

# The Main Feature

Season 32 - Issue 9 (screening 26.1.12)



France

2007

135 minutes

Certificate 12

Director: Nicolas Klotz

Screenplay: Elizabeth Perceval

Adapted from the novel *La Question Humaine* by Francois Emmanuel

Music: Syd Matters

Cinematography: Josée Deshaies

**Cast:**

Simon Kessler

Mathieu Amalric

Mathias Jüste

Michael Lonsdale

Lucy Jüste

Edith Scob

Karl Rove

Jean-Pierre Kalfon

Arie Nuemann

Lou Castel

Lynn Sanderson

Valérie Dréville

Jacques Paolini Rémy Carpentier

This dark film has been described as a thriller. But it is long, detailed slow-motion thriller without a car chase or a shoot-out; and it draws gradually to its conclusion rather than have any kind of dramatic revelation.



The story centres on Simon Kessler (Mathieu Amalric) a suave confident psychologist in the French branch of a German multi-national chemical company. His job involves interviewing candidates for posts, running development events for the executives ('to keep them competitive'), and drawing up the criteria for a vicious down-sizing, with the number of staff reducing from 2,500 to 1,200.

The deputy Chief Executive Officer Karl Rove (a rather creepy Jean-Pierre Kalfon) asks Kessler confidentially to review the increasingly erratic behaviour of the CEO, Mathias Jüste (Michael Lonsdale) since Rove thinks he is mentally ill and is damaging the company. Kessler has to

get under the skin of the company and gradually explores a Kafkaesque world in which the senior executives know damaging facts about each other, there is a long and deep history, and words do not necessarily mean what you think they do. And it gets to him. With his solitary lifestyle and complicated love life as background, anonymous letters sent to his office and home, what he finds out about the company and its leadership at first disquiets him and then gradually sends him into a decline until, in the understated denouement, he starts to see what has motivated these nasty personal antagonisms.



There is a strong performance from the leonine Michael Lonsdale as the CEO with a shady past and obsessions with music. But the central performance is given by Mathieu Amalric as the psychologist driven of the rails. Almaric's best-known performance is as Jean-Dominique Bauby, the editor of French Elle in *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* who can communicate only through moving an eyelid, for which he won a César. He was cast as Dominic Greene, the villain in the Bond movie *Quantum of Solace*. Not only an actor, he has directed a dozen films himself.

The notion underlying the film is controversial – there is a parallel between how a modern company downsizes and the operation of the Holocaust. Both are described in neutral, technical language without reference to the individual people involved and their lives. Both ignore the 'human question', which is the French title of the film. The film suggests other parallels. In an almost incidental scene, the police are seen in a café rounding up black African men apparently on their skin colour alone.



When asked whether basic premise of the film, that corporate downsizing, with its de-humanising treatment of people as 'units', is analogous to the genocidal evil of the Second World War wasn't too much of a leap of interpretation, Almaric said: 'It's trying to put two things

together and seeing what happens but there's not really a theory in this film. There's just a dizzy ... it's the use of language, of technical words that hide violence but make you do horrible things.'

One critic described the film as 'ambitious'. That's an ambiguous a word, but probably appropriate for a work which asks you to accept an underlying view that many would argue with.

## Michael Hipkins

With "The Artist" tipped for Oscar success and already requested by several members for next season, the following BBC website piece dated 10 January caught my eye:

## Artist director responds to Kim Novak *Vertigo* claim

In a full-page ad in Monday's edition of trade paper Variety, the actress said "rape" had been committed with the use of Bernard Herrmann's score.

In a response, Michel Hazanavicius said The Artist had been "inspired by the work of Hitchcock" and other directors.

The spat coincided with the Frenchman's nomination for a Directors Guild award. Woody Allen, David Fincher, Alexander Payne and Martin Scorsese are also lined up for its Outstanding Directorial Achievement in Feature Film prize.

The Artist, a homage to the silent film era that is largely silent itself, has been critically acclaimed and is expected to receive several Oscar nominations. One of its stars, canine performer Uggie, is currently in the UK making television appearances.

The film is up for six prizes at this weekend's Golden Globes and is up for a host of other accolades.



Novak, 78, also said in the advertisement: "I feel as if my body - or at least my body of work - has been violated by the movie."

The statement was headed by the words: "I want to report a rape".

"The film could and should have been able to stand on its own without depending upon Bernard Herrmann's score from Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* to provide it more drama.

By featuring the music, she went on, the makers of *The Artist*, were guilty of "using emotions it engenders as if it were their own".

"Even though they gave a small credit to Bernard Herrmann at the end, I believe this to be cheating, at the very least."

The US composer, also known for his work on *Psycho* and *Taxi Driver*, died in 1975.

In his own statement, Hazanavicius said the *Vertigo* 'Love Theme' had been "used in many different films" and that he was "very pleased to have it in mine". "I respect Kim Novak greatly and I'm sorry to hear she disagrees," he added.

This year's Directors Guild of America (DGA) awards recognise Allen, Fincher, Payne and Scorsese for *Midnight in Paris*, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, *The Descendants* and *Hugo* respectively.

The guild's main prize - won last year by *The King's Speech* director Tom Hooper - is viewed as a key indicator as to who will go on to receive the best director Oscar.

The DGA awards will be held on 28 January in Los Angeles, a month ahead of the Academy Awards.

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# Reactions to **Black Swan** – 12 January

<b>Score</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Votes</b>	~	~	2	3	4	3	10	5	3	3	1

**Total received – 34**

**Average Score – 5.88**

## Your Comments

Words fail me when I see a really unusual film like that – enjoyed it very much.

If the scoring system allowed I would have given it a Desmond – i.e. a “Tutu”!

Excellent film – not for the squeamish

Strong stuff – too strong for this old man

In the end the film came up with the goods

Overly melodramatic – no better on a second viewing

Disturbing and thought provoking – superb acting

Not my type of film – Acting excellent

Technical proficiency admirable – but the film is not enjoyable

Well acted and well directed but I’ll never feel the same about Swan Lake again

Beautifully acted but it was like watching a horror film. It was not until the very end when everything seemed to click. Very good film, but I would not like to watch it again.

A Marmite film – some will love it, and others hate it.

Too long

Well acted but tosh

A role to die for!

Seen for the 2<sup>nd</sup> time

Very distasteful

Not my sort of film

Too many tutus?

Position	Film	Average Score
1 <sup>st</sup>	The Secret in their Eyes	8.69
2 <sup>nd</sup>	The Kings Speech	8.66
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Made in Dagenham	7.94
4 <sup>th</sup>	Etre et Avoir	6.94
5 <sup>th</sup>	Machan	6.81
6 <sup>th</sup>	Harvey	6.3
7 <sup>th</sup>	Public Enemies	6.16
8 <sup>th</sup>	Black Swan	5.88

*Our next film*

**8pm on Thursday 9 February 2012:**



*“Bittersweet, moving and utterly beautiful: a love letter to cinema and to Scotland.”*