

# The Main Feature

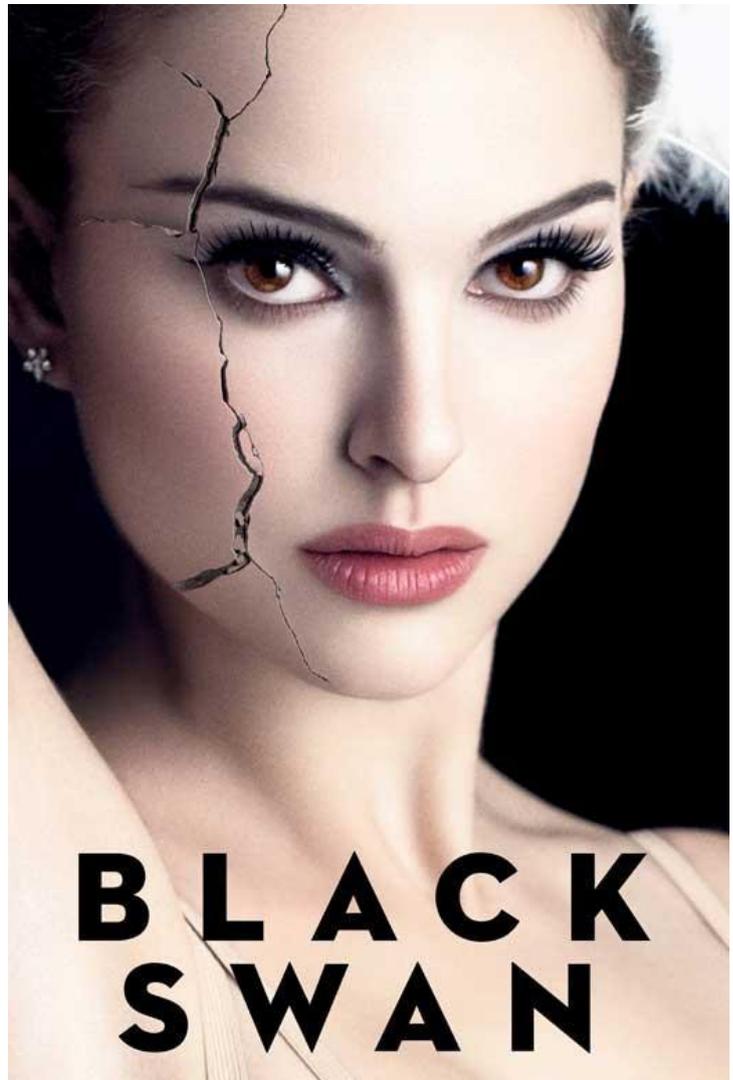
## Season 32 - Issue 8 (screening 12.1.12)

USA Certificate 15  
 108 minutes UK release 21.1.11

**Directed by:** Darren Aronofsky  
**Screenplay by:** Mark Heyman and Andres Heinz  
**Original Music by:** Clint Mansell  
**Cinematography by:** Matthew Libatique

**Cast:**

Natalie Portman	'Nina'
Mila Kunis	'Lily'
Winona Ryder	'Beth MacIntyre'
Barbara Hershey	'Erica'
Vincent Cassel	'Thomas Leroy'
Sebastian Stan	'Andrew'
Janet Montgomery	'Madeline'
Benjamin Millepied	'David'
Ksenia Solo	'Veronica'
Kristina Anapau	'Galina'
Toby Hemingway	'Tom'



In this dark, delirious thriller from the director Darren Aronofsky (*The Wrestler, Requiem for a Dream*) Portman plays Nina, a member of the corps in a New York ballet company. While highly motivated and disciplined, she feels time is passing her by. But then Tomas (Vincent Cassel, last seen by members in the film *Read My Lips*), the company's arrogant artistic director, fires his star ballerina and gives Nina her first lead role, as the Swan Queen in Swan Lake.

Flamboyant and melodramatic, *Black Swan* covers a broad range of emotional territory. 'It's a Rorschach test for what's going on in the minds of the audience,' Portman says. 'One person will say, well, obviously, it's about one thing, and then someone else gives a completely different assessment – which is all you could possibly hope for.' Did she identify at all with Nina's story?

