

= Black Swan (film) =

Black Swan is a 2010 American psychological thriller film directed by Darren Aronofsky and starring Natalie Portman , Vincent Cassel , Mila Kunis and Winona Ryder . The plot revolves around a production of Tchaikovsky 's Swan Lake ballet by a prestigious New York City company . The production requires a ballerina to play the innocent and fragile White Swan , for which the committed dancer Nina (Portman) is a perfect fit , as well as the dark and sensual Black Swan , which are qualities better embodied by the new arrival Lily (Kunis) . Nina is overwhelmed by a feeling of immense pressure when she finds herself competing for the part , causing her to lose her tenuous grip on reality and descend into a living nightmare .

Usually described as a psychological thriller , Black Swan can be also interpreted as a metaphor for achieving artistic perfection , with all the psychological and physical challenges one might encounter , i.e. " the film can be perceived as a poetic metaphor for the birth of an artist , that is , as a visual representation of Nina 's psychic odyssey toward achieving artistic perfection and of the price to be paid for it . "

Aronofsky conceived the premise by connecting his viewings of a production of Swan Lake with an unrealized screenplay about understudies and the notion of being haunted by a double , similar to the folklore surrounding doppelgängers . Aronofsky cites Fyodor Dostoyevsky 's " The Double " as another inspiration for the film . The director also considered Black Swan a companion piece to his 2008 film The Wrestler , with both films involving demanding performances for different kinds of art . He and Portman first discussed the project in 2000 , and after a brief attachment to Universal Studios , Black Swan was produced in New York City in 2009 by Fox Searchlight Pictures . Portman and Kunis trained in ballet for several months prior to filming , and notable figures from the ballet world helped with film production to shape the ballet presentation .

The film premiered as the opening film for the 67th Venice International Film Festival on September 1 , 2010 . It had a limited release in the United States starting December 3 , 2010 and opened nationwide on December 17 . Black Swan received critical praise upon its release , particularly for Portman 's performance and Aronofsky 's direction , and was a surprise box office success , grossing \$ 329 million worldwide . The film received five Academy Award nominations and Portman won the Best Actress award for the film , as well as many other Best Actress awards in several guilds and festivals . In addition , Aronofsky was nominated for Best Director and the film was nominated for Best Picture . It is the fifth horror film to be nominated in the Best Picture category , after The Exorcist in 1973 , Jaws in 1975 , The Silence of the Lambs in 1991 , and The Sixth Sense in 1999 .

= = Plot = =

Nina Sayers (Natalie Portman) , is a professional dancer in a New York ballet company . Nina lives in New York City with her overprotective mother , Erica (Barbara Hershey) . The company is preparing to open the season with Swan Lake . The director , Thomas Leroy (Vincent Cassel) , is looking for a new principal dancer after forcing Beth Macintyre (Winona Ryder) into retirement . Thomas wants the same ballerina to portray the innocent , fragile White Swan as well as her mysterious , sensual twin , the Black Swan . Nina auditions for the part , performing flawlessly as the White Swan , but she is not able to emulate the characteristics of the Black Swan . Upset , Nina approaches Thomas and asks him to reconsider her as the lead role . Thomas forcibly kisses Nina , and she displays a change of character and bites him , convincing him that she has the ferocity to play the Black Swan . Nina begins to witness strange happenings , and her mother finds scratches on her back .

An intoxicated Beth angrily confronts Thomas and Nina . Nina is worried that she will befall the same eventual fate as Beth , but stays quiet . Thomas tells Nina she needs to give herself to the sensuality of the Black Swan . He tells her to go home and masturbate , which she does . The next day , Nina finds out that Beth was seriously injured in a car accident , and Thomas tells her it was a suicide attempt . Nina realizes Beth will never dance again , and tearfully unpacks her belongings in

Beth 's former dressing room .

