

Black Swan

Black Swan (1:48, 2010, [8.0](#), [87|84%](#)) is an American psychological thriller about Nina, a New York ballerina working until she bleeds to first land – and then perform – the main role of Swan Queen in Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*. The film is very heavy and quite dark, and in the end you have trouble sifting through the fantasy for bits of reality. It touches on some very difficult topics – from painful career-ending transitions (age), to vicarious, authoritarian parenting, to the use of drugs and alcohol to take the edge off extreme pressure at the highest levels of sport. It is this last that gets fully explored in this dark thriller.



Nina: cracking from within.

Nina is a meticulous dancer, perfect in training and discipline, but she lacks the “spark” needed to perform magnificently. She must dance two roles for the show: that of the perfect White Swan, as well as that of the passionate Black Swan. In trying to lose herself to passion in performing this second – literally *becoming* the swan she is to emulate – she suffers tremendous psychological trauma... ergo the trouble pulling fantasy apart from reality as the film rolls on. Added to this are the mixings of awakening and letting run sexual desires (including for her trainer, as well as for her co-dancer on a much more subconscious level), the pressures of her mother (herself an accomplished dancer who gave up her passion to deliver and care for her daughter), and the threat

she feels every moment she walks in the change room (amid whispers of old age darting around her like flies).

This movie was excellent in throwing me right into its feel. Every time a character danced, I felt as if I was dancing with them – as if I were the partner at the end of their outstretched hand. I felt threat in a way I hadn't since I'd watched the traumatizing [Irréversible](#) years back... the camera's wide, throbbing sweeps, the pulsating, ominous tones of havoc just about to break free as Nina's psyche cracks, the brutal whispers of mouths cackling at her perceived ineptitude and inevitable demise. Amazing. The dark, pink backdrop of her bedroom was also great in underpinning her stunted, ballet-focused identity. It seemed she had become stuck in her sport so much that the rest of her identity didn't even exist. Her bedroom became something of a metaphor for this situation: it is pink and frilly, much as you'd expect any small girl's who loves princesses and dolls. However, it is always softly and poorly lit, as if the tendrils of darkness coming in from its edges were some sort of palpable foreshadowing of the pressure that she feels caving in on her little world. Natalie Portman plays Nina superbly well; a small girl trapped in her small world and wanting to give it her all because, well, it is all she has.



Nina's room, unsafe and unnaturally dark.

Ratings? ★★ $\frac{1}{4}$. Characters are full but the plot is a bit

confusing and heavy for me – half point for the first and a $\frac{1}{4}$ for the second. I don't like unclear films so only a $\frac{1}{4}$ star for complexity (I didn't fully know what was real and what was in her head), but a full point for originality. Lastly, recommendability. Here, only a quarter point as it's too heavy for anyone who doesn't like diving into negativity, or who isn't dealing with the same problems as Nina. However, it would be a good watch for coaches so they can have something on hand for athletes going through extreme pressure.