

## Jeff Kirkendall's Thoughts For The Month Column

### Thoughts, Opinions, Reviews, Commentary & More!

Hello and Welcome! My name is Jeff Kirkendall and I'm an independent filmmaker and actor from the Upstate New York area. This is the section of the Very Scary Productions website where I write about topics related to independent filmmaking, digital video production, acting, movies in general, horror movies in particular, my own indie movies, as well as anything and everything related or in between.

I decided to create this commentary page because I find that I often come across things that either interest me, excite me, intrigue me, or maybe just bug me. Any topic related to movies and cinema is fair game, from the most mainstream to the most controversial. For example I'll often read about movie projects that I have a strong interest in or opinion on, for one reason or another. This page gives me a forum to discuss these things. It's all about discussion and furthering understanding of our pop culture. Anyone who has feedback concerning what I have to say here, feel free to contact me (see the contact link at <http://www.veryscaryproductions.com/>).

I'd also like to point out that the following is just my opinion, and everyone is free to agree or disagree with what I have to say. Enjoy, and to all the Indies out there: Keep on Filming!

SUBJECT: Movie Review – ***Black Swan*** - January 2011

In ***Black Swan*** Natalie Portman stars as Nina, an extremely devoted ballerina in a New York City ballet company who strives to be the best, and wants desperately to play two lead roles in an upcoming production of Swan Lake. However in order for that to happen she has to transform not only into the pure and good White Swan, a role she is naturally suited for because of her grace and technical skills, but also into the sensual, dangerous Black Swan, a role which requires the uptight young lady to totally lose herself and give in to her darker side (so to speak). Nina lives with her domineering mother, an ex-ballet dancer played to perfection by character actress Barbara Hershey, who keeps tight control over her daughter in order to make sure she succeeds. This has led to the young dancer having a very sheltered life outside of performing; however that begins to change as her artistic director Thomas (Vincent Cassel) pushes her to give in to the sexual nature of the Black Swan role as well as to his own sexual advances. On top of this, a new free-spirited dancer named Lily (Mila Kunis) enters the picture and threatens to steal Nina's spotlight while simultaneously becoming her new best friend. These things begin to liberate as well as take a toll on Nina as the production draws near, and we sit transfixed, watching as she very slowly unravels almost to the point of madness.

If I were to choose a single word to describe this movie it would be intense. The story and all the performances fit this definition, especially Portman's. We watch her change from a pure, innocent, but obsessively devoted dancer, into a woman whose life careens into wild abandon leading up to her complete transformation into the Black Swan persona. \* Portman really paints the character well as she takes you on Nina's journey, and the surrounding cast supports her ably. The scenes of her sexual discovery are raw, edgy and not for the easily offended, while at the same time not being cheap or exploitative. For this particular story, this seemed to be just the right balance, as did the surreal imagery that comes into play near the end of the film in some rather frightening sequences. Some of this imagery involves bleeding, some of it is hard to describe, and all of it leads up to an incredibly climactic ending. A few of these sequences actually brought to mind something out of a Dario Argento film, although director Darren Aronofsky employs these images sparingly, which like the sexual imagery proves effective

rather than excessive. \*\* However this is not exactly a horror film, but perhaps may be categorized as an intense, dark drama with shades of the fright genre. However one may categorize ***Black Swan*** though, this intense movie is one to see. In fact I'll go so far as to say it was one of the best films I saw in 2010.

\* Winona Ryder is also effective (and not entirely recognizable) here in a supporting role as an aging star bitter over the fact that she has been replaced by someone younger. One initially quiet scene with her and Portman in a hospital room proves to be among the scariest in the film.

\*\* Actually it could be argued that ***Black Swan*** qualifies as a horror flick, solely because Natalie Portman's whiter-than-white image of madness appeared on the cover of a recent issue of Fangoria Magazine. Hey, who am I to argue with the editors of my favorite genre publication!