

Breaking point(e)
By Ana Tajder

Not really a horror movie and not really a ballet movie, Black Swan offers decent entertainment for those with blurred expectations

True to Hollywood's world-conquering strategy of transcending the boundaries between tastes, sexes, age and any other characteristics that might make a person decide NOT to see a movie, Black Swan alchemically achieved being everything for everybody – and in the process nothing to many. It's ballet movie for horror fans, a female movie for the male audience, an American movie for everyone else on the planet. In this case, the strategy was even prepped with a little extra: unclear expectations. When you don't know what to expect, it is harder to say no. And in spite of the abundant media coverage, Black Swan was very successful in blurring any expectations.

First off, this is not a movie about ballet. This is a movie about that eternally tantalizing war between light and darkness, about the two forces defining the world we live in, just as much as defining who we are. A truly fascinating topic, but unfortunately a bit too clumsily dealt with.

As the great New York Ballet company's senior ballerina (Winona Ryder) gets forced into retirement, Nina Sayers (Natalie Portman), a young dancer from the corps de ballet is unexpectedly chosen for the main role in the next season's version of Swan Lake. This legendary ballet tells a story of Odette, a princess turned into White Swan by an evil sorcerer, and her prince charming, who gets seduced by her twin sister Odile, the Black Swan. Both white and black swans are danced by the same ballerina, making this one of the most challenging roles in the ballet repertoire.

Our hero Nina is a perfect white swan. But the artistic director (played by the excellent Vincent Cassel) is deeply unsatisfied with her performance of the Black Swan. So here her task: Nina has to discover the black (swan) inside of her. The director helps her do this in a very strange way – by asking her ballet partner if she was really seductive enough to be fucked (which is cute, considering the fact that in real life, Natalie Portman is actually pregnant with the very same man) and sending her home with instructions to touch herself. A bit low. Very unfair to the world of ballet. And, let's be honest, perhaps a reason for a law suit?

So the premises are great: A shy, insecure, ballerina of alabaster perfection, until now safely tucked in her pink tulle, is setting off on the fascinating journey of discovering her dark side.

Unfortunately, this is where the film loses it.

Nina's search for her own black swan goes so many different ways that it leaves the audience confused. The demonic mother (Barbara Hershey), an angry failed ballerina trying to fulfill her dreams through her daughter, tricks us into thinking we are about to see a ballet version of "Rosemary's Baby." This turns out not to be so. Even if it were, it would be wrong – what we are searching for should be hidden inside, not outside, of Nina.

Then we explore a new potential source of darkness by going through a night of drinking, drugs and lesbian sex – a scene a little too obviously made to lure men into a ballet movie – all under influence of Nina's wicked competitor played by Mila Kunis, with black swan wings tattooed on her back. Too cheap – a night of drugs, booze and sex

will probably not sprout black feathers on any white swan. And it will for sure not do anything for her dancing except ruin it.

And then there is the third, and final path towards Nina's "Black Swan-ness": She is going crazy. We have some blood splashed in our faces, see some confusing images and are made to wonder what is real and what just a product of Nina's estranged mind. All in all, we are served a mix of a psycho thriller, splatter and a CGI monster horror film packed into a ballet movie. Too much of everything for ...nothing.

Viewers who know the world of ballet will find Black Swan's portrayal of this world so wrong that it becomes hilarious. Starting with Portman not even resembling a dancer (being thin does not a ballerina make), you have a company director consciously making wrong casting decisions, a ballerina lacking the strength of character to ever enter a big company, and a mentally and physically bruised dancer who would not survive one single day of rehearsals, let alone make it to the opening night. Also, considering that ballerinas start their brutal training as young as six years old, completely reshaping their bodies so that they can achieve grace required for portraying their roles, computer generated images of a body changing its surface to fit the role is just absurd. And offensive.

So viewers who know ballet will laugh, and those who expect a horror movie will be disappointed. Those with blurred expectations, though, might enjoy the movie. Aronofsky is a talented storyteller, and the visual interpretation of this claustrophobic world is wonderful; Natalie Portman and her co-stars give very intense and dedicated performances, and there are even a couple of surprises, just so one doesn't get bored with all that tulle.

Decent entertainment. If you're not a ballerina, and you don't think too much.

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