

Film masterfully terrorizes audience



BY KEN DUSOLD
Staff Reviewer

Thoughts of ballet incur images of a dreamlike world of toy soldiers, princesses, fairies and love. If this is the case, then Darren Aronofsky's "Black Swan" could be considered the rare nightmare disturbing that seemingly happy illusion.

"Black Swan," the newest addition to the growing list of Academy Award hopefuls, is a beautiful — and at times — absolutely frightening film that studies the lengths a person will go to compete for and achieve perfection.

The film follows a promising ballerina, Nina (Natalie Portman), as she prepares for the greatest honor of her

perfectionist.

For Nina, the role that requires her to tackle two personalities becomes a challenge not only for her body, but also for her already delicate mind. Originally turned down for the part by the company's director Thomas Leroy (Vincent Cassel) because of her inability to exude both the White Swan's elegant innocence and the Black Swan's cunning sensuality, Nina is motivated to correct her imperfections by competition from a new ballerina, Nina's eventual understudy, Lily (Mila Kunis, who, in this film, is far removed from her days in the FOX sitcom, "That '70s Show").

Of course, perfection has its price. In Nina's case, her determination to capture the flawless balance of contrasting personalities tests her strength and sanity to the breaking point.

It should be noted that the movie itself is not for all audiences. The most



Photo courtesy of rottentomatoes.com

Natalie Portman plays Nina, a ballerina who mentally deteriorates trying to embody innocence and sensuality.

While far from perfect, "Black Swan" is as close to impeccable as a psychological ballet thriller can get.

conservative-minded viewers will find graphic scenes in which Nina explores her sexuality both privately and with the aid of a fellow ballerina difficult to sit through, while the faint of heart surely will shift uncomfortably during scenes in which Nina's obsessive scratching forces her to clip her nails hurriedly with scissors out of paranoia. Shriill upturns in the music and sudden turns

of the camera to reveal people not present moments before will cause much of the theater-going audience to jump in their seats. Like the role of Swan Queen in the ballet, only an actress of fearless heart and talent could do proper justice to the character of Nina. Portman, who has proven to be very careful in her choice of scripts, rises to the occasion in her most stunning performance to date. Portman slips into the role as a naïve and sweet dancer hoping for her dreams to be answered. As the film unravels, she seamlessly undergoes a metamorphosis into the darkest

personification of bipolar schizophrenia. Supporting her are predominantly strong performances from her fellow actors. Hershey, also juggling two personalities, matches the characteristics of supportive and loving mother with that of overbearing antagonist.

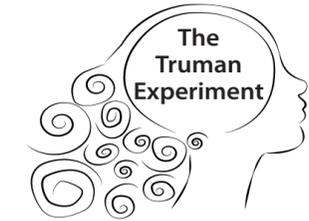
Kunis breathes life into the easy-going sextop, Lily. Lily seems to want only friendship from Nina, constantly trying to help. With only her eyes, Kunis manages to leave Nina, and simultaneously the audience, agonizingly unsure of Lily's true intentions. Cassel and Winona

Ryder, who plays an aging and suicidal ballet star, are less effective than their co-stars, although far from inadequate. Cassel lacks the proper balance between demanding artist and sensual instructor that is needed to play Leroy. Ryder shows just enough depth in her cameo for it to work, but it is not compelling. Ryder's character represents what could lie ahead for Nina should she continue down the dangerous path she begins to follow, and thus could have been more intriguing. Sadly, it serves as a pinch of wasted potential.

The film suffers from

very little, but what it does suffer from cannot go unnoticed. As Nina begins to experience hallucinations at an alarming rate, it becomes increasingly difficult distinguishing her reality from her horrifying subconscious. Because of this, "Black Swan" borders on delusional, threatening to drive audiences mad simply by trying to understand what is being thrown at them.

While far from perfect, "Black Swan" is as close to impeccable as a psychological ballet thriller can be. "Black Swan" opens in select theaters nationwide Dec. 3.



Thoughts of future lead to startling realization of age

BY ELIZABETH NECKA
Columnist

I survived my first bachelorette party.

The bachelorette — one of my closest friends — survived too. I'll spare you the details of the night, because the point isn't what we did. The point is that I planned and successfully executed a bachelorette party.

I don't feel old enough to be throwing a bachelorette party. Wasn't it only yesterday that my Barbie was walking down the aisle — and now it's my friend's turn? I'm only in college. Marriage is something people like my parents do, not hip young things like me and my friends. I get on Facebook, and girls I went to high school with are posting photos of their toddlers. I have to accept the facts — I am a grownup.

Why do we never feel as old as we are? Even my mom, whose undisclosed age is at least old enough to have a 21-year-old daughter, is surprised at her age. "How did I grow up this quickly?" she asked me. I chuckled. After all, she's always been a grownup to me.

Innately, evolutionarily even,

our nature is to think about the future. The frontal lobe of the brain is the center of our higher-level thought processes in dealing with the future. It also is most highly developed in humans.

However, the catch-22 is that our brain plays tricks on us when we do so.

Thinking about the future incites more intense emotions than actually living it or thinking about the past. Our affective forecasts, which are predictions about how we will emotionally respond to future positive or negative events, such as getting a job or suffering a romantic breakup, are surprisingly inaccurate. We think, "If I get that job offer, it would make my year," or, "I won't be able to live without my girlfriend if she leaves me," but when it happens, we accommodate and move on. You get the job, but you then set your eyes on a promotion. Your girlfriend breaks up

with you, and you keep breathing and realize you didn't like the way she treated you anyhow.

Anticipation is the key factor. Planning a vacation and getting excited about the time to relax is more emotionally stimulating than actually going on the vacation itself. When we think about an event in the past tense, our emotions are more subdued. Because

we experience a sense of control and uncertainty about the future, we're likely to be more invested in it, which our emotions reflect.

When we think about the already certain and entirely unchangeable past, we don't involve too much emotion.

In addition, we place more value on future events than on past ones. The prospect of cheating in the future is worse than a past instance of cheating, and a future charitable donation is perceived as much more generous than one that has already been made.

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