

WVXU Views and Reviews

The Page Turner (La tourneuse de pages)

Now Showing at: Cincinnati World Cinema on Wednesday, June 27th.

Review by: Larry Thomas

A beautifully filmed nicely understated thriller in the style of French suspense master Claude Chabrol.

The French do many things differently from us Yanks. In the areas of walking, wine consumption, personal hygiene, and taking time off from work, they seem to do almost a 180. Another notable difference is in their filmmaking.

When American studios make commercial fluff, the films are generally unbearable, lowbrow, insulting garbage. When French filmmakers make commercial fluff, the end result may be a thoughtful, provocative, intriguing tale of revenge, like *The Page Turner*.



Twelve-year-old Melanie has dreams of becoming a famous pianist, and practices hard. Ariane is a famous pianist, and is on the board of Melanie's audition for admission to an advanced program. During Melanie's audition, she is distracted from her performance by a thoughtless, rude interruption from Ariane from which she cannot recover. Melanie's performance is a disaster, and she gives up piano for good.

Flash forward about ten years. Melanie is grown up and has taken an internship at a legal office in Paris. The office is that of Jean, husband of Ariane. From that internship, Melanie ingratiates herself with Jean by offering to be a part-time nanny to the couple's young son while Jean is away on a business trip.

It seems that Ariane has lost her confidence due to an automobile accident, and that her trio has an important concert coming up. Ariane picks Melanie to be her "page turner," a very important position, and especially when the pianist is on the edge. Now that the set up is in place, we are left to guess what dire consequences Melanie has dreamed up for Ariane...or perhaps her whole family.

The Page Turner is a beautifully filmed nicely understated thriller in the style of French suspense master Claude Chabrol. The director is Denis Dercourt, a musician and music educator, who used his musical knowledge to great effect as a filmmaker. The use of Bach, Shostakovich and Schubert is striking, as is the Cesar-nominated original score by Jerome Lemonnier.

The lead performances were also Cesar-nominated: **Catherine Frot** as Ariane, is fragile, yet devoted to her music and her family. She feels she is regaining her self-confidence on stage through the assistance of Melanie acting as her page-turner. The stunningly beautiful **Deborah Francois** plays the 20-something Melanie. Nominated for Most Promising New Actress for this role, she is reminiscent of the young Catherine Deneuve, delivering a very understated performance. We know something is going on beneath her placid exterior...but what?

Melding a suspense drama with the world of classical chamber music is an interesting mix. The story of perceived wrong and the need for revenge has been done many times on screen, and the chamber music gives it that extra edge to help keep it fresh.

While *The Page Turner* isn't in the league of the best works of such French directing stalwarts as Francois Truffaut, Louis Malle, or Jean-Pierre Melville, it's still light years ahead of what might be done to the same story in America, or anything you can see in a cineplex near you this week.