

Undertone (2025)

“Did You Hear That?”

A Review by Sydney Buckholt

As horror continues to cross boundaries no one has thought it could, it makes sense that a film like *Undertone* has made its eerie yet soothing appearance in the world. Serving as the writing/directorial debut for Ian Tuason, the film closely follows its predecessors such as the found footage hits *Host* and *Grave Encounters* bringing in a new wave of dread in the form of podcasting.

Undertone tells the story of Evy played by Nina Kiri (*Let Her Out*, *Out Standing*) who portrays a podcast host who finds herself caring for her dying mother while unraveling a haunting story with her co-host Justin played by Adam DiMarco (*The White Lotus*, *The Magicians*). What starts out as a basic episode of skeptic versus true believer of the paranormal quickly descends into creeping madness and suffocating dread as the two continue to unravel a mystery at hand.

Nina brings a grounded intensity to Evy, balancing skepticism with a sense of unease that never feels forced. Adam, though only *heard* through the film, still fits the film's unsettling rhythm. Horror podcasts are notorious for letting your imagination bring the fear and each actor flawlessly executes this rule, using silence and stillness to provide the audience with just enough to have them wonder what could be coming next.

True to any A24 project, the film relies heavily on camera angles and an understanding that negative space can be just as threatening as anything lurking within it. Visually, it masters the use of minimalism. The deliberate stillness to the framing waiting for something to break it, and when something finally does, it pays off in just the right amount to keep the audience wanting more.

Narratively, the film plays with ambiguity in a way that won't be for everyone. But for those willing to meet it halfway, there's something deeply compelling about its refusal to hand over easy answers.

There's a recurring use of nursery rhymes that feels particularly effective as they are played throughout the film. Hidden messages, dark omens and the hint of a darker

presence residing in the sound waves adds to the discomfort more than any jump scare ever could.

But while *Undertone* shines when it comes to ominous atmosphere, the film stumbles towards the final act. There are hints of something larger brewing in the background but it never fully sharpens into focus. Hints and callbacks throughout the film don't necessarily get answered even though you can feel the director reaching for a bigger statement, only to pull back just before it lands. The final act feels derailed and almost as if he didn't know how to end the story on a good note.

Still, what the film does well, it does confidently. It creates a mood that feels consistent and controlled. It avoids overstaying its welcome and instead leaves you with that lingering discomfort, like you've overheard something you weren't meant to hear.

As a debut, *Undertone* announces Ian Tuason as a filmmaker who understands the power of subtlety. It's not your typical loud, aggressive horror that we've seen countless times and it doesn't need to be. Sometimes, it's far better to be low, quiet, and patiently waiting for your next victim.

Undertone gets a well deserved 3.5 out of 5.