

Natalie Portman

Natalie Portman (born **Neta-Lee Hershlag**; Hebrew: נטע-לי הרשלג;^[3] June 9, 1981)^[4] is an actress, film producer and film director with dual American and Israeli citizenship. Her first role was in the 1994 action thriller *Léon: The Professional*, opposite Jean Reno, but mainstream success came when she was cast as Padmé Amidala in the *Star Wars* prequel trilogy (released in 1999, 2002 and 2005).

Born in Jerusalem to an Israeli father and American mother, Portman grew up in the eastern United States from the age of three. She studied dancing and acting in New York, and starred in *Star Wars: Episode I – The Phantom Menace* while still at high school on Long Island. In 1999, Portman enrolled at Harvard University to study psychology, alongside her work as an actress; she completed a bachelor's degree in 2003. During her studies she starred in a second *Star Wars* film and opened in New York City's Public Theater production of Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull* in 2001.

Portman won a Golden Globe and was nominated for an Academy Award for starring in the 2004 drama *Closer*, appeared in *Star Wars: Episode III – Revenge of the Sith* the following year, and won a Constellation Award for Best Female Performance and a Saturn Award for Best Actress for her starring role in the political thriller *V for Vendetta* (2006). She played leading roles in the historical dramas *Goya's Ghosts* (2006) and *The Other Boleyn Girl* (2008), and also appeared in *Thor* (2011) and its 2013 sequel. In 2010, Portman starred in the psychological horror film *Black Swan*. Her performance received widespread critical acclaim and she earned her first Academy Award for Best Actress, her second Golden Globe Award, the SAG Award, the BAFTA Award and the BFCA Award in 2011.

In May 2008, Portman served as the youngest member of the 61st Annual Cannes Film Festival jury. The same year she directed a segment of the collective film *New York, I Love You*. Her first feature film as a director, *A Tale of Love and Darkness*, was released in 2015.

1 Early life

Portman was born on June 9, 1981 in Jerusalem.^{[5][6][7]} Her original given name was Neta-Lee, a Hebrew name.^{[3][8]} She is the only child of Shelley (*née* Stevens),^[9] an American homemaker who works as Portman's agent, and Avner Hershlag, an Israeli fertility spe-

cialist and gynecologist.^[10]

Her maternal grandparents, Bernice (*née* Hurwitz; 1925–2014) and Arthur Stevens^[9] (whose family surname was originally *Edelstein*),^[11] were from Jewish families who moved to the United States from Austria and Russia.^[12] Natalie's paternal grandparents, Mania (*née* Portman) and Zvi Yehuda Hershlag, were Jewish immigrants to Israel.^{[13][14]} Zvi, born in Poland in 1914, moved to what was then Mandatory Palestine in 1938 and eventually became an economics professor; his parents died at Auschwitz.^[14] One of Natalie's paternal great-grandmothers was born in Romania and was a spy for British Intelligence during World War II.^{[15][16][17]}

Portman's parents met at a Jewish student center at Ohio State University, where her mother was selling tickets. They corresponded after her father returned to Israel and were married when her mother visited a few years later. In 1984, when Portman was three years old, the family moved to the United States, where her father received his medical training.^[12] Portman, a dual citizen of the United States and Israel,^[18] has said that although she “really love[s] the States... my heart's in Jerusalem. That's where I feel at home.”^[15]

Portman and her family first lived in Washington, D.C., but relocated to Connecticut in 1988 and then moved to Jericho, New York, on Long Island,^[19] in 1990.^{[20][21][22]}

2 Education

While living in the Washington, D.C. area, Portman attended Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School in Rockville, Maryland.^[13] Portman learned to speak Hebrew^[23] while living on Long Island and attended a Jewish elementary school, the Solomon Schechter Day School of Nassau County in Jericho, New York.^{[19][24]} She graduated from Syosset High School in Syosset, Long Island in 1999.^{[25][26][27]} She studied ballet and modern dance at the American Theater Dance Workshop in New Hyde Park, New York, and attended the Usdan Center for the Creative and Performing Arts in Wheatley Heights, both on Long Island.^[19] Portman skipped the premiere of her film *Star Wars: Episode I – The Phantom Menace*, so she could study for her high school final exams.^[28]

In 2003, Portman graduated from Harvard University with an Artium Baccalaureus (A.B.) degree in psychology.^{[27][29][30][31]} “I don't care if [college] ruins my career,” she told the *New York Post*. “I'd rather be

smart than a movie star.”^{[32][33]} At Harvard, Portman was Alan Dershowitz’s research assistant.^{[34][35]} While attending Harvard, she was a resident of Lowell House^[36] and wrote a letter to the *Harvard Crimson* in response to an essay critical of Israeli actions toward Palestinians.^[37]

Portman returned to Israel and took graduate courses at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in the spring of 2004.^[38] In March 2006, she was a guest lecturer at a Columbia University course in terrorism and counterterrorism, where she spoke about her film *V for Vendetta*.^[39] Portman has professed an interest in foreign languages since childhood and has studied French,^[40] Japanese,^[40] German,^[41] and Arabic.^[42]

