

# Homebody (2022)



Johnny with the baby sitter whom he has a crush on, Melanie. (c) Killjoy Films

Having directed ten short films, this marks director/writer Joseph Sacket's debut as a feature film creator—though clocking in at a mere 1 hour 15 minutes, it barely qualifies as such. His version of the body swap film (remember *Freaky Friday* and *Like Father, Like Son*?) is quite a bit different in two ways, as explained below.

Nine-year-old Johnny (Tre Ryder) has been in the care of Melanie ([Colby Minifie](#)) a great deal because his single parent mom Claire's (Maria Dizzia) work. However, Melanie is about to move on to become a birthing assistant or doula, so she is about to end her nanny career. The boy idolizes her, keeping beneath his bed a box containing treasures associated with her. Thus, he is very upset by the thought of her leaving.

The two have been watching a YouTube video in which a mystical guru explain how one can enter the mind of another person and even communicate with that person while in the other's body. Johnny is successful at this, but gets more than he bargained for. The mayhem that follows might remind you of Mickey Mouse's character in the "Sorcerer's Apprentice" segment of *Fantasia*. It's one thing to gain unusual power, but can you retain control; what do you do with it once you have it? As his spirit enters Melanie's body, his own body grows limp, so s(he) pushes it underneath a couch in his bedroom.

Johnny revels in his new experience, jumping up and down on his bed and trying on his mother's clothes. When he walks in Melanie's shoes it is the awkward gait of a male barely able to keep from falling. Also he is puzzled and panicked by the string and cloth item he pulls from her bottom—what nine-year-old boy knows anything about tampons? The guru's video also tells him how he can communicate with the possessed person, and so we hear their dialogue as Johnny tries to cope with an impending crisis—a phone call from a pregnant woman Melanie is supposed to help with her birthing that afternoon.

Out on the Brooklyn street actress [Colby Minifie](#) reveals how talented she is—walking like a young boy would in a woman's shoes, and changing facial expressions as she portrays both a boy inside her and herself buried deep in her psyche conversing. The scene in which Johnny over indulges his love of sweets, now that he has plenty of money, is a delight. Then, for a time Johnny is unable to talk with Melanie, and he keeps receiving on her cellphone urgent calls from the soon-to-be mother and her assistant about when Melanie is coming. (Johnny's mother is out on a number of errands, so there will also be the need to get back home before she does.)

Johnny needs to get to Melanie's apartment but does not know her address, and because he is unable to talk with her calls a boy's number on her phone to obtain it. This almost leads to the film taking a deep dive into darker territory, causing the tension to sky rocket for a few minutes. The boy shows up at the apartment and jumps to the wrong conclusion as to why she had called him. He refuses her request to leave her apartment and grapples with her so that she has to fight back. Fortunately this tense sequence does not last long, and we are soon back to comedy mode.

How Johnny is able to save Melanie's reputation with her client (can you imagine being a nine-year-old present at a home birthing and expected to tell the mother and her care assistant what to do?!), rush back home as Mom is returning,

while trying to return his spirit to his own body, makes for lots of laughter and intense suspense. And also some thought about gender identity. Earlier Johnny had tried out lipstick and eye shadow makeup on Melanie's face, really pouring them both on. Back home in his own body, he takes Melanie's tube and applies the lipstick to his own lips while dressing up in female clothes. Then his mother comes in...

Thus, this is not so much a body swap film as it is a gender swap one, as well as a film of gender exploration in which a boy arrives at some degree of self discovery. It is much shorter than the two body swap films mentioned above, but a bit more complex, a bit deeper in its exploration of the human psyche trying to understand itself and others. Tre Ryder is delightful as young Johnny, but it is the incredibly talented [Colby Minifie](#) who, for most of the time, carries the film, assuming the double role of a young woman inhabited by a boy who finds it difficult yet exhilarating to be in control briefly of a woman's body, and emerges better equipped to understand his queerness. This is a film that both the LGBTQ+ and the heterosexual communities can embrace. Coming out at a time when some politicians are attempting to pass strict laws against the minority community, especially any teaching about it in schools, it will be interesting to see how the film is received in such conservative states. Soon available in theaters and on streaming platforms, this is a film worth watching!

*This review will be in the December issue of VP along with a set of questions for reflection and/or discussion. If you have found reviews on this site helpful, please consider purchasing a subscription or individual issue in The Store.*