

VARIETY: Tuesday 18 February “ ‘Mother’s Baby’ Review: A Paranoid Postpartum Thriller That Very Nearly Delivers” by Siddhant Aslakha
<https://variety.com/2025/film/reviews/mothers-baby-review-1236312316/>

Feb 18, 2025 3:42pm PT

‘Mother’s Baby’ Review: A Paranoid Postpartum Thriller That Very Nearly Delivers

If not for a few ill-conceived decisions toward the end, Johanna Moder’s jet-black motherhood comedy would be the perfect genre thriller.

By [Siddhant Adlakha](#)



FreibeuterFilm

[Johanna Moder](#)’s latest — the thrilling, paranoid, bleakly comedic “Mother’s Baby” — is crafted with masterful tonal control for much of its runtime. It comes achingly close to sticking the landing, undone only in its final minutes by a handful of decisions that rob it of its crucial power: its ability to exist within the chilling unknowns of postpartum depression.

In trying desperately for a child, middle-aged orchestra conductor Julia (Marie Leuenberger) and her husband Georg (Hans Löw) find themselves at the door of a fancy fertility specialist, the enigmatic Dr. Vilfort (Claes Bang). The doctor boasts a high success rate for his cutting-edge methods, and all seems well once Julia is pregnant — that is, until the day she gives birth at his private clinic. Something seems amiss when her newborn son is whisked away for some emergency treatment before she can even hold him, but is returned the following day with no complications.

Each conversation comes loaded with exchanges and observations only Julia seems to note as strange. These mounting signs all point to an inevitability in Julia’s mind: that the baby she’s trying so hard to breastfeed, who she refuses to name, and to which she has a hard time connecting, is not her

own. As Gerlinde (Julia Franz Richter), the midwife assigned to them by the clinic, makes over-familiar house calls, Georg seems none the wiser, placing a strain on their marriage and causing an itch at the back of Julia's mind. These factors practically isolate her as she draws comparisons between the strange behavior of her uncannily smiling, surprisingly serene newborn and the smirking axolotls she notices at Vilfort's facility. Could there be some connection?

A film with a more obvious horror bent might provide answers by yanking its protagonist down a rabbit-hole of online research, but "Mother's Baby" is a work of gesture and suggestion. It floats its oddball ideas through strange happenings and surreal exchanges with minor characters who exit the frame (and the story at large) after serving their purpose, but its numerous possibilities are anchored by Leuenberger's wonderfully measured performance. The actress maintains an unsteady and fragile equilibrium, even in ludicrous moments wherein Moder brings Julia face to face (in wryly amusing two-shots) with an innocent infant whose very presence seems to torment her.

The film is, at times, jaw-droppingly funny even as it navigates material that turns some of the most troubling woes of early motherhood into acerbic cinematic fodder. By placing in its crosshairs something as ethereal and unquantifiable as a mother's instant, nurturing love, and practically deleting it from Julia's DNA, "Mother's Baby" offers glute-tightening tension the further it dips its toe into genre territory, while holding off on the satisfaction (and release) of going full-tilt for as long as possible. It certainly helps that Bang is practically channeling his role as Netflix's Count Dracula, introducing a subtly sinister streak beneath each conversation without ever tipping his hand.

Where the movie falters, however, is in its climactic scramble to provide answers — even abstract ones. The film is at its most ominous when its possible outcomes linger in the distance, through locations rife with sinister, claw-like canopies, and through moments of drama that make Julia, and the audience, question all the things they see. By the end, however, "Mother's Baby" makes the odd decision to switch its primary mode of expression to something far more definitive and literal (or at least, literal-minded), even though on paper one can't reasonably conclude that it depicts either the full-picture of reality, or a total and complete break from it.

Either way, that both these possibilities suddenly exist on screen bifurcates the story between two equally didactic possibilities when its strengths lie in lingering uncertainties. To sacrifice this sensation in favor of something known is to rob the story of the most horrifying catharsis. Then again, that so much of the movie works up until this point is a miraculous feat, one that — alongside Sundance premiere and fellow Berlin competition title "If I Had Legs, I'd Kick You" — signals an intriguing evolution of pregnancy and motherhood horror, toward something more hauntingly internal and psychological, and in the process, wildly entertaining.

**'Mother's Baby' Review: A Paranoid Postpartum Thriller That Very Nearly Delivers
Reviewed at Berlin Film Festival (Competition), Feb. 17, 2025. Running time: 107 MIN.**

- Production: (Austria-Switzerland-Germany) A FreibeuterFilm production, in co-production with Tellfilm GmbH, Match Factory Prods. (World sales: Match Factory, Cologne.) Producers: Sabine Moser, Oliver Neumann. Co-producers: Katrin Renz, Viola Fügen, Michael Weber.
- Crew: Director: Johanna Moder. Screenplay: Johanna Moder, Arne Kohlweyer. Camera: Robert Oberrainer. Editor: Karin Hammer. Music: Diego Ramos Rodriguez.
- With: Marie Leuenberger, Hans Löw, Claes Bang, Julia Franz Richter. (German dialogue)