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**Inside Awards Season with Gregory Ellwood**

## **Oscar Watch: 'Black Swan' and 'The Tempest' will bookend the Venice Film Festival**

**Posted on** Tuesday, Jul 27, 2010 **By** Gregory Ellwood

If it's almost August, that means Hollywood is turning its attention from the summer movie season to yet another awards race and the contenders are already getting into position. David Fincher's "The Social Network" recently landed the prestigious opening night slot of the New York Film Festival, but two other films are making their mark earlier in September with world premieres in Venice.

Darren Aronofsky's follow up to "The Wrestler," the dramatic thriller "Black Swan" starring Natalie Portman and Mila Kunis, will open the 67th Venice Film Festival on Sept. 1. Julie Taymor's adaptation of William Shakespeare's "The Tempest" will close the same festival on Sept. 11. The latter stars Oscar winners Helen Mirren and Chris Cooper, Russell Brand, Ben Winshaw, David Strathairn, Alan Cumming and Ben Winshaw among others.

Recent Oscar players who won the Venice Film Festival's top award, the Golden Lion, include "Brokeback Mountain," "Vera Drake" and, oh yeah, Aronofsky's "The Wrestler" in 2008.

"Swan" is said to have supernatural elements, but focuses on Searchlight is keen on the pic and its expected to also show up at other fall festivals down the road before an anticipated -- but not official yet - December debut. According to the studio, Portman plays Nina, a ballerina who finds herself in an intense competition with a newcomer to the company played by Mila Kunis. The official release gives the most descriptive synopsis of the picture yet saying it "takes a thrilling and at times terrifying journey through the psyche of a young ballerina whose starring role as the duplicitous swan queen turns out to be a part for which she becomes frighteningly perfect." There also rumored "supernatural" elements to the low budget feature, but what that means is still unclear. After his comeback with "The Wrestler," however, no one is counting Aronofsky out.

Taymor's "The Tempest" is a fundamental change from the play by changing the sorcerer Prospero to the sorceress Prospera, played by Mirren. The film was originally a Miramax release, but in a surprise, the Walt Disney Company pulled it from the mini-major's assets up for sale. The reasons why are becoming increasingly evident. "The Tempest" has a shot at true Awards glory, something Disney could put under its own banner (well, Touchstone banner) for the first time since "The Sixth Sense" and "The Insider." Secondly, it keeps the Mouse House in the good graces of the talented Taymor, who helped turn the stage version of "The Lion King" into a major cash cow. The visionary had a difficult experience with Sony Pictures and the now defunct Revolution Studios on her movie musical "Across the Universe." Stepping into the unknown with a new owner of Miramax was not what she was expecting when she brought her latest baby to the Disney division. Whether Disney's marketing division can handle a film so radically different from their traditional releases, however, remains to be seen.

There are still a lot of films that need to decide whether or not they are in the Oscar game this year, but other contenders include the already released "Inception," "Toy Story 3," "The Kids Are All Right" and "How to Train Your Dragon" as well as the still to come Coen Bros. remake of "True Grit," "Never Let Me Go," Clint Eastwood's "Hereafter," "Conviction" with Hilary Swank, Ben Affleck's "The Town," John Madden's "The Debt," Danny Boyle's "127 Hours," Ed Zwick's "Love and Other Drugs," Mike Leigh's "Another Year," David Fincher's "The Fighter," Terrence Malick's "The Tree of Life" and wildcard "The Kings Speech."

And in less than a month, we'll be in thick of awards season. Aren't you excited?

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