'When I started out as a child actress, I wanted to please everyone, and was always looking for approval,' she says. 'Having grown up, I'm not totally immune to approval, but I do look to please myself. It's all to do with finding a way to express yourself instead of being the way someone else wants you to be. Nina starts out as this childlike woman, trying to please her mother, trying to please her ballet director and fit exactly into the standards of this world that's prescribed to her. Finally she finds that perfection only lies in pleasing herself.'

Indeed, her training required the kind of dedication usually associated with Olympian athletes. 'It was almost like starting from scratch,' she recalls. 'I'd done dance from the age of five to 13. I'd only just gone en pointe for six months before I stopped. What I had from my childhood was basic coordination and familiarity with different moves and words. I had turnout with feet and hips, and an understanding of classical music. Those were the things I was armed with.' She smiles ruefully. 'Everything else was the challenge.'



And quite a challenge it was – beginning a year before *Black Swan* was shot, at a point when the film had not yet been green-lit, and there was no script beyond an idea in Aronofsky's mind. Her training regime took five hours a day, seven days a week. Portman's teacher was Mary Helen Bowers, who had danced with the New York City Ballet for 10 years. She stressed the prevention of injury, which would have cost time, money and thrown the film's shooting schedule into disarray. And Portman had to swim a mile each day – crucial non-impact cardio work, employing long strokes to extend her reach, elongate her body and improve her spine alignment.

Daily she did 15 minutes of a single toe exercise to strengthen the muscles between her toes before she started going en pointe again

Nevertheless the amount of dancing performed by Portman was the source of controversy with editor-in-chief Wendy Perron of *Dance Magazine*, asking in a blog: "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*." Natalie Portman's dancing double in "Black Swan" also stated that out of all the dancing that was in the movie, 5% was performed by Portman. Director Darren Aronofsky came to Portman's defence.

*"Here is the reality. I had my editor count shots. There are 139 dance shots in the film. 111 are Natalie Portman untouched. 28 are her dance double Sarah Lane,"* said Aronofsky. *"If you do the math that's 80% Natalie Portman. What about duration? The shots that feature the double are wide shots and rarely play for longer than one second. There are two complicated longer dance sequences that we used face replacement. Even so, if we were judging by time, over 90% would be Natalie Portman."*

Of course all of the training and effort paid off when Portman won the 2011 Oscar for Best Actress.

One person not nominated was the film's composer, Colin Mansell. The 47-year-old Brit's music for the ballet horror story has been disqualified from competition because of its use of "pre-existing music", i.e. Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*.

Which is a shame, because Mansell's re-imagining of the Russian composer's original score is one of the most beautiful and haunting elements of Darren Aronofsky's film. Not that Mansell seems too disappointed.



"There was quite a bit of noise when it was disqualified, which is heartening because that means that people thought it had a chance. But I never expected anything different. I wanted to build the score out of Tchaikovsky because it made the most sense intellectually and artistically." Mansell saw his job as trying to "deconstruct and then reconstruct *Swan Lake* as a contemporary film score."

Both Kunis and Cassel function perfectly as dramatic foils, but are also delightful as they dissipate the atmosphere, bringing with them a welcome amount of humour in response to Nina's behaviour.

Aronofsky pulls off some astonishing visual flourishes, transporting us from the dank claustrophobia of toilet cubicles and dressing rooms to the sheer, light-bathed ecstasy of the stage. He shoots ballet like Scorsese shot boxing in *Raging Bull*: not from the audience's point of view, but up close, with a forced intimacy that captures every little twitch, creak and strain.

An extraordinary, intoxicating movie. It's hard, twisted edges may turn off some, but there's no faulting either Aronofsky's technical mastery or Portman's flawless performance.

Iain McGlashan

A reviewer of tonight's film described it as "*the best movie Ken Russell never made*", so allied to Russell's childhood ambition to have been a ballet dancer as well as his controversial film about Tchaikovsky it seems tonight's film is an appropriate one to mark his recent death with this BBC website obituary.

## **Ken Russell (3 July 1927 - 27 November 2011)**



A larger than life character who was one of the most controversial directors in British cinema., Russell specialised in the interpretation of the great classical composers, extravaganzas which matched powerful images with a dramatic score.

