

VARIETY

Nannerl, Mozart's Sister

Nannerl, la soeur de Mozart

(France)

By RONNIE SCHEIB

A JML Distribution release of a Les Films Alyne production, with the participation of the Centre National du Cinema et de l'Image Animee, with the support of Region Ile de France, Region Limousin, in partnership with the Centre National de la Cinematographie. (International sales: Wide Management, Paris.) Produced by Rene Feret, Fabienne Feret. Directed, written by Rene Feret.

With: Marc Barbe, Marie Feret, Delphine Chuillot, David Moreau, Clovis Fouin, Lisa Feret.

Rene Feret's lively, fascinating costumer about Mozart's talented older sister Nannerl smartly incorporates just enough fiction to bring history into sharp focus as it follows the Mozart family on the road from one royal court to the next. Feminist without the arrogance of 20-20 hindsight, vividly precise in its depiction of 18th-century pre-revolutionary France (the filmmakers were allowed to shoot inside Versailles), alive with exuberantly thesped personages and awash in the joy and power of music, the pic is a stunner. A treat for classical music lovers and cinephiles alike, "Nannerl" seems sure to strike a chord with arthouse distribs worldwide.

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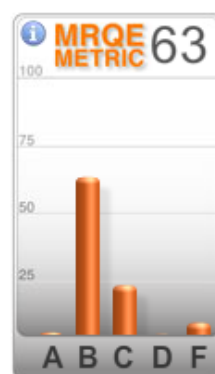
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Feret picks up the Mozarts -- a likable, affectionate bunch -- in 1763, during their nonstop tour playing for European nobility.

Strict taskmaster Leopold (Marc Barbe) turns loving family man by night. Wise, beautiful Frau Mozart (Delphine Chuillot) reps the ideal mother and the kids tussle, clown around and positively breathe music. At one point, Wolfgang (David Moreau) and Nannerl (helmer Feret's daughter Marie), still in nightclothes, vocally improvise harmonies, then tumble over each other to race to the clavichord to transcribe their new composition.

Feret stresses the precariousness of the Mozarts' career: Travel is exhausting and compensation uncertain. Rival prodigies spring up everywhere (Wolfgang waits in the wings for a pale English lad to finish his recital) and Leopold must constantly contrive new gimmicks to showcase his son's superior talent: composing an opera at age 12, playing blindfolded, etc.

But accomplished singer, harpsichordist, violinist Nannerl, Wolfgang's elder by five years, first held forth as the family's infant prodigy. At the pic's opening, she is still performing, though overshadowed and sidelined as accompanist by Wolfgang's growing fame. Her father bows to social strictures "for her own good," refusing to let her continue with the violin (a man's province) or compose (it's beyond a woman's feeble brain), while privately conceding Nannerl's talent to his wife. No longer a precocious tot, Nannerl chafes at the limitations imposed by her gender and frets about her prospects.

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Unlike the revisionism of Sofia Coppola's "Marie Antoinette," Feret's distanced "Nannerl" eschews contempo psychological takes on history, with characters very much products of their age. The camera grants immediate, physical intimacy but never familiarity, providing abstract visualizations of the characters' social mindsets.

Nannerl's options are romantically imagined through the fiction of her meetings with two members of royalty. The king's cloistered daughter (Lisa Feret, the helmer's younger offspring) represents a glorified image of feminine submission as the formerly rebellious wannabe-ruler serenely turns to the convent. An alternate path is suggested as the Dauphin (Clovis Fouin) nurtures Nannerl's fantasies of acceptance both as musician and woman. Much attracted to Nannerl (not only by her musical gifts), he encourages her to compose, which she accomplishes in passionate rushes of creativity. He then privately commissions a chamber orchestra to perform her work, inviting her to play first violin. Of course she must always outwardly disguise herself as a young man, lending a decidedly kinky cast to their relationship.

Nannerl's real life, recounted in closing post-scripts, presented no such exalted alternatives. Indeed even Feret's hypothetical fictional interlude ends in disillusionment.

Strong production values transcend the pic's modest budget, with ace lensing by Benjamin Echazarreta, and stunning decor and costumes by Veronica Fruhbrot and Dominique Louis, respectively. Biggest kudos go to Marie-Jeanne Serero, who composed the apocryphal Nannerl Mozart music that lushly envelops the film.

Camera (color), Benjamin Echazarreta; editor, Fabienne Feret; music, Marie-Jeanne Serero; production designer, Veronica Fruhbrot; costume designer, Dominique Louis; sound (DTS), Agnez Szabo, Emmanuelle Villard. Reviewed at Montreal World Film Festival (competing), Sept. 1, 2010. Running time: 120 MIN.