

Russia Backs 'Swan' for Oscars

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Natalie Portman plays a ballerina who begins to unravel in "Black Swan."

Russia is rooting for "Black Swan" to win at the upcoming Oscars, as the Hollywood melodrama finds resonance with ballet's master of heritage.

Starring Natalie Portman as the black swan ballerina in "Swan Lake" — a ballet composed by Pyotr Tchaikovsky in the 19th century and treasured by Russians — the film premiered in the capital late on Friday to enormous applause.

"I would be so happy to see a movie about ballet win," said Anastasia Volochkova, one of Russia's most well-known ballerinas, who has performed in "Swan Lake" several times.

"What have we got in Russia? The Russian soul, Russian ballet, Russian vodka. ... Out of those, ballet is the most worthy because it has beauty, grace, fulfillment," she said as she flicked back her long blonde hair.

Directed by Darren Aranofsky, "Black Swan" has already made \$120 million worldwide

and grabbed five Oscar nominations, including best picture and best actress for Portman. The awards ceremony will take place Feb. 27.

"The movie will be better received here and in Europe than in the United States because we relate to ballet and this music," 20th Century Fox distributor Yekaterina Romanenko said as five ballerinas dressed as the black swan twirled to Tchaikovsky's music behind her.

Russia's discerning ballet elite found Portman had many shortcomings in her actual dancing, but they applauded her for accurately depicting the harsh life a ballet dancer can face.

"There were many mistakes immediately visible to a ballet person," said prima ballerina Natalia Osipova.

"[But] she definitely deserves an Oscar," Osipova said, adding that Portman showed how "the ballet world is cruel, there is no human kindness there, and unfortunately it is full of negativity."

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