, and boyhood friend Francis half-heartedly obliges in these indulgent reconstructions.

If this house seems a time warp of sorts, trapping its characters in the temporal paradox of a present that oddly overlaps with the past, then it is also, as JP suggests, a place where dreams and reality get mixed up—like the ingredients of one of the cocktails that JP shakes. The reason why Francis has been summoned after a decade of no contact is that JP is now suffering an unspecified condition—the closest that his family doctor (McNally Sagal) can get to describing it is with the sublimely vague diagnosis of a “melancholic... sickness of the soul.” JP hopes that his old friend will stay with him and nurse him through an ailment that he believes to be terminal. One of JP’s supposed symptoms is a loss of short-term memory, and a confusion of his older memories with dreams. Soon Francis himself will succumb to similar symptoms, as he (and the viewer with him) cannot tell if JP’s twin sister Vivian (Annalise Basso) actually crawled into his bedroom in the night with a warning (“Get out of here! You’ll die with the rest of us.”), or if he merely dreamt the encounter, or indeed if he is being gaslit by the manipulative JP.

JP inherited the house from his grandmother, who long ago drank herself to death in what is now the piano room, and whose sigh can, according to JP, still be heard when there is quiet. Yet the grandmother is not the only living dead around. For if

JP has exiled himself to the house and not once in the last two years set foot beyond its confines, Vivian is an even more reclusive shut-in, rarely if ever leaving her own bedroom. Francis will see Vivian only one more time during his entire stay with JP, again in what appears to be a dream—otherwise she is a little other than a ghost, unseen and perhaps not even real, even as another absent presence, the “Bloodhound” of the title, remains even more hidden in the house that he haunts, seen only by the viewer (and by JP in a dream). For this house, set over three narrow floors (and a basement vault), is an irrational space, its modest, tight interiors harboring more than one stowaway. Although we visit most, perhaps all of the house’s rooms, the trickery of director of photography Jake Magee’s camera angles and David Scorca’s editing ensures that we never have a clear blueprint of its layout, and stay disoriented in its labyrinthine interiors. Here space gets confused as much as time.

The spectral outlines of Picard’s previous shorts, *The Living Ghost* (2015) and *Ordinary Dream* (2016), also linger in *The Bloodhound*. All three films conform to a narrative pattern wherein a male outsider enters a Los Angeles domestic space and gets tripped up by its uncanny history. More specifically, *The Living Ghost* concerns the reunion of two old friends (one a feckless heir) who have not seen each other for a decade, and whose dreams and destinies appear to become intertwined in a haunted house—and one sequence, in which these two men watch a homemade porn film, is imported almost wholesale into *The Bloodhound*. Meanwhile the words which formally introduce *Ordinary Dream* as “a story of the uncanny, or as some might call it, the supernatural” might equally preface *The Bloodhound*—and the actor (Matthew Luret) who plays the short film’s bewildered protagonist lends his distinctive surname to JP and Vivian in *The Bloodhound*. Filmmakers often use short films to build their chops, rehearse their ideas, and write their calling cards, but the repetitions and resonances that Picard brings over from his shorts to his feature debut are not merely developments of tried and tested concepts, but additional layers to the house of echoes that he is carefully crafting. This abode is haunted by more than one past—including Picard’s own filmography. With its moribund twins, its letter-summoned guest and its sepulchral residence, it is of course also possessed by the spirit of Edgar Allen Poe’s short story *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1839).

IN AND OUT OF THE CLOSET

“Be straight with me, JP,” Francis insists, as he struggles to determine whether he dreamt the events of the preceding night or not. Yet ever since Francis received JP’s letter inviting him over for “one long sleepover,” JP’s intentions towards Francis have seemed altogether less than straight. You can see it in the way he repeats Francis’ name when first reunited with him, and embraces him like a long-lost lover. You can see it in his constant tactility. You can see it in the way, having taken Francis’ trainers to put them in the “shoe cave,” JP sniffs them deeply. You can see it in the way that he persuades Francis to resume a boyhood game that involves literally wrestling in sleeping bags (“I’m sorry, Francis, I was just playing,” JP insists apologetically when Francis complains that it was too rough for him, “I haven’t played with anyone in a while.”). And you can see it in the way that JP asks if he can sleep in Francis’ room. As JP shows Francis a lesbian porn film that he has himself shot in the house, he finally makes his move, drunkenly reaching for Francis’ crotch—only for Francis to rebuff him with a punch to the face.

