

## Terror Tidbits (Fango #299)—“BLACK SWAN”: The Blood Red Shoes

Written by Michael Gingold  
Sunday, 12 December 2010 10:35

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Back when FANGORIA visited the set of Darren Aronofsky’s drug drama REQUIEM FOR A DREAM, the director happily stated that he considered it a horror film, in which “addiction is the monster.” So if his latest feature BLACK SWAN is a genre movie (and it most certainly is), what’s the monster this time?

“There are a lot of monsters in this film,” Aronofsky replies, “though it’s not as clear as it was in REQUIEM. I think Nina’s own mind and fears are a monster, and there are actual embodiments of that throughout the film.”

He further reveals that SWAN, opening in platform release this month from Fox Searchlight, had its origins in a horror screenplay that he felt he could transform to suit his own interests. “I’ve always wanted to do something set in the ballet world. My sister was a dancer, and I never knew anything about it, but thought it would be an interesting world to break open and explore. Then a script by Andres Heinz came along called THE UNDERSTUDY, which was a horror story set in the off-Broadway scene about competing actresses, and I thought it might be a very good engine to transfer into the ballet world. But that took a long time, because the ballet world is so different from the acting world.



“At one point I lost control of it and it went to another director,” he continues, “and I tried to develop my own ballet idea based on Dostoyevsky’s THE DOUBLE. Then I went to see SWAN

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LAKE, and discovered that the black swan and the white swan are both performed by the same dancer. That gave me the idea of tying in to that ballet. When we got into further researching SWAN LAKE, we started to look at the film as a fairy tale. The ballet's heroine is a young maiden who's turned into a swan by an evil magician, and I said to myself, 'Well, that's a were-swan—it's kind of a werewolf story.' And I got really excited by the idea of transforming Natalie Portman into a swan.”

To realize that vision, “I brought in a writer named John McLaughlin, whom I had worked with on a horror show for HBO that never got made, but I was impressed with his work. He did the first translation into the ballet scene, but it didn't really get finished. Then when we were editing THE WRESTLER, I asked my director of development, Mark Heyman, who is a talented writer, 'What do you think about trying to tackle the ballet project?' So he jumped in, and 20 or 30 drafts later, a big collaboration between me and him and our associate producer, Rose Garnett, eventually brought forth a shooting script.”

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