Thomas tells Nina to watch Lily (Mila Kunis) , another dancer in the company , whom he describes as lacking Nina 's flawless technique but possessing an uninhibited quality that Nina has not shown . The relationship between Nina and Lily grows tense . During rehearsal , Thomas kisses Nina passionately , but leaves abruptly and tells her she must seduce him with her dancing . Nina finds unexplained scratches and blood on her body . Nina and her mother have an argument , interrupted by Lily 's unexpected arrival at their apartment . Lily and Nina go for a night out .

At a restaurant that evening , Lily offers Nina a capsule of ecstasy to help her relax . Initially , Nina turns it down , but later accepts a drink with ecstasy powder in it . Nina returns home late with Lily , fights with her mother , barricades herself in her room , and has sex with Lily until the latter seemingly smothers her with a pillow . The next morning , Nina wakes up alone and late for the dress rehearsal . When she arrives at the studio , she finds Lily dancing the Black Swan . After she confronts her , Lily admits she spent the night with a man she met at the club , and Nina realizes the encounter didn 't really happen . Nina 's hallucinations become stronger and more graphically sexual and violent .

Nina trashes the apartment and slams her bedroom door on her mother 's hands , and has hallucinations of becoming freakishly swanlike . Concerned about Nina 's behavior , her mother tries to prevent her from performing on opening night in an effort to keep her daughter safe . An enraged Nina forces her way out of the apartment . Thomas had assigned understudy Lily to take over , but is impressed at Nina 's confidence , and lets her play the Swan Queen . The first act goes well , until Nina is distracted by a hallucination during a lift , causing her partner to drop her . Distraught , she returns to her dressing room and finds Lily there . Lily announces her plans to play the Black Swan . Nina shoves her into a mirror , shattering it . Lily , seemingly dead , awakens , and her face changes shape , now a copy of Nina 's . The doppelganger starts to strangle Nina , who then grabs a shard of glass and stabs her rival in the stomach , apparently killing her . The doppelganger 's face reverts to that of Lily 's . Nina hides the body and returns to the stage .

Sprouting feathers , her arms become black wings as she finally loses herself and is transformed into a black swan . At the end of the act , she receives a standing ovation . Offstage , Thomas and the rest of the cast congratulate her on her stunning performance . Nina takes Thomas by surprise and kisses him . Back in her dressing room before the final act , Nina is congratulated by Lily , revealing that their fight was , again , imaginary . The mirror , however , is still shattered . Nina removes a small shard from her own body and realizes she stabbed herself . Dancing the last scene , in which the White Swan throws herself off a cliff , Nina spots her mother weeping in the audience . As Nina falls backward onto a hidden mattress , the theater erupts in thunderous applause . Thomas and the cast gather to congratulate her ? only to find that she is bleeding profusely . As the white ceiling lights envelop her , she whispers , " I felt it . Perfect . It was perfect . "

= = Cast = =

During the closing credits , the major cast members were credited both as their film characters as well as their corresponding characters from Swan Lake .

Natalie Portman as Nina Sayers / The Swan Queen

Mila Kunis as Lily / The Black Swan

Vincent Cassel as Thomas Leroy / The Gentleman

Barbara Hershey as Erica Sayers / The Queen

Winona Ryder as Elizabeth " Beth " MacIntyre / The Dying Swan

Benjamin Millepied as David Moreau / The Prince

Ksenia Solo as Veronica / Little Swan

Kristina Anapau as Galina / Little Swan

Janet Montgomery as Madeline / Little Swan

Sebastian Stan as Andrew / Suitor

Toby Hemingway as Thomas " Tom " / Suitor

= = Production = =

= = = Conception = = =

Darren Aronofsky first became interested in ballet when his sister studied dance at the High School of Performing Arts in New York City . The basic idea for the film started when he hired screenwriters to rework a screenplay called *The Understudy* , which was about off @-@ Broadway actors and explored the notion of being haunted by a double . Aronofsky said the screenplay had elements of *All About Eve* , Roman Polanski 's *The Tenant* , and Fyodor Dostoyevsky 's novella *The Double* . The director had also seen numerous productions of *Swan Lake* , and he connected the duality of the White Swan and the Black Swan to the script . When researching for the production of *Black Swan* , Aronofsky found ballet to be " a very insular world " whose dancers were " not impressed by movies " . Regardless , the director found active and inactive dancers to share their experiences with him . He also stood backstage to see the Bolshoi Ballet perform at the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts .

Aronofsky called *Black Swan* a companion piece to his previous film *The Wrestler* , recalling one of his early projects about a love affair between a wrestler and a ballerina . He eventually separated the wrestling and the ballet worlds as " too much for one movie " . He compared the two films : " Wrestling some consider the lowest art ? if they would even call it art ? and ballet some people consider the highest art . But what was amazing to me was how similar the performers in both of these worlds are . They both make incredible use of their bodies to express themselves . " About the psychological thriller nature of *Black Swan* , actress Natalie Portman compared the film 's tone to Polanski 's 1968 film *Rosemary 's Baby* , while Aronofsky said Polanski 's *Repulsion* (1965) and *The Tenant* (1976) were " big influences " on the final film . Actor Vincent Cassel also compared *Black Swan* to Polanski 's early works and additionally compared it to David Cronenberg 's early works .

= = = Casting = = =

Aronofsky first discussed with Portman the possibility of a ballet film in 2000 , and he found she was interested in playing a ballet dancer . Portman explained being part of *Black Swan* , " I 'm trying to find roles that demand more adulthood from me because you can get stuck in a very awful cute cycle as a woman in film , especially being such a small person . " Portman suggested to Aronofsky that her good friend Mila Kunis would be perfect for the role . Kunis contrasted Lily with Nina , " My character is very loose ... She 's not as technically good as Natalie 's character , but she has more passion , naturally . That 's what [Nina] lacks . " The female characters are directed in the *Swan Lake* production by Thomas Leroy , played by Cassel . He compared his character to George Balanchine , who co @-@ founded New York City Ballet and was " a control freak , a true artist using sexuality to direct his dancers " .

Portman and Kunis started training six months before the start of filming in order to attain a body type and muscle tone more similar to those of professional dancers . Portman worked out for five hours a day , doing ballet , cross @-@ training , and swimming . A few months closer to filming , she began choreography training . Kunis engaged in cardio and Pilates , " train [ing] seven days a week , five hours , for five , six months total , and ... was put on a very strict diet of 1 @, 200 calories a day . " She lost 20 pounds from her normal weight of about 117 pounds , and reported that Portman " became smaller than I did . " Kunis said , " I did ballet as a kid like every other kid does ballet . You wear a tutu and you stand on stage and you look cute and twirl . But this is very different because you can 't fake it . You can 't just stay in there and like pretend you know what you 're doing . Your whole body has to be structured differently . " Georgina Parkinson , a ballet mistress from the American Ballet Theatre (ABT) , coached the actors in ballet . ABT soloists Sarah Lane and Maria Riccetto served as " dance doubles " for Portman and Kunis respectively . Dancer Kimberly Prosa also served as a double for Portman . She stated : " Natalie took class , she studied

for several months , from the waist up is her . Sarah Lane a soloist at ABT , did the heavy tricks , she did the fouettés , but they only had her for a limited time , a couple of weeks , so I did the rest of whatever dance shots they needed . "

In addition to the soloist performances , members of the Pennsylvania Ballet were cast as the corps de ballet , backdrop for the main actors ' performances . Also appearing in the film are Kristina Anapau , Toby Hemingway , Sebastian Stan , and Janet Montgomery .