The evolving guest-host relationship between Francis and JP is one rooted not just in a clash of class, but in their conflicting desires. Broke and homeless, Francis wants what JP has: a roof over his head, a comfortable life, access to money. Conversely, privileged JP wants for nothing in terms of financial security, but craves human connection, even as his toxically needy personality repels everyone, including his own twin sister. In the end, both men will get what they want, but perhaps not quite as either imagines. JP’s desire is expressed in queer terms: what he longs for is “connectivity and shared experience” (a phrase he uses twice), while what made him turn to Francis for this was his sudden memory of a war film in which “there was a young man dying in another man’s arms, and there was this feeling of brotherhood that I’ve never completely understood but I’ve always been moved by.” So while this odd, somewhat old world couple, locked into their hermetic, haunted world, may recall the decadence of F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* (1925), the Maysles brothers’ *Grey Gardens* (1975), Wes Anderson’s *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001), and even the unsettling illustrated books of Edward Gorey, there is also an echo of Miguel Arteta’s *Chuck and Buck* (2000) to these characters’ homosocial interplay.

In JP's self-isolation and self-imprisonment, the house has also become his closet, where these desires have remained concealed—until at last he invites Francis to share his hiding place. Yet there is someone else here lurking out of sight in a more literal closet. At the film's beginning we see a man (Chad Kotz), his face obscured, crawling out of a creek into the house, where he secretes himself in a clothing cupboard. This sinister interloper is spotted again at various other points in the film, even if his presence goes more or less unnoticed by his cohabitants. He does, though, feature in a dream that JP has—indeed, he may be no more than JP's dream—according to which “the bloodhound” (as the man becomes known in the dream) moves into a house and into a closet, spreading a great, indeterminate fear “until there was a tenderness between the people in the house. A real tenderness. An apology. Forgiveness. A real deal sort of thing. And then he'd move down the river and find a new house.” While the bloodhound certainly figures JP's own anxieties and closetedness, this nightmare narrative foreshadows the film's own ending in tenderness, apology, and forgiveness—even if the dread never quite goes away.

THE HOUSE AS TOMB AND THE LEGACY OF LONELINESS

Upon entering the house, the first thing that Francis tries to photograph is the collection of urns accommodating the ashes of JP's ancestors. Indeed this house is a place of legacy and death. JP inherited it from his grandmother, who died in situ—as will JP himself and his sister, for whom the house already feels like a tomb. The impression is enhanced by the way that cinematographer Jake Magee tends to place the camera at one end of each very long room in the house, as though adopting the perspective of a body buried (alive?) in a coffin. Even as JP obsesses over his childhood, he already thinks of his days as numbered, and so his entire life is collapsed into this one place and time. Not just his, but all life—for near the film's end, when JP asks, “How did we get here?”, Francis answers with a potted cosmogony. After briefly outlining the Big Bang and the formation of the planets, Francis discusses the origins of life: “Somehow water got into the mix and we got some fish. The fish climbed out of the sea, turned into apes,” at which point JP brings this grand narrative right up to date by adding, “The apes turned into JP, crying on the floor.” Much like Francis' account of life, *The Bloodhound* too begins with the emergence of a creature from

water—and although it is a chamber piece, its claustrophobic setting also serves as a microcosm for more universal themes of life's cycle, death's intrusion, and the predetermined curse of the human condition.

Childless, JP and Vivian are the last in the Luret line, but they leave to Francis a generous legacy that is also a trap. For in the end, Francis has everything and nothing—an opulent home as well as a sarcophagus, and an acute notion of his own loneliness and alienation in an unforgiving universe. For despite opening with a nightmarish monster and a home invasion, *The Bloodhound* is ultimately a horror film dealing not in jump frights, gore, or special effects, but in an altogether more esoteric and insidious brand of existential dread, with an ending so understated in its bleakness that it will haunt the corridors of your mind for a good long time after.

