



*Black Swan* is the story of a ballerina (Natalie Portman) who loses her mind while fighting to win the lead role in the classic ballet *Swan Lake*.

# Curse of the Black Swan

## The dark side of ballet

**There's been a lot of excitement lately about one of the Academy Award-winning films. In today's world of hit films about gangsters, terrorists, and child abuse, this winner was about something completely different – ballet!**

### A modern *Swan Lake*

The psychological thriller *Black Swan* won an Oscar for best actress in a leading role. Natalie Portman earned the honors<sup>1</sup> not only for her acting, but because she trained for a year to learn the basic moves necessary in ballet.

*Black Swan* is the story of a young ballet dancer who struggles to master two antagonistic<sup>2</sup> characters and loses her mind due to<sup>3</sup> it. The movie is based on the classic Tchaikovsky's ballet *Swan Lake*.

### Evil, evil, evil

*Swan Lake* starts off with the evil sorcerer<sup>4</sup>, Von Rothbart. (In the film *Black Swan* his costume alone is enough to send you screaming into the night.) He casts an evil spell<sup>5</sup> on the beautiful princesses in the neighborhood, and they become swans by day and turn back into princesses at night.

Just about to become 21, the handsome Prince Siegfried is getting ready for his big birthday bash<sup>6</sup>. His mom says, "Son, you're not a boy anymore. Go out and find a wife." And as his birthday present, she gives him a huge macho crossbow<sup>7</sup>. He runs out to the woods to test his present and of course he sees the swans. His eye catches one in particular, with a golden crown on her head. Coincidentally<sup>8</sup>, it just happens to be sunset, and this swan turns into the most beautiful chick<sup>9</sup> young Siegfried has ever seen. Her name is Odette (the White Swan).

They immediately fall deeply in love, promising to always be true to each other. There's just this little bird/princess problem that Odette has to deal with.

At Siegfried's big birthday bash, the evil Von Rothbart shows up with Odette, except it's not really Odette but his own daughter, Odile (the Black Swan), cleverly disguised<sup>10</sup> to look

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just like the real princess. Siegfried can't tell the difference, and swears<sup>11</sup> his love to her.

Unfortunately, the real Odette is watching and runs away, devastated. Siegfried fights Von Rothbart and Odette jumps into the lake to drown herself.

The same ballerina sometimes dances the role of both White and Black Swans. In the movie, trying to be both characters and dealing with the stress drives Natalie Portman crazy. It gives the filmmakers a chance to show mental delusions<sup>12</sup>, paranoia, a pathological relationship with a mother, and passionate love scenes in this Stephen King type of ballet story.

## Is ballet really like that?

Some lovers of ballet aren't very enthusiastic to see their beloved art portrayed so violently. Other fans are just happy that *Black Swan* is putting ballet into the popular spotlight. For example, Veronika Ibová, a former prima ballerina and today's director of the VIP International School of Ballet in Prague, said: "It was not a good recommendation for the ballet. They just used the ballet world to make a story. It was creepy<sup>13</sup>. And violent." However, she admitted, her 17-year-old twin sons loved the movie.

Jana Malisová, who works in the production department at the National Theatre in Prague, said that it's true that dancers can easily get the broken toenails<sup>14</sup> and sore<sup>15</sup>, blistered<sup>16</sup> feet shown in *Black Swan*. She also admitted that the competition between dancers can be fierce<sup>17</sup> sometimes, but Zuzana Šimáková, who is dancing the lead role in the National Theatre Ballet's current production of *Cinderella*, said that with only one or two exceptions all the dancers in the company are very friendly.

Mary Matz (USA)

You can find out more information about "Black Swan" and ballet in the online magazine, *Opus Osm* ([www.opusosm.com](http://www.opusosm.com)).

## MAY FILM TIPS

### Banksy: Exit Through the Gift Shop

(UK / US, 2010)



Directed by the British graffiti legend Banksy, this is as close a view of the world of street art as yet to be filmed. More than just a dry discussion about art, the documentary is a thrilling and funny adventure story and satire on the art world. It tells about how an eccentric amateur French filmmaker decides to document the world of street art and befriend Banksy, and slowly turns into a street artist himself. It includes footage of some famous graffiti artists and their work. The film was nominated for an Oscar in the Best Documentary category.