= = = Development and filming = = =

Aronofsky and Portman first discussed a ballet film in 2000 , after the release of *Requiem for a Dream* , though the script had not yet been written . He told her about a love scene between competing ballet dancers , and Portman recalled , " I thought that was very interesting because this movie is in so many ways an exploration of an artist 's ego and that narcissistic sort of attraction to yourself and also repulsion with yourself . " On the decade 's wait before production , she said , " The fact that I had spent so much time with the idea ... allowed it to marinate a little before we shot . "

The screenplay *The Understudy* was written by Andres Heinz ; Aronofsky first heard about it while editing his second film *Requiem for a Dream* (2000) and described it as " All About Eve with a double , set in the off @-@ Broadway world . " After making *The Fountain* (2006) , Aronofsky and producer Mike Medavoy had screenwriter John McLaughlin rewrite *The Understudy* ; Aronofsky said McLaughlin " took my idea of *Swan Lake* and the ballet and put [the story] into the ballet world and changed the title to *Black Swan* . " When Aronofsky proposed a detailed outline of *Black Swan* to Universal Pictures , the studio decided to fast @-@ track development of the project in January 2007 . The project " sort of died , again " according to Aronofsky , until after the making of *The Wrestler* (2008) , when he had Mark Heyman , director of development of Aronofsky 's production company Protozoa Pictures , write for *Black Swan* " and made it something that was workable . " By June 2009 , Universal had placed the project in turnaround , generating attention from other studios and specialty divisions , particularly with actress Portman attached to star . *Black Swan* began development under Protozoa Pictures and Overnight Productions , the latter financing the film . In July 2009 , Kunis was cast .

Fox Searchlight Pictures distributed *Black Swan* and gave the film a production budget of \$ 10 ? 12 million . Principal photography was achieved using Super 16 mm cameras and began in New York City toward the end of 2009 . Part of filming took place at the Performing Arts Center at State University of New York at Purchase . Aronofsky filmed *Black Swan* with a muted palette and a grainy style , which he intended to be similar to *The Wrestler* . Aronofsky said

I like Super 16 because the cameras are really light , really moveable . Also , for *The Wrestler* it was a money @-@ saving thing . The film stocks on 35mm would become so glossy that they 'd get close to what people are doing on video . I wanted to go back to the grainy , vérité feel of *The Wrestler* Like with wrestling , ballet is shot in wide shot with two shots on the side , and no one really brought the camera ? well , wrestling ? into the ring or for us , onto the stage and into the practice room . I really wanted the camera to dance , but I was nervous about shooting a psychological thriller / horror film with a hand @-@ held camera . I couldn 't think of another example where they did that steady @-@ cams are very different than hand @-@ helds , because hand @-@ held gives you that verite feel . I was concerned if that would effect [sic] the suspense , but after a while I said , " screw it , let 's go for it . "

= = = Controversies = = =

= = = = Costume design = = = =

Amy Westcott is credited as the costume designer and received several award nominations . A publicized controversy arose regarding the question of who had designed 40 ballet costumes for

Portman and the dancers . An article in the British newspaper The Independent suggested those costumes had actually been created by Rodarte 's Kate and Laura Mulleavy . Westcott challenged that view and stated that in all only 7 costumes , among them the black and white swan , had been created in a collaboration between Rodarte , Westcott , and Aronofsky . Furthermore , the corps ballet 's costumes were designed by Zack Brown (for the American Ballet Theatre) , and slightly adapted by Westcott and her costume design department . Westcott said : " Controversy is too complimentary a word for two people using their considerable self @-@ publicising resources to loudly complain about their credit once they realized how good the film is . "

= = = = Dance double = = = =

ABT dancer Sarah Lane served as a " dance double " for Portman in the film . In a March 3 blog entry for Dance Magazine , editor @-@ in @-@ chief Wendy Perron asked : " Do people really believe that it takes only one year to make a ballerina ? We know that Natalie Portman studied ballet as a kid and had a year of intensive training for the film , but that doesn 't add up to being a ballerina . However , it seems that many people believe that Portman did her own dancing in Black Swan . " This led to responses from Benjamin Millepied and Aronofsky , who both defended Portman as well as a response from Lane on the subject .

