

## Tár

Lydia Tár (Cate Blanchett) is a woman at the very top of her game, conductor of the world-renowned Berlin Philharmonic, co-founder of a non-profit organization to aid worthy musicians, teacher at New York's Juilliard School, mentor to young performers, and living in a luxurious apartment with partner Sharon (Nina Hoss) and their adopted child Petra. We see her when she is prepping to perform Mahler's Fifth Symphony on live television as well as ready to launch a memoir.

In an early scene from "Tár," we see her converse with intellectual vigor and sweeping knowledge of classical music and the role of the conductor (with *New Yorker* writer Adam Gopnik as moderator). We see, too, that Tár can also be personable and a good communicator with her orchestra. In sum, a paragon when assessed from afar...and perhaps too good to be true.

It's a heady life; she has been at the podium of the world's best ensembles (Cleveland, New York, Boston, etc.), with Berlin as the capstone. That life is also undeniably pressured, with her quiet assistant Francesca (Noémie Merlant) watching her every move. We see her at Juilliard contend with a balky student who rejects her musical judgements and taste. We see her as an irritated mom who threatens a child at Petra's school who she thinks has mocked her daughter. We see her try to handle cracks in her relationship with Sharon. We see her having to fire her older, longtime assistant conductor Sebastian (Allan Corduner)...

The pressures mount. Things become more dicey with Sharon, who is also her concertmaster (and a kind of conscience). She pops handfuls of pills to get by. She hears foreboding noises. She favors an attractive, young Russian cellist Olga (Sophie Kauer) over other veterans of her string section. Incriminating video emerges of her badgering that Juilliard student mentioned above. Worst, she becomes implicated in the suicide of another young woman she mentored and has to face questioning by the orchestra's Board.

The movie's style is intricate and somewhat frenetic, and some content may be opaque to viewers not versed in the classical music world. Also somewhat opaque is the depiction of Tár's demise. The film is long (153 minutes) and full of incident, but her fall from glory is only treated in the last 20 minutes in a flurry of international travels and unidentified locations, leaving the viewer confused. A hurried fall from grace.

The film, written and directed by the talented Todd Field (his first movie in 16 years) tells Tár's story in a blizzard of scenes, some arresting, some puzzling, through the arc of her life, from triumphs to disgrace. Field has emphasized that "This script was written for one artist, Cate Blanchett. Had she said no, the film would have never seen the light of day." He sees her as "a master supreme." "She raised all boats," Field has said and added: "The privilege of collaborating with an artist of this caliber is something impossible to adequately describe."

"Tár" is, understandably, dominated by Blanchett, present and omniscient in almost every scene. She can be mesmerizing but still impossible to fathom: a driven workaholic who cannot see her carefully crafted world crumbling. It is an impressive performance but leaves little room for sympathizing with her promethean character.

Director Fields himself had a worthy acting career for 20 years before switching to directing in 2001 with a splendid debut in “In The Bedroom,” offering superior roles for Tom Wilkinson and Sissy Spacek. His great work with actors continued in the suburban drama “Little Children” in 2006. Those films earned its actors a total of five nominations for Academy Awards. But after that: zip, nothing until “Tár.” It would be no surprise if his latest opus attains another nomination for the rich work of his star, Blanchett, a maestro easy to admire but hard to fully grasp.

*(This film, now in independent theaters, is rated “R” and runs 153 minutes)*

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