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Review of The Page Turner

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The Page Turner
(Tartan Video, 7.10.2007)

The Page Turner is a perfect example of how the French, or, at least, French filmmakers, are different from the rest of us. The film is subtle and sneakily subversive, as writer-director Denis Dercourt constantly passes up opportunities for melodramatic overkill.

Young Melanie Prouvost (Julie Richalet) is determined to be a concert pianist but flubs her entrance exam to a conservatory when one of the judges, Ariane Fouchecourt (Catherine Prot), gives a fan an autograph during her performance. The film then jumps ten years, with Melanie (now played by Deborah Francois) plotting her revenge.

First, she becomes an intern at the Paris law firm of Jean Fouchecourt (Pascal Greggory), Ariane's husband. After ingratiating herself with Jean, Melanie is invited to his country estate to look after his young son, Tristan (Antonie Martynციow), while Catherine prepares for an important radio concert with her trio, which includes violinist Virginie (Clotilde Mollet) and cellist Laurent (Xavier De Guillebon).

What's clever about *The Page Turner* is that Melanie has no definite plan. Circumstances will certainly arise to allow her revenge, though neither Melanie nor the viewer knows what they will be. Because Melanie's parents are butchers, there are undercurrents of class resentment in her revenge. Dercourt excels at conveying both the fragility and the sense of entitlement of artists.

At the heart of *The Page Turner*, beautifully photographed by Jerome Peyreburne, is Melanie's playing on the insecurities of Catherine, making the pianist dependent upon the younger woman. In the making-of extra, Dercourt notes the similarities to a Claude Chabrol film, without acknowledging a direct indebtedness, but *The Page Turner* is a cooler, more subdued psychological thriller than Chabrol's efforts. It constantly reminded me of other movies, from *All About Eve* (the protégé angle) to Pasolini's *Teorema* (though the sexual subtext is much tamer). A shot of Melanie walking down a basement hallway recalls *The Shining*.

Though Dercourt has a musical background, having played the viola professionally since he was 16 and having taught at the Strasbourg Conservatory since 1993, he is clearly a filmmaker, with the constantly gliding camera recalling the work of Otto Preminger. In the excellent 38-minute making-of, Dercourt describes himself as a perfectionist who painstakingly frames each shot, yet when he sees the fluidity of the Steadicam, he is willing to leave some shots to chance.

Dercourt cast the relatively inexperienced Francois after seeing her in Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne's *L'Enfant*. At first she seems a bit stiff, almost amateurish, but her Melanie slowly becomes more controlling and seductive. The making-of, which shows the director rehearsing and shooting several scenes, indicates that Dercourt kept tight control on Melanie's mysterious smile. Francois, who resembles a young Jennifer Jason Leigh, plays well off the veteran Frot, who makes Catherine vulnerable but not too neurotic.

The making-of, which features interviews with Dercourt, Francois, and Frot, shows the actors ably faking the music of Schubert and Shostakovich, as well as the film's 2006 premier at Cannes. Other extras include the film's theatrical trailer and trailers for six other Tartan DVDs.—Michael Adams