= = Soundtrack = =

The non @-@ original music featured in Black Swan consists of music by Tchaikovsky featuring performances on @-@ screen and in the soundtrack by violinist Tim Fain and a track of electronica dance music by English production duo The Chemical Brothers . It marks the fifth consecutive collaboration between Aronofsky and English composer Clint Mansell , who composed the original score for the film . Mansell attempted to score the film based on Tchaikovsky 's ballet but with radical changes to the music . Because of the use of Tchaikovsky 's music , the score was deemed ineligible to be entered into the 2010 Academy Awards for Best Original Score .

The Chemical Brothers ' music , which is featured prominently during the club scene in Black Swan , is omitted from the soundtrack album .

= = Release = =

Black Swan had its world premiere as the opening film at the 67th Venice Film Festival on September 1 , 2010 . It received a standing ovation whose length Variety said made it " one of the strongest Venice openers in recent memory " . The festival 's artistic director Marco Mueller had chosen Black Swan over The American (starring George Clooney) for opening film , saying , " [It] was just a better fit ... Clooney is a wonderful actor , and he will always be welcome in Venice . But it was as simple as that . " Black Swan screened in competition and is the third consecutive film directed by Aronofsky to premiere at the festival , following The Fountain and The Wrestler . Black Swan was presented in a sneak screening at the Telluride Film Festival on September 5 , 2010 . It also had a Gala screening at the 35th Toronto International Film Festival later in the month . In October 2010 , Black Swan was screened at the New Orleans Film Festival , the Austin Film Festival , and the BFI London Film Festival . In November 2010 , the film was screened at American Film Institute 's AFI Fest in Los Angeles , the Denver Film Festival and Camerimage Festival in Bydgoszcz , Poland .

The release of Black Swan in the United Kingdom was brought forward from February 11 to January 21 , 2011 . According to The Independent , the film was considered one of " the most highly anticipated " films of late 2010 . The newspaper then compared it to the 1948 ballet film The Red Shoes in having " a nightmarish quality ... of a dancer consumed by her desire to dance " .

The film was released on DVD and Blu @-@ ray Disc in Region 1 / Region A on March 29 , 2011 . The Region 2 / Region B version was released on May 16 , 2011 .

= = Reception = =

= = = Box office = = =

Black Swan had a limited release in select cities in North America on December 3 , 2010 , in 18 theaters and was a surprise box office success . The film took in a total of \$ 415 @, @ 822 on its opening day , averaging \$ 23 @, @ 101 per theater . By the end of its opening weekend it grossed \$ 1 @, @ 443 @, @ 809 ? \$ 80 @, @ 212 per theater . The per location average was the second highest for the opening weekend of 2010 behind The King 's Speech . The film is Fox Searchlight Pictures ' highest per @-@ theater average gross ever , and it ranks 21st on the all @-@ time list . On its second weekend the film expanded to 90 theaters , and grossed \$ 3 @. @ 3 million , ranking it as the sixth film at the box @-@ office . In its third weekend , it expanded again to 959 theaters and grossed \$ 8 @, @ 383 @, @ 479 . The film went on to gross over \$ 106 million in the United States and over \$ 329 million worldwide .

= = = Critical reaction = = =

Review aggregator Rotten Tomatoes gives the film a score of 87 % based on reviews from 273 critics , with Natalie Portman 's performance being lauded , and reports a rating average of 8 @. @ 2 out of 10 . According to the website , the film 's critical consensus is , " Bracingly intense , passionate , and wildly melodramatic , Black Swan glides on Darren Aronofsky 's bold direction ? and a bravura performance from Natalie Portman . " At Metacritic , which assigns a weighted average score out of 100 reviews from mainstream critics , the film received an average score of 79 based on 42 reviews , indicating " Generally favorable reviews " .