### Sound of Noise

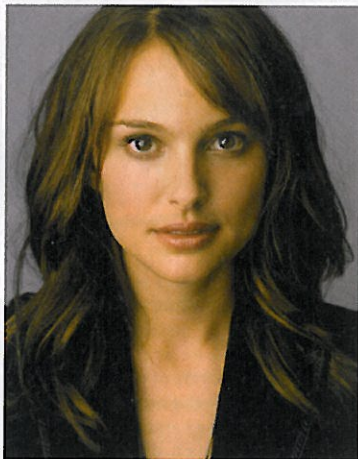
(Sweden / France, 2010)



Amadeus, a policeman, has always felt like an outsider because unlike other members of his family he has no talent for music. In fact, he hates music. But now he is on a mission – to catch a group of drummers who terrorise the city by illegally performing music on various objects in the streets. Will he succeed? Get your ears ready for this comedy-crime film.

## The Israeli beauty

The 30-year-old, Israel-born Natalie Portman is a well-known actress, who appeared in the films *Léon* (a thriller), *Star Wars* (a sci-fi) and *V for Vendetta* (a futuristic tale about an authoritarian regime in Britain). She often portrays smart<sup>18</sup> and mature<sup>19</sup> characters, and is considered to be a role model<sup>20</sup> for many young girls. During the royal première of *Star Wars: Episode I* (1999) she met Prince Charles. He asked her whether she had also been in the original *Star Wars: Episode IV* (1977), which had been released four years before her birth! Natalie bears a striking resemblance<sup>21</sup> to Keira Knightley, another famous actress. When the two actresses wore make-up for their roles in *Star Wars*, not even their mothers could tell them apart<sup>22</sup>. Natalie is definitely a dedicated<sup>23</sup> actress – she shaved her head bald<sup>24</sup> for filming *V for Vendetta*. "Some people will think I'm a neo-Nazi or that I have a cancer or I'm a lesbian," she said about going bald. "After all the crazy hairstyles I had to endure<sup>25</sup> for the films, it's quite liberating to have no hair – especially in this heat."



### VOCABULARY

<sup>1</sup> earned the honors [ˈɒnəz] – získala ocenění

<sup>2</sup> antagonistic [æntəgəˈnɪstɪk] – protikladný

<sup>3</sup> due to [djuː] – kvůli

<sup>4</sup> sorcerer [ˈsɔːs(ə)rə] – čaroděj

<sup>5</sup> to cast a spell – začarovat

<sup>6</sup> bash [bæʃ] – párty, oslava

<sup>7</sup> crossbow [ˈkrɒsbəʊ] – kuše

<sup>8</sup> coincidentally [kəʊɪnsɪˈdɛnt(ə)li] – shodou okolností

<sup>9</sup> chick [tʃɪk] – kočka (pěkná žena)

<sup>10</sup> to disguise [dɪsˈgaɪz] – přestrojit se

<sup>11</sup> to swear [swɛə] – přísahat

<sup>12</sup> delusion [dɪˈluːʒ(ə)n] – přelud, halucinace

<sup>13</sup> creepy [ˈkriːpi] – strašidelný

<sup>14</sup> toenails – nehty na nohou

<sup>15</sup> sore [sɔː] – obolavělý

<sup>16</sup> blistered [ˈblɪstəd] – plný puchýřů

<sup>17</sup> fierce [fiəs] – zuřivý

#### THE ISRAELI BEAUTY

<sup>18</sup> smart [smɑːt] – bystrý

<sup>19</sup> mature [məˈtʃʊə] – vyspělý

<sup>20</sup> role model – vzor

<sup>21</sup> bears a striking resemblance [beɪz ˈstraɪkɪŋ rɪˈzemb(ə)ns] – se nápadně podobá

<sup>22</sup> tell them apart – rozlišit je od sebe

<sup>23</sup> dedicated [ˈdedɪkətɪd] – oddaný, horlivý

<sup>24</sup> bald [bɔːld] – dohola

<sup>25</sup> to endure [mɪˈdʒuə, ɛn-] – vydržet