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## 'Poker Face' Sharply Revitalizes the Detective Genre With a Killer Hand of Comedy

written by Toan Le • 1 year ago

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Ever since his success with “Knives Out,” creator Rian Johnson has been reinventing the murder-mystery genre. “Poker Face” is no stranger to his intricate recreation, delivering sharp-edge comedy and engaging storylines.

The series centers on an ex-poker player, Charlie Cale (Natasha Lyonne), who has an intrinsic knack to tell who is lying. After solving a crime she shouldn't have gotten involved with in the first place, Charlie is being hunted by her ex-employer's goon, Cliff LeGrand (Benjamin Bratt). However, dicey situations involving murder always occur whenever Charlie reaches a stop on the road. With her special power, Charlie can't help but solve these mysteries with a level of tenacity and witticism. Subsequently, she finds herself to be an unsung detective, solving multiple crimes even if they bring her pursuer one step closer to her.

Johnson's writing and exceptional directions continue to deliver astounding entertainment. Each episode is its own hilarious murder case with a new set of strangers that Charlie encounters, but there is a continuous storyline running behind each mystery. The way Johnson weaves these story arcs together with such ease is a testament to his role as a genius creator. Each mystery feels so refreshing and engaging as if the audience is watching a different show each time. Plus, the comedy element plays extremely well with the retro-style and unconventional format the series offers.

One of the biggest takeaways from the whole series is its usage of style and genre. Combined with a killer soundtrack, Johnson smartly utilizes the colorful detective theme from most 1970s investigative shows to not only pay homage to his craft but also inject a distinctive identity that is so different from today's television landscape.

Of course, stylistic compositions of shots from “Knives Out” are apparent throughout the series, but what makes it so unique is its execution. A lot of times, the framing of the shot delivers a deeper, more meaningful layer onto the characters' motives and outcomes, from camera movements to lighting tactics. Some of the twists are so unexpectedly hilarious and effective that it makes the payoff all the more rewarding.

Adding more to the prestigious value of the show, each story features clues and case developments for Charlie to discover and solve. Even if the audience already knows who the killer is, the narrative still has tricks to unveil answers as to why those characters commit the crime.

The amazing guest stars throughout the season bring their best to the series, with each character contributing a certain growth for Charlie — a certain purpose. Plus, each set of strangers has its unique storyline; nothing feels repetitive or reused. Certain guest stars even have some stellar scene-stealing moments; some include Hong Chau (“The Menu” and “The Whale”), Chloe Sevigny (“American Horror Story” and “Russian Doll”) and Lil Rel Howery (“Get Out” and “Free Guy”). The list goes on.

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However, the show’s best card is Lyonne’s dedicated performance as the insightful yet questionable Charlie. Lyonne’s chaotic persona blends remarkably well with the vision Johnson is aiming for. Her candor and interactions with her environment and its characters are uproariously charming and entertaining. Lyonne’s witticism in the series gives life to Charlie as this wisecracker, yet the character feels human and relatable.

For each murder case, Lyonne taps into her comedy roots and delivers an enchanting performance. She takes the viewers through her ridiculous thought process, but it seems so enticing that one can’t stop rooting for her to find the answer. When there is a shift from comedy to drama or vice versa, Lyonne drifts herself between the genres so effortlessly. Truth be told, this is the character she is destined to embody.

“Poker Face” is a breath of fresh air into the ever-changing comedy landscape. Johnson’s writing remains strong and compelling as well as funny and witty, outputting well-crafted narratives. Of course, Lyonne is the ace of spades in the series; without her, the charisma would not be as potent or funny. “Poker Face” automatically sets the expectation high for the rest of the year as it proudly claims a seat at the best comedy table.

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