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French thriller 'The Page Turner' hits the right note

Deborah Nicol
Desert Post Weekly
May 10, 2007

Who needs a knife when a maddening musical piece by Shostakovich will do the job?

Director Denis Dercourt reminds audiences about the true sense of thrillers. No bloody weapon required, no screaming threats, but rather the mere possibility of danger is enough to keep filmgoers rattled. Around every corner lay the option for violence, and yet each moment that aggression is not pursued is a moment that cranks the anticipation up a notch.

A young, focused girl prepares for entrance into a musical conservatory. When her father assures her that no matter what happens he will happily continue her piano lessons, she curtly replies, "No." She's in it to win it, and there is no alternative.

When a judge thoughtlessly interrupts her audition, she loses her concentration and her dreams are shattered by her own ultimatum.

Years later - through what must have been a very calculated turn of events - young Mélanie finds herself in the presence of the former judge and accomplished pianist, Ariane. After an unexplained accident (unexplained in regards to who caused it), Ariane no longer carries confidence to the stage and ironically becomes dependent on Mélanie for support. Little does she realize that Mélanie holds her accountable for a ruined life.

Their reunion is framed with nods to Hitchcock, and composer Jérôme Lemonnier's feature film debut reveals an influence by Bernard Herrmann in every troubled chord. Appropriately, music permeates Mélanie plans for revenge.

As she encourages Ariane's son to perform beyond his abilities, the metronome not only quickens his amateur pace but parallels the speed of her devious plans.

Just as she methodically practiced for her audition, so too has she minutely analyzed the intricacies of destroying Ariane from the inside out.

There is such a wicked subtlety in Déborah François's ("The Child") performance as the titular character. Her sophomore acting effort proves that she has the ability to convey much with her eyes alone, as the rest of her body displays a very controlled range of emotions.

Whenever the prospect to cause harm arises, one can almost perceive her filling away the method for a more opportune moment through the squint of her eyes.

The more her character gains control of the nasty scheme, the more her fragile former mentor slides into a sea of desperation. The stunning Catherine Frot barely contains a shaky grasp on her accomplished life

and appears ready to crumble at the slightest provocation. She is surrounded by well-wishing friends and family, and yet her only comfort is found in this mysterious girl who seems attuned to her.



Tartan Films

Poster from "The Page Turner."

THE PAGE TURNER
Rated: R for sexual content, nudity and language.

Time: 1 hour, 25 minutes

Genre: Art/foreign, drama, thriller

Language: French

Starring: Catherine Frot, Déborah François, Pascal Greggory, Clotilde Mollet, Xavier De Guillebon

Director: Denis Dercourt

Showing: Now playing.

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