In September 2010 , Entertainment Weekly reported that based on reviews from the film 's screening at the Venice Film Festival , " [Black Swan] is already set to be one of the year 's most love @-@ it @-@ or @-@ hate @-@ it movies . " Leonard Maltin , on his blog Movie Crazy , admitted that he " couldn 't stand " the film , despite praising Natalie Portman 's performance . Reuters described the early response to the film as " largely positive " with Portman 's performance being highly praised . The Sydney Morning Herald reported that " the film divided critics . Some found its theatricality maddening , but most declared themselves ' swept away ' . "

Kurt Loder of Reason magazine called the film " wonderfully creepy " , and wrote that " it 's not entirely satisfying ; but it 's infused with the director 's usual creative brio , and it has a great dark gleaming look . " Mike Goodridge from Screen Daily called Black Swan " alternately disturbing and exhilarating " and described the film as a hybrid of The Turning Point and Polanski 's films Repulsion and Rosemary 's Baby . Goodridge described Portman 's performance , " [She] is captivating as Nina ... she captures the confusion of a repressed young woman thrown into a world of danger and temptation with frightening veracity . " The critic also commended Cassel , Kunis , and Hershey in their supporting roles , particularly comparing Hershey to Ruth Gordon in the role of " the desperate , jealous mother " . Goodridge praised Libatique 's cinematography with the dance scenes and the psychologically " unnerving " scenes : " It 's a mesmerising psychological ride that builds to a gloriously theatrical tragic finale as Nina attempts to deliver the perfect performance . "

Kirk Honeycutt of The Hollywood Reporter gave the film a mixed review . He wrote , " [Black Swan] is an instant guilty pleasure , a gorgeously shot , visually complex film whose badness is what 's so good about it . You might howl at the sheer audacity of mixing mental illness with the body @-@ fatiguing , mind @-@ numbing rigors of ballet , but its lurid imagery and a hellcat competition between two rival dancers is pretty irresistible . " Honeycutt commended Millepied 's " sumptuous " choreography and Libatique 's " darting , weaving " camera work . The critic said of the thematic mashup , " Aronofsky ... never succeeds in wedding genre elements to the world of ballet ... White Swan / Black Swan dynamics almost work , but the horror @-@ movie nonsense drags everything down the rabbit hole of preposterousness . " Similarly , in a piece for The Huffington Post , Rob Kirkpatrick praised Portman 's performance but compared the film 's story to that of Showgirls (1995

) and Burlesque (2010) while concluding Black Swan is " simply higher @-@ priced cheese , Aronofsky 's camembert to [Burlesque director Steve] Antin 's cheddar .

The film has been criticized for its portrayal of ballet and ballet dancers . Upon the film 's release in the United Kingdom , The Guardian interviewed four professional ballet dancers in the UK : Tamara Rojo , Lauren Cuthbertson , Edward Watson , and Elena Glurjidze . Rojo called the film " lazy ... featuring every ballet cliché going . " Watson felt that the film " makes [ballet] look so naff and laughable . It doesn 't show why ballet is so important to us ? why we would want to try so hard . " The Canadian Press also reported that many Canadian ballet dancers felt that the film depicted dancers negatively and exaggerated elements of their lives but gave Portman high marks for her dance technique . In an interview with the Los Angeles Times , Gillian Murphy a principal dancer with American Ballet Theatre praised the visual elements of the film but noted that the film presentation of the ballet world was " extreme . "

= = = Accolades = = =

Black Swan appeared on many critics ' top ten lists of 2010 and is frequently considered to be one of the best films of the year . It was also featured on the American Film Institute 's 10 Movies of the Year . On January 25 , 2011 the film was nominated for five Academy Awards (Best Picture , Best Director , Best Actress , Best Cinematography and Best Film Editing) and won one for Portman 's performance .