As a student, Portman co-authored two research papers that were published in scientific journals. Her 1998 high school paper, “A Simple Method to Demonstrate the Enzymatic Production of Hydrogen from Sugar,” co-authored with scientists Ian Hurley and Jonathan Woodward, was entered in the Intel Science Talent Search.^[43] In 2002, she contributed to a study on memory called “Frontal lobe activation during object permanence: data from near-infrared spectroscopy” during her psychology studies at Harvard.^{[44][45]}

As a consequence of both her academic and acting careers, Portman has an Erdős–Bacon number of 7.^{[46][47][48][49][50]}

3 Career

3.1 Early work

Portman started dancing lessons at age four and performed in local troupes. At the age of 10, a Revlon agent asked her to become a child model,^{[20][51]} but she turned down the offer to focus on acting. In a magazine interview, Portman said that she was “different from the other kids. I was more ambitious. I knew what I liked and what I wanted, and I worked very hard. I was a very serious kid.”^[52]

On school holidays, Portman attended theater camps. When she was 10, Portman auditioned for the 1992 off-Broadway show *Ruthless!*, a musical about a girl who is prepared to commit murder to get the lead in a school play. Portman and future pop star Britney Spears were chosen as the understudies for star Laura Bell Bundy.^[38]

In 1993, she auditioned for the role of an orphan child who befriends a middle-aged hitman (played by Jean Reno) in Luc Besson’s film, *Léon: The Professional*. Soon after getting the part, she took her paternal grandmother’s maiden name, “Portman”, as her stage name in the interest of privacy and to protect her family’s identity.^{[53][54]} *Léon: The Professional* opened in 1994,^[55] marking her feature film debut.^[56]

3.2 1995–99

During the mid-1990s, Portman had roles in the films *Heat*, *Everyone Says I Love You*, and *Mars Attacks!*, as well as a major role in *Beautiful Girls*.^[20] She was the first choice to play Juliet in *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet*, but producers felt her age wasn’t suitable.^[51] In 1997, Portman played the role of Anne Frank in a Broadway adaptation of *The Diary of Anne Frank*.^[57]

Also in 1997, Portman was cast as Padmé Amidala in the *Star Wars* prequel trilogy. The first film, *The Phantom Menace*, began filming in June 1997 and opened in May 1999.^{[20][58]} Following production on *The Phantom Menace*, she initially turned down a lead role in the film *Anywhere but Here* after learning it would involve a sex scene, but director Wayne Wang and actress Susan Sarandon (who played Portman’s mother in the film) demanded a rewrite of the script. Portman was shown a new draft, and she decided to accept the role.^[20] The film opened in late 1999, and she received a Golden Globe nomination for Best Supporting Actress for her role as Ann August.^[59] Critic Mary Elizabeth Williams of *Salon* called Portman “astonishing” and said that “[u]nlike any number of actresses her age, she’s neither too maudlin nor too plucky.”^[60] She then signed on to play the lead role of a teenage mother in *Where the Heart Is*, which opened in April 2000.^[61]

3.3 2000–05



On the set of *Free Zone*, 2005

After filming *Where the Heart Is*, Portman moved into the dorms of Harvard University to pursue her bachelor’s degree in psychology.^[20] She said in a 1999 interview that, with the exception of the *Star Wars* prequels, she would not act for the next four years in order to concentrate on studying.^[62] During the summer break from June to September 2000, Portman filmed *Star Wars: Episode II – Attack of the Clones* in Sydney, along with additional production in London.^[63]

In July 2001, Portman opened in New York City’s Public Theater production of Chekhov’s *The Seagull*, directed

by Mike Nichols; she played the role of Nina alongside Meryl Streep, Kevin Kline, and Philip Seymour Hoffman.^[20] The play opened at the Delacorte Theater in Central Park.^[64] That same year, she was one of many celebrities who made cameo appearances in the 2001 comedy *Zoolander*. Portman was cast in a small role in the film *Cold Mountain*.^[20]

In 2004, Portman appeared in the independent movies *Garden State* and *Closer*.^[20] *Garden State* was an official selection of the Sundance Film Festival and won Best First Feature at the Independent Spirit Awards. Her performance as Alice in *Closer* earned her a Supporting Actress Golden Globe as well as a nomination for the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress.^{[65][66]}

The final *Star Wars* prequel, *Star Wars: Episode III – Revenge of the Sith*, was released on May 19, 2005. The film was the highest grossing domestic film of that year^[67] and was voted Favorite Motion Picture at the People’s Choice Awards. Also in 2005, Portman filmed *Free Zone* and director Miloš Forman’s *Goya’s Ghosts*. Forman had not seen any of her work but thought she looked like a Goya painting, so he requested a meeting.^[68]



