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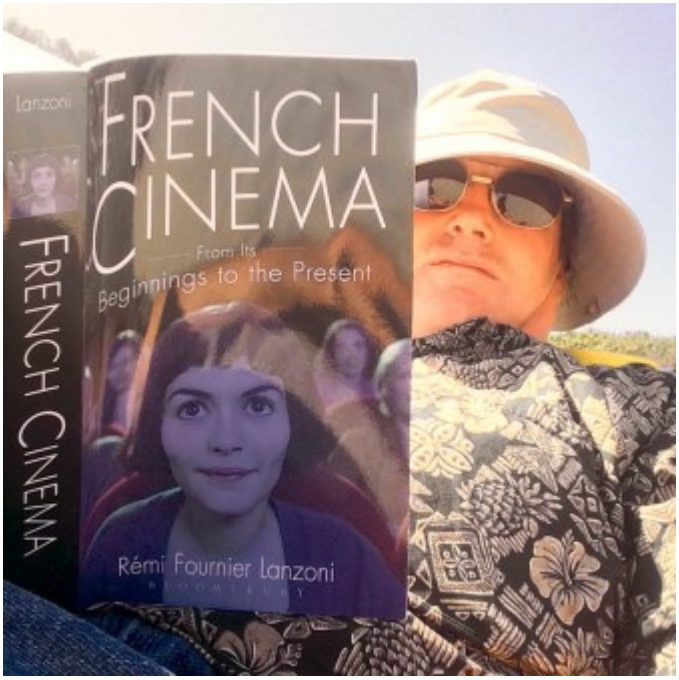
FILM REVIEW: Planetarium (Zlotkowski, 2016): France

Description

Viewed by Larry Gleeson



Writer/Director Rebecca Zlotkowski (*Grand Central, Belle epine*) presented her latest work *Planetarium* , a mixture of drama, fantasy and mystery, to a rousing ovation at the Sala Darsena Theatre during the 73rd Venice International Film Festival. In attendance with Zlotkowski were two of the filmâ??s stars, Natalie Portman and Lily-Rose Depp, who teamed up to portray the infamous American Barlow sisters, believed to possess the ability to connect with ghosts. Zlotkowski bases her film on a trio of 19th century American sisters who played an important role in the creation of spiritualism, the Fox Sisters.

The film opens with a plush, sensuous cabaret scene with Laura Barlow, played convincingly by Oscar-winning (*Black Swan)* Natalie Portman, exhorting a rather attentive audience to pay attention to and to witness a medium, Kate Barlow, played refreshingly by Lily-Rose Depp (*The Dancer, Yoga Hosers*) as she will communicate with the other side. Young Kate Barlow begins breathing as a drum beat permeates. As Kateâ??s breathing intensifies so does the drum beat until a connection is made with the ritualistic feel of Wicca and in a resultant style of a sÃ©ance. The seeker is mystified and the audience is wowed as Kate creates a communicative voice from the other side.

Quickly, Laura finds out the cabaret is closing as it canâ??t make ends meet despite the additional revenue generators from private dances, bar drinks and the kitchen preparations. With impeccable timing Laura is introduced to a powerful French film producer, Andre Korben, played by Emmanuel Salinger (*Oublie-moi, Donâ??t Forget Youâ??re Going To Die).* Korben propositions the sisters. He invites them for a seance house call and then negotiates a deal for them to stay with him at his estate

for an extended, indefinite period of time. He closes the deal by telling Laura he wants to use the sisters to direct the first real ghost film. However, he also has other notions. He acts towards Kate in an inappropriate manner subjecting her to multiple brain monitoring devices and practically pines over her. In addition, he does multiple sÃ©ances with her as she calls out for his deceased wife. It goes so far as Kate embodying the wife so Korben can kiss her to restore passion to their relationship. Korben then claims heâ??s falling in love with his wife through Kate. Meanwhile, Laura is acting in Korbenâ??s studio film on location unaware of Korbenâ??s actions with Kate. Soon, however, Kateâ??s health begins declining and she is bound by weakness to her bed never to recover.

Planetarium is a beautifully shot film with very good acting. George Lechaptois was the filmâ??s Cinematographer. Interestingly, Zlotkowski draws much of the story line from history. In addition to the Fox sisters, Zlotkowskiâ??s use of the powerful film producer as a jew during the 1930â??s allowed her to address the periodâ??s anti-semitism. The Fox sistersâ?? benefactor was actually a banker, who had one of the Fox sisters embody his deceased wife for an entire year during the Victorian era while their new doctrine of spiritualism was sweeping through the intellectual circles of Europe.

Unmistakably, Zlotkowski paid attention to details with the filmâ??s mise-en-scene to create a look and feel of the 1930â??s and to her vision of spiritualism. Zlotkowski shared screenwriting credits with Robin Campillo. The costuming, very representational of the time period, was handled by Anais Romand. Makeup was done by Sarai Fiszel. Hairstyles were coiffed by Catherine LeBlanc-Careas and the Artistic Director was Partel Oliva. The film was produced by FrÃ©dÃ©ric Jouve (Les Films du

Velvet) and co-produced by Les Films du Fleuve, Kinology, France 3 CinÃ©ma, Proximus, RTBF (TÃ©lÃ©vision Belge).
This was one of my favorite viewing experiences of the Venice Film Festival. Shortly after I had taken my seat, Zlotkowski, Portman and Depp all made a grand entrance into the Sala Darsena theater to a standing ovation. The energy in the theater was unmistakable. At times, however, I felt the narrative of *Planetarium* drifted a tad bit. Nevertheless, Zlotkowski covered a lot of territory and she did it with convincing style. Warmly recommended.

*Photos from Planetarium and featured photo of Ms. Zlotkowski are courtesy of (ASAC Images/Biennale Cinema di Venezia)

Category

1. Venice International Film Festival

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