



Hilary and Jackie

121 minutes, 1998, UK

Director: Anand Tucker

Screenwriter: Frank Cottrell Boyce

Cast: Emily Watson, Rachel Griffiths, James Frain, David Morrissey, Chalres Dance, Celia Imrie

Synopsis

A controversial film when it was released in 1998. Directed by [Anand Tucker](#). The screenplay by [Frank Cottrell Boyce](#) is based on the memoir [A Genius in the Family](#) by [Piers and Hilary du Pré](#), which chronicles the life and career of their sister, cellist [Jacqueline du Pré](#). The film attracted controversy and criticism for allegedly distorting details in the musician's life, and Hilary du Pré publicly defended her version of the story. Perhaps a film of a genius who died early, married to Daniel Barenboim, the pianist and conductor at the top of his career was always likely to be ruffle feathers, within the family or outside of it.

Reviews:

In his review in the [New York Times](#), [Stephen Holden](#) called the film "one of the most insightful and wrenching portraits of the joys and tribulations of being a classical musician ever filmed" and "an astoundingly rich and subtle exploration of sibling rivalry and the volcanic collisions of love and resentment, competitiveness and mutual dependence that determine their lives," and added, "Hilary and Jackie is as beautifully acted as it is directed, edited and written."

[Roger Ebert](#) of the [Chicago Sun-Times](#) described it as "an extraordinary film [that] makes no attempt to soften the material or make it comforting through the cliches of melodrama."

In the [San Francisco Chronicle](#), [Edward Guthmann](#) stated, "Watson is riveting and heartbreaking. Assisted by Tucker's elegant direction and Boyce's thoughtful, scrupulous writing, she gives a knockout performance."

[Anthony Lane](#) of [The New Yorker](#) said, "The sense of period, of ungainly English pride, is funny and acute, but the movie mislays its sense of wit as the girls grow up. The nub of the tale . . . feels both overblown and oddly beside the point; it certainly means that Tucker takes his eye, or his ear, off the music. The whole picture, indeed, is more likely to gratify the emotionally prurient than to appease lovers of Beethoven and Elgar."

[Entertainment Weekly](#) rated the film A- and added, "This unusual, unabashedly voluptuous biographical drama, a bravura feature debut for British TV director Anand Tucker, soars on two virtuoso performances: by the rightfully celebrated Emily Watson . . . and by the under-celebrated Rachel Griffiths."

Rana Dasgupta wrote in an essay about biographical films that "the film's tagline – 'The true story of two sisters who shared a passion, a madness and a man' – is a good indication of its prurient intent. The book's ['Genius in the Family'] moving account of love and solidarity, whose characters are incomplete and complex but not "mad", is rejected in favour of a salacious account of social deviance."

Although the film was a critical and box-office success, and received several Academy Award nominations, it ignited a furor, especially in London, centre of du Pre's activities. A group of her closest colleagues (including fellow cellists Rostropovich and Julian Lloyd Webber) sent a bristling letter to *The Times*.

Clare Finzi, Hilary's daughter, charged that the film was a "gross misinterpretation, which I cannot let go unchallenged." Students from the Royal College of Music picketed the premiere, although this was later revealed by the *London Evening Standard* to have been a publicity stunt set up by the film's publicity company. Barenboim — who has always teetered on the edge of villainy in du Pré-revering quarters — said, "Couldn't they have waited until I was dead?"

Hilary, Jacqui's sister, and co-author of the book strongly defends both the book and the film, writing, in *The Guardian*; "At first I could not understand why people didn't believe my story because I had set out to tell the whole truth. When you tell someone the truth about your family, you don't expect them to turn around and say that it's bunkum. But I knew that Jackie would have respected what I had done. If I had gone for half-measures, she would have torn it up. She would have wanted the complete story to be told." *The New Yorker* reports her as saying, "When you love someone, you love the whole of them. Those who are against the film want to look only at the pieces of Jackie's life that they accept. I don't think the film has taken any liberties at all. Jackie would have absolutely loved it."