

VertigoAlfredHitchcockJamesStewart1958

By Tim Van Schmidt

Vertigo ***

A cop takes time off from the force when his acrophobia contributes to the death of another officer in the line of duty. An old friend takes advantage of the situation by hiring the cop to investigate his own wife, who has been acting oddly. This leads to a dark web of deception and obsession.

There are certainly some mundane scenes- there're a lot of scenes with actor James Stewart at the wheel of his car- but Hitchcock at least creates a pleasant background, shooting in colorful and even elegant locations, taking full advantage of the general San Francisco area, from bustling city to redwood forests to ocean cliffs.

But the sequence that is not mundane in the least is following the wife's apparent suicide. The cop has a fever dream that jumps off the screen with geometric designs going haywire in the background while special effect nightmare shots spin around on the screen. This breaks completely away from the gritty reality unfolding throughout the rest of the movie, unbalancing the production and adding tension as a result.

Most fascinating here, however, is Kim Novak, who plays two parts- or does she really? In any case, she appears both as an exotic, well-bred woman and as a sturdy Midwestern single gal.

Directed by Alfred Hitchcock...1958...128 min...featuring James Stewart, Kim Novak, Barbara Bel Geddes, Tom Helmore, Ellen Corby.