—Anton Bitel

Anton Bitel is a freelance film critic for Sight & Sound, Little White Lies, VODzilla.co and ThroughTheTreesMag.com amongst others, specialising in genre cinema. He has been a member of the Online Film Critics Society since 2007, and of the London Film Critics' Circle since 2009. He blogs at ProjectedFigures.com.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

The Bloodhound is a perverse and completely unfaithful adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Fall of The House of Usher*. Jean Epstein and Luis Buñuel made a version in the twenties. Later, Vincent Price made his very Vincent Price version. There have been other adaptations more or less worth mentioning. So in a way it's become a kind of tradition and that's because, I think, there is some sort of archetypal significance to the story and enough ambiguity in its themes to use it as a canvas for any storyteller to project their own ideas.

I came about the story by chance. I was sitting in my living room trying to get ideas when I looked up at my bookshelf and saw an old anthology of Poe stories which had belonged to my grandfather. I grabbed the thing off the shelf, flipped to the first story (*The Fall of The House of Usher*), read the first two pages, and then the outside ideas started flying in. In fact, I'm fairly certain I began to form the bulk of my own story before I even completed reading Poe's. Just the atmosphere and the setup of Poe's story got me excited enough. Later, I read the entire thing and developed a structure.

Simultaneously—and not to be morose—I was having constant dreams about a childhood friend who had recently and tragically passed away. In the dreams it was me and him in his childhood home and, as you'd expect, the dreams were full of sadness. The atmosphere shared something with the Poe story and I began to mix the dreams with *Usher* and discovered my take on the tale; what I would project onto its canvas. For me, the story became in many ways about friendship in the face of the void. It's a mysterious and sad and strange world and the company of a friend goes a long way.

Lastly, I had a completely unrelated dream about a man/creature who crawled everywhere and hid in suburban closets and produced fear in families simply through his presence. I figured this dream was the third element necessary to give the story its own rich ambiguity and a relationship to the unconscious. For whatever reason, it became important that the film felt like a dream and included dreams, but that the dreams actually affect the story and characters and push the narrative forward (as opposed to everything “just” being a dream [you know what I mean?]).

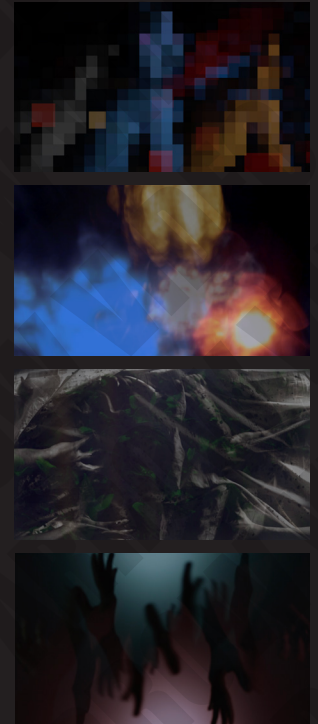
—Patrick Picard

PATRICK PICARD ON THE SHORT FILMS *bad dream*, *the muffled hammerfall in action*, *the mosaic code*, AND *wiggleworm*

“These little ‘micro-shorts’ were made from recycled material: footage I’d shot over the years that didn’t find a home but that I felt needed to be used for something. And since the content of the footage was often dreamy, the micro-shorts took on a kind of unconscious, dream-like quality. What’s nice is that they became this sort of jumbled collage of things I was thinking about over the years—or dreaming about—a kind of visual index or dream diary. Dreams are mentioned a lot in *The Bloodhound* and these micro-shorts felt like they could be the unconscious diary entries of the characters in the Luret House.”

(shot and edited by Patrick Picard with additional photography by Chad Kotz)

—Patrick Picard



ABOUT THE TRANSFER

The Bloodbound is presented in its original 1.66:1 aspect ratio, with 5.1 and 2.0 stereo audio. The High Definition master was provided by Yellow Veil Pictures.

