

## ‘Vox Lux’ is a Visually Stark Metaphor for a Lost Cause

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on December 12, 2018 - 5:37pm

- [Glam](#) [2]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [3]
- [Jennifer Ehle](#) [4]
- [Jude Law](#) [5]
- [Movie Review](#) [6]
- [Natalie Portman](#) [7]
- [Neon](#) [8]
- [Patrick McDonald](#) [9]
- [Pop Star](#) [10]
- [Raffey Cassidy](#) [11]
- [School Shooting](#) [12]
- [Stacy Martin](#) [13]
- [Vox Lux](#) [14]
- [Willem Dafoe](#) [15]



Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – In the frozen emotional landscape of America, where mass shootings have become as regular as the sunrise, what better symbol for this madness is there than a pop star? Natalie Portman is that singer in “Vox Lux,” a victim and a perpetrator in the sin of mass death, and the soundtrack of gunfire.

Using a worshipped singer as a metaphor for lost cause USA is a brilliant stroke, created by writer/director Brady Corbet, an actor and filmmaker. Portman is proficient as usual, imbuing the singer Celeste with a bitter edge of desperation, augmented with the unadvised escapism in trying to erase a sordid past. Jude Law continues his chameleon-like foray in character acting, playing Celeste’s manager as both moral center and creep. The whole she-bang is narrated with expressive calm by Willem Dafoe, adding another layer to the killing joke of fantasy (pop music) and the real world.

Celeste Montgomery (Raffey Cassidy young, Natalie Portman thereafter) is a victim of a school shooting in 1999. In recovery, she and her sister Ellie (Stacy Martin) write a song about healing, and the nation embraces it, launching a career for Celeste as a pop singer. Her manager (Jude Law), carefully crafts a glam image for her, and Ellie writes the songs that made her a superstar.



Natalie Portman is Glam in ‘Vox Lux’

*Photo credit: Neon*



Flash forward to 2017, as the now adult Celeste is put on the brink of despair when another mass shooting is carried out, with the gunmen using imagery from an old music video she made. She is also trying to repair her relationship with her now teenage daughter (Raffey Cassidy again) and begins to spiral downward right before an important show, debuting her latest album "Vox Lux."

Why shouldn't the hedonistic excesses of the America Dream be forged and vilified through a pop music career? The backlash of such lives – as been proved over and over again – is about teetering on the brink. The modest roots of Celeste, and her accidental thrust into the limelight, is like the hedonistic history of America... going from mostly rural beginnings to industrial might to winning a world war to creating excess consumerism as religion. The worship of a pop star is part of that religion, and it flows through the character of Celeste like sorrow through a victim.

The main performances – by Natalie Portman and Jude Law – are a highlight, as each go beyond their movie images to do some dirty work on their characters. Portman is especially arresting, as she portrays Celeste in a state of privilege she doesn't deserve (again, America) and uses that entitlement within an emotional state of bewilderment. Law is somewhat unrecognizable as The Manager, emphasizing his receding hairline and his own state of ennui and confusion, despite his client's success.



Jude Law is The Manager in 'Vox Lux'

Photo credit: Neon

The film pulsates with strong imagery, from the school atmosphere in the beginning to the final concert splash. Most wild is both the filming of the breakout music video and the video itself. It contrasts the breakdown of Celeste and becomes part of the melting world. It's a terrific big screen movie with a deeper dive into a psyche of a character and what it means as a bigger picture.

The final concert is part of that visual karma that director Corbet builds, and his sensibility feels like European cinema. Plus it becomes a reminder of the flashiness of icons with seemingly indestructible agendas ... like the Titanic, the World Trade Center and a large land mass country with a Constitution.

*"Vox Lux" continues its nationwide release in Chicago on December 14th. See local listings for theaters and show times. Featuring Natalie Portman, Jude Law, Stacy Martin, Jennifer Ehle, Raffey Cassidy and Willem Dafoe. Written and directed by Brady Corbet. Rated "R"*



[16]

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