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By Ray Bennett, May 18, 2009 06:37 ET

Bottom Line: Good-looking mystery yarn that goes for more than thrills.

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CANNES -- Olivier Cohen's intelligent mystery "Invisible Eyes" has all the conventions of a thriller about a woman alone in a house but confounds expectations by moving pleasingly into "Twilight Zone" territory.

The offbeat story, which stars German catwalk veteran Pia Mechler as an over-the-hill supermodel who starts to believe the walls have eyes, also has echoes of the themes explored by Charlie Kaufman in "Adaptation," with a puzzle about who's really writing the script.

Marketed smartly, the handsomely made film could go beyond its obvious youth audience to draw in fans of classic film and television mysteries. It also features a late Peter Cushing-like appearance by the fine English stage actor Michael Mears as a key instrument in the plot.

The setup is simple. Gaby (Mechler) arrives at a large, remote English country home to spend time watching DVDs and reading scripts in order to move on from being a top model. Her manager/lover Dan (Simon Merrells) enthuses about her future but his manner suggests his words are artificial as he departs to the city.

Gaby soon claims to sense another's presence in the empty house and begins to fantasize about her first lover, a young man who died in a motorcycle accident. Visibly unsettled, she starts hearing odd noises and receiving weird notes. Answering her pleas for help, Dan suspects she's losing her mind, not least because the notes are in her handwriting.

The French director establishes an unsettling tone that tickles the imagination in the mood of that wonderful word *eldritch*, but along with the requisite shocks, he delivers a smart and intriguing payoff.

Merrells, who has won plaudits in the Brando role in a stage production of "On the Waterfront" in London's West End, makes his character ambiguously sinister and Mears nails his small but vital role.

Mechler's German-inflected accent when speaking English at first suggests the attractive young actress will wobble when things get spooky but her ever-so-slightly stilted delivery serves the character well. It heightens the evocation of classic suspense movies, along with Damien Salancon's music, which plays with the genre's traditions while hitting all the right notes.

Festival de Cannes -- Market

Sales: HiDe Films

Production company: HiDe Films

Cast: Pia Mechler, Simon Merrells, Michael Mears, Mark Tintner, Ross Armstrong

Director-screenwriter: Olivier Cohen

Producer: Liz Rosilio

Director of photography: Darran Bragg

Production designer: Gaelle Lindingre

Music: Damien Salancon

Costume designer: Nadya Lubrani

Editor: David Laurence

No rating, 107 minutes


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