They were not for the faint-hearted. Audiences would be regaled with the sight of women cavorting naked in railway carriages, nude actors wrestling in front of roaring fires and nuns indulging in orgies.

Henry Kenneth Alfred Russell was born on 3 July 1927 in Southampton. His father was a prosperous shoe retailer who was given to outbursts of rage. The young Ken would often take refuge with his mother in local cinemas.

Having joined the Merchant Navy on one occasion he was made to stand watch in the blazing sun for hours on end while crossing the Pacific. His lunatic captain feared an attack by Japanese midget submarines despite the war having ended.

A nervous breakdown ensued and it was during his recovery that he first heard Tchaikovsky on the radio, inspiring a lifelong obsession with the classical composers.

He secured a job in the BBC arts department under Sir Huw Wheldon, who became a major influence on his career. At the BBC, he developed an increasingly eccentric style, what the film critic David Thomson described as "an unbridled sense of pictorial madness and decay". His documentary *Song of Summer*, about the composer Frederick Delius, and a study of Elgar were widely acclaimed, as was another documentary, on the dancer Isadora Duncan. In all, Ken Russell made three feature films and 33 drama-documentaries at the BBC.

His first successful film for the big screen was an adaptation of DH Lawrence's *Women in Love* in which he added the famous naked fireside wrestling match between Oliver Reed and Alan Bates. "I managed to get them to do it by bribing them and encouraging them to enjoy themselves," he said later. "Judging by the smiles of satisfaction on their faces, they had the time of their lives."The film won him an Oscar nomination for Best Director, for the first and only time in his career.

United Artists were pleased with the result, though balked at his next proposal, which was to make a film about Tchaikovsky. Russell won them round with the pitch that it was about a nymphomaniac who falls in love with a homosexual. The graphic nude sequences caused outrage, and it was widely panned by the critics. But it did well at the box office and Russell once described it as the film of which he was most proud. "It was a masterpiece," he told the *Daily Telegraph* in 2010. "And I wouldn't change it in any way."

In his 70s, he was reduced to shooting cheap movies in his garage for internet release; still as passionate, still as rebellious. But by now he had become something of a celebrity and in 2007 he famously appeared in the *Big Brother* house on Channel 4 but left after an altercation with Jade Goody.

Critics often accused him of self-indulgence but behind all the flamboyant imagery was a film-maker of great talent; some have said, genius.

Russell himself refused to compromise. "Reality is a dirty word for me, I know it isn't for most people, but I am not interested. There's too much of it about."

He had lost most of his money over the years but never his sense of humour. When he wanted an email address and was told that it couldn't be plain "Kenrussell", he asked for and got "Thekenrussell".

He was married four times and had eight children. In 2001 he married Elise Tribble, whom he met following an appeal on Russell's own website which had engendered a dozen answers: "Unbankable film director Ken Russell seeks soulmate. Must be mad about music, movies and Moet & Chandon champagne." He is survived by Elise and his children.

# Reactions to **Harvey** – 8 December

<b>Score</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Votes</b>	~	~	1	1	2	4	3	12	2	1	1

Total received – 27

## Average Score – 6.3

### Your Comments

They don't make films like this any more!  
 Charming and perceptive  
 Found the speech too fast  
 Witty well constructed comedy – enjoyable  
 A light hearted, quite clever entertaining childish yarn

A golden oldie – I now have rabbit envy  
 I'd like a friend like Harvey  
 Lovely! Old Hollywood at its best  
 Better 1<sup>st</sup> time around  
 Excellent

Position	Film	Average Score
1 <sup>st</sup>	The Secret in their Eyes	8.69
2 <sup>nd</sup>	The Kings Speech	8.66
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Made in Dagenham	7.94
4 <sup>th</sup>	Etre et Avoir	6.94
5 <sup>th</sup>	Machan	6.81
6 <sup>th</sup>	Harvey	6.3
7 <sup>th</sup>	Public Enemies	6.16

*Our next film*

## 8pm on Thursday 26 January 2012:



An in-house psychologist at a petrochemical firm is asked to discreetly gauge the mental health of his company director, setting in train unforeseen consequences.

Mathieu Amalric stars in this cerebral corporate thriller with a steadily accumulating sense of dread.

*The printing of the notes for each film is undertaken by Repropoint free of charge*



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