
The Black Swan: Influence of Sound and Camera in the Movie

The Black Swan: The Influence of Sound and Camera

The Black Swan is a very ambitious movie. Released in 2010 and directed by Darren Aronofsky the film follows a young ballerinas ascent to her first lead, and all the obstacles in her way. Not only is it based on a ballet, but the film heavily relies on its musical roots. In addition to these musical roots the film also uses a variety of camera angles. The film uses shadows extensively and well, allowing the darkness to almost take on a personality of its own.

The clip I've chosen is the night before Nina (Portman) has to act her role as Swan Princess in Swan Lake. It starts with Nina practicing her choreography but quickly turns much more sinister after the piano player leaves. The audience has to determine whether what Nina is seeing is real or in her head.

The focus of my clip analysis will be on sound, particularly the music, and the camerawork in this clip. The sound in this clip is chilling and really enhances the emotions the audiences feels. The sound effects are loud (the nail file scene in particular can't help but give me chills) and the music sets a disturbing, yet beautiful, backdrop for the insane events that are happening to Nina. All the music in the film, including this clip, is from the original Swan Lake score, so its extremely interesting to see how its used in the context of a psychological thriller.

The camerawork is also very gripping, and enhances the tension felt in the clip. The focus on shadows and close ups to Portman really make you guess whats next. It also features some amazing work with mirrors, where Portman is dancing in front of a room length mirror. It seems pretty simple until you realize a film crew was there filming her and that they had to be removed in post production. Overall both the camerawork and sound in this clip really add to the atmosphere, and I'll show why with my analysis.

The scene I have chosen for my analysis is the night before Nina's (Natalie Portman) opening role in Swan Lake as the Swan Queen. Nervous about the performance, she is practicing choreography in the studio late at night, anxious to get all her intricate moves down. The piano player tires of her perfectionist attitude and leave, which is when the lights shut off. The following few minutes are a roller coaster ride of chillingly orchestrated music and a whirlwind of different camerawork techniques.

My scene falls near the end of the movie and is about 5 minutes long, although with all that happens it feels much longer than that. While the sound is definitely essential the camerawork is the first thing to make a definite impression. The camera mainly follows Portman closely throughout the scene, either staying close behind her shoulder or close up to her face, with few exceptions. One of my favorite things about the camerawork in this scene is the cuts. The scene overall features very fast cuts, I think designed to confuse and disorient the audience, which it does fairly successfully. There is one cut in particular with does the opposite. When Nina is walking from the studio there is a quick cut and it resumes from the same angle but her walking into the hospital. This creates a sense of continuity and allows the audience to quickly follow the

action without catching a breath. The camerawork also has a tendency to focus on shadows and dark areas rather than well lit ones, ratcheting up the sense of tension the audience feels.

The sound, a combination of effects and the musical score, does an excellent job of creating a chilling backdrop to the intensity that is happening on screen. The effects feel very loud in contrast to the dialog in the scene, often creating a false scare moment. All the effects used are used well. The tapping and scraping of Nina's ballet shoes show how much effort she is putting into each and every movement. The part of the clip where Beth (Wynona Rider) repeatedly stabs the nail file into her cheek makes me cringe every time I watch the scene. And finally, during the final moments of the clip where Nina transforms into the swan, the cracking and creaking of Nina's joints and bones can't help but leave you feeling disgusted and sorry for Nina's character.

The musical score plays just as important as a part in the sound design of this clip. Using the soundtrack to Swan Lake, but transforming beautiful, delicate music into something horrifying and full of emotion, was a brilliant move by Aronofsky and it suits the film, and this clip, very well. The musical score almost lies in wait, using subtle piano chords during quite moments but exploding into full orchestrated sound whenever something happens. In the clip the delicate music plays slow, quite piano chords until the Black Swan appears, exploding into action. It follows similar suit throughout the rest of scene, remaining quiet with the exception of Nina's visit to the hospital and Nina's return home to her confrontation to with her mother.

Overall, both camerawork and sound design make this movie greater than the sum of its parts. The camerawork adds innumerable layers to the intense, chilling imagery the film presents and the sound design, both the effects and the musical score, add yet another layer of tension onto already tension drenched moments. The clip ends with Nina transforming into an actual physical representation of the Black Swan. The final moments of the clip are full of grotesque sound effects and loud, bombastic orchestrated moments. It also features quick cuts around Nina's quickly transforming body. I think the last moments of this clip are a pretty adequate summation of the movie as a whole and its stand out achievements in sound and camerawork.