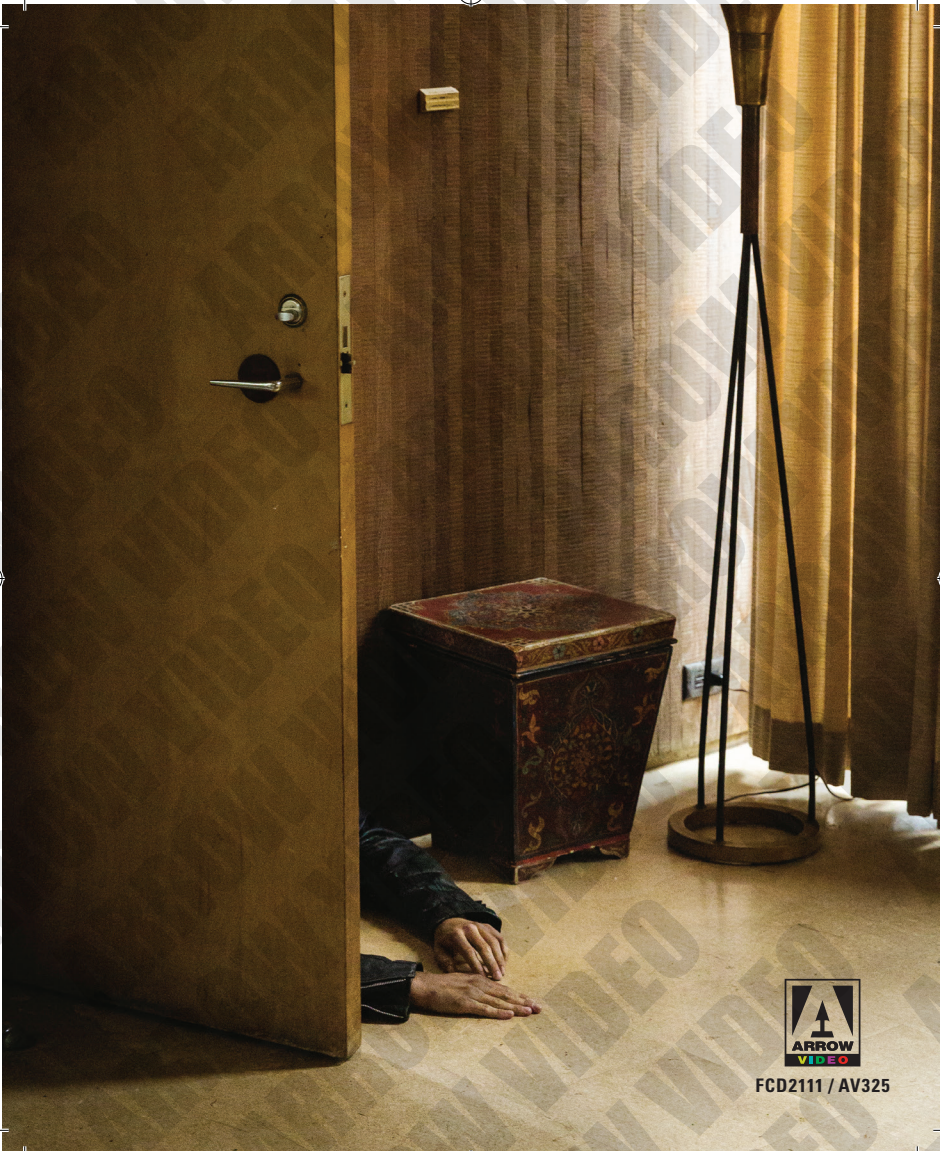
PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc and Booklet Produced by **Jasper Sharp**
Executive Producers **Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni**
Associate Producers **Caroline Lichnewsky, Ewan Cant**
Technical Producer **James White**
Disc Production Manager **Nora Mehenni**
QC **Alan Simmons**
Production Assistant **Samuel Thiery**
Blu-ray Mastering and Subtitling
The Engine House Media Services
Artist **Tony Stella**
Design **Scott Saslow**



SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Joe Adler, Sarah Appleton, Anton Bitel,
Thomas Burke, Chad Kotz, Jim Kunz, Jake Magee, Leal
Naïm, Arielle Ness-Cohn, Patrick Picard, David Scorca



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