Black Swan : Review

Much has been made of Darren Aronofsky's debt to Dario Argento, and to the Davids, Lynch and Cronenberg, in the wake of *Black Swan*, his new film starring Natalie Portman, which opened on Friday. However, within the opening minutes, anyone familiar with Aronofsky might feel that it is his own work to which the director is referring.

Since his first feature film, 1998's π (*Pi*), obsession as a form of addiction has been a major theme in Aronofsky's work, be that based on finding a particular mathematical theorem (π), drug addiction (*Requiem for a Dream*), or personal ambition (*The Wrestler*). Shots of shoes being prepared and uniforms laced with meticulously practiced precision act as exposition, introducing us to the dedicated ballerina Nina Sayers, and should be familiar to those who saw Mickey Rourke lovingly tend to his costume in *The Wrestler.*

Whereas *The Wrestler* dealt with a performer coming to terms with his career ending, here Nina Sayers (Portman) finds herself on the eve of her most prestigious role to date, cast in the lead role of 'Swan Queen' in a production of Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake.* Faced with having to dance both as the White **and** Black Swans, Sayers is told that whilst she is perfect for the White, she is too frigid and reserved to embody the Black persona and needs to 'let go' in order to give the perfect performance for which she strives.

The premise is quite simple, and Aronofsky uses it to explore the duality of the psyche, and expose the fractured and paranoid nature of Portman's character, thanks to his particular style for depicting psychological turmoil that is all the while exciting and engaging. The distinctive kinetic camera movement that he developed particularly in *The Wrestler,* may not seem like it could be applied to both the ring and the ballet stage, but it is skilfully utilised and

allows the audience to feel as though they are part of the dance, enabling Portman to be truly seductive in her climactic dance as The Black Swan. This is, without doubt, Aronofsky's most articulate and concise film to date, drawing upon the best elements of his previous works and combining them in a film that reflects his influences but which retains a more mainstream appeal.

Mila Kunis is strong and considered in an unruly and unrestrained role as Lily, Sayers' understudy and perceived enemy. Vincent Cassel is near perfect as Thomas Leroy, the deplorable and manipulative director. A special mention must also go to Winona Ryder, whose relatively small amount of screen time in no way diminishes her devastating performance as the bitter previous star of Leroy's ballet troupe.

However, portraying both elements of the psyche, a conundrum that plagues the paranoid Nina Sayers throughout the film, presents a similar problem for Natalie Portman as she represents both sides of the delusional ballerina. Portman's transformation is astounding, and is built upon the tension surrounding her character's apparent inability to dance the Black Swan to such an extent that the audience starts to doubt that the actress will be able to pull off the similar feat. No doubt when Oscar nominations are announced this coming Tuesday (25th January) The Academy will agree that she does.

Visceral and relentless, exhilarating and terrifyingly beautiful, do not miss *Black Swan* at the Cameo.

Click [here](#) for screen times – and here is the trailer