

Brian De Palma Returns with Revenge Thriller 'Passion'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on August 2, 2013 - 1:51pm

- [Brian De Palma](#) [2]
- [Brian Tallerico](#) [3]
- [Film Review](#) [4]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [5]
- [Love Crime](#) [6]
- [Noomi Rapace](#) [7]
- [Passion](#) [8]
- [Rachel McAdams](#) [9]



Rating: **3.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Brian De Palma returns to what he does best after a few notable failures in the last decade, producing his best work since 2002's "Femme Fatale" and arguably returning to form in the surprisingly effective thriller "Passion." It's certainly not the home run that fans of "Dressed to Kill" or "Blow Out" still hold out hope for the director to deliver but it's proof that this very stylish filmmaker hasn't completely thrown in the towel like some of his '70s and '80s peers. It starts a little slow and ends a little crazy but there's more to like about "Passion" than I ever would have expected. The film is now available On Demand and will be released in select markets tomorrow, August 2, 2013. It's worth a look.

On its surface, "Passion" seems to be a pretty straightforward vengeance thriller. Of course, De Palma doesn't make straightforward films, even if this one doesn't have quite the twisting narrative of a "Raising Cain" or a "Femme Fatale." This loose remake of the French hit "Love Crime," centers on a rivalry turned deadly between two women at a high-powered ad agency. Isabelle (Noomi Rapace) has a great idea for an ad for a major client. She takes it to Christine (Rachel McAdams), who takes it for her own concept after their client adores it. Professional competition becomes personal when infidelity, mental disorder, and murder weave their way into De Palma's plot.



Passion

Photo credit: eOne

De Palma the director may be back, and he's ably assisted by a notable behind-the-camera crew (including great cinematography from Almodovar regular Jose Luis Alcane and a stellar score from longtime collaborator Pino Donaggio), but De Palma the writer still struggles. I'd really love to see him work with a great script but almost all of the problems of "Passion" come down to poor plotting, weak dialogue, and thin characters. It's when these problems don't matter, when De Palma is allowed to sink his teeth into the twisting narrative after about 40 minutes, that the film finally clicks into gear. Before that, it's a little slow in its set-up and nonsensical in its characters.

Part of the problem is that McAdams goes pretty one-note with Christine, turning her into a cartoonish villain and Rapace is woefully miscast. One can only imagine how much stronger "Passion" would have been with stronger leads. It often feels like De Palma was more interested in his actresses as visual props – one blonde, one brunette, and one redhead – than as characters. When De Palma the visual auteur is allowed to come out and play, this feeling actually enhances the film. When character matters, the film suffers. None of the performances are of the caliber in De Palma's best work.



Passion
Photo credit: eOne

Brian De Palma still sees film as spectacle. He loves the "show," intercutting a crucial scene with a ballet performance straight to camera. These are equal – this lurid plot is little more than a performance. And I don't think he has a straight angle after about 45 minutes, presenting the whole thing like an off-kilter nightmare. He brings a style to "Passion" that other filmmakers wouldn't have even considered. All the problems that I have with "Passion" narratively (and I could see some having even more than I do and wouldn't debate too strongly...it's a pretty ridiculous movie) are overshadowed by the fact that De Palma the visual master has shown signs of life for the first time in a decade.

De Palma recently told an interviewer that he presumed he was past his peak, like so many of his '70s auteurs. While most people who have suffered through failures like "The Black Dahlia" and "Redacted" went, "Well, duh," his hardcore fans held out hope that perhaps this self-examination wasn't true. "Passion" should only fuel this hope.

"Passion" stars Noomi Rapace and Rachel McAdams. It was written and directed by Brian De Palma. It opens today, August 2, 2013 in some markets and is now available On Demand.



[10]

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