At the 2009 Toronto International Film Festival

3.4 2006–09

Portman hosted live television sketch comedy show *Saturday Night Live* on March 4, 2006.^[69] In a SNL Digital Short, she portrays herself as an angry gangsta rapper (with comedian Andy Samberg as her partner in Viking garb) during a faux-interview with comedian Chris Parnell, saying she cheated at Harvard University while high on marijuana and cocaine.^[70] The song, titled “Natalie’s Rap,” was released – alongside other sketches from the show – in 2009 on *Incredibad*, an album by the Lonely Island.^[71]

V for Vendetta opened in early 2006. Portman portrayed Evey Hammond, a young woman who is saved from the secret police by anarchist freedom fighter V. Portman worked with a voice coach for the role, learning to speak with an English accent, and she famously had her head shaved.^[72]

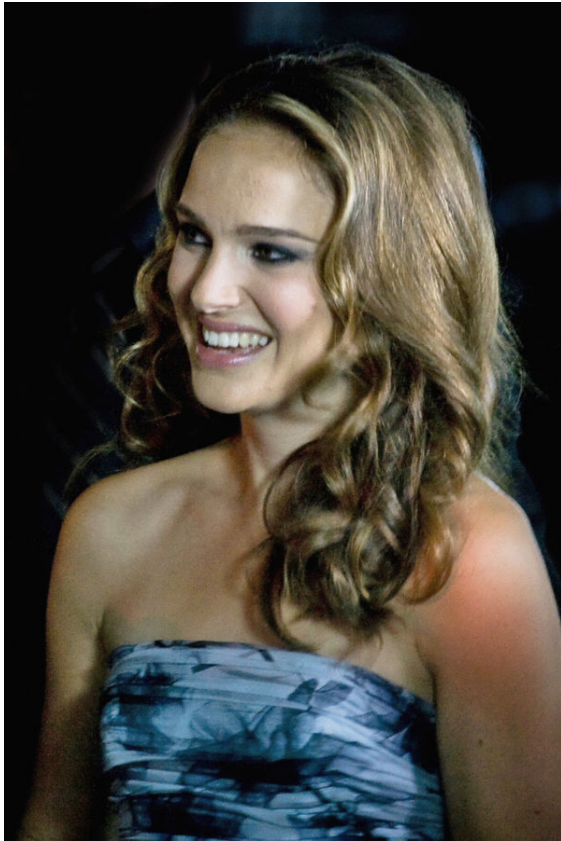
Portman has commented on *V for Vendetta*’s political relevance and mentioned that the main character, who recruits Evey to join an underground anti-government group, is “often bad and does things that you don’t like” and that “being from Israel was a reason I wanted to do this because terrorism and violence are such a daily part of my conversations since I was little.” She said the film “doesn’t make clear good or bad statements. It respects the audience enough to take away their own opinion”.^[73]

Both *Goya’s Ghosts* and *Free Zone* received limited releases in 2006. Portman starred in the children’s film *Mr. Magorium’s Wonder Emporium*, which began filming in April 2006 and was released in November 2007; she has said that she was “excited to do a kids’ movie.”^[72] In late

2006, Portman filmed *The Other Boleyn Girl*, a historical drama in which she plays Anne Boleyn; Eric Bana and Scarlett Johansson co-starred.^[74]

In 2006, she filmed Wong Kar-wai’s road movie *My Blueberry Nights*. She won acclaim for her role as gambler Leslie, because “[f]or once she’s not playing a waif or a child princess but a mature, full-bodied woman... but she’s not coasting on her looks ... She uses her appeal to simultaneously flirt with and taunt the gambler across the table.”^[75] Portman voiced Bart Simpson’s girlfriend Darcy in the episode “Little Big Girl” of *The Simpsons*’ 18th season.^[76]

She appeared in Paul McCartney’s music video “Dance Tonight” from his 2007 album *Memory Almost Full*, directed by Michel Gondry.^[77] Portman co-starred in the Wes Anderson short film *Hotel Chevalier*, opposite Jason Schwartzman. In May 2008, Portman served as the youngest member of the 61st Annual Cannes Film Festival jury.^[78] Portman’s directorial debut, *Eve*, opened the 65th Venice International Film Festival’s shorts competition in 2008.^[79] The short film, about a young woman who is dragged along on her grandmother’s romantic date, was screened out of competition and Portman drew inspiration for the character from her own grandmother.^[80] In 2009, she starred opposite Tobey Maguire and Jake Gyllenhaal in the drama film *Brothers*, a remake of the 2004 Danish film of the same name.^[81]



At the premiere of *Black Swan* during the 2010 Toronto International Film Festival

3.5 2010–present

Portman played a young ballerina in Darren Aronofsky's 2010 film *Black Swan*,^[82] a role of which critic Kurt Loder wrote: "Portman gives one of her most compelling performances in this film, which is saying something."^[83]

To prepare for the role, she went through five to eight hours of dance training each day for six months and lost 20 pounds (9 kg).^[84] In 2011, she won both the Golden Globe Award and the Academy Award for Best Actress.^{[85][86]}

After Portman's Oscar win, controversy arose over who performed the bulk of the on-screen dancing in *Black Swan*.^[87] Sarah Lane, one of Portman's dancing doubles in the film, claimed that Portman performed only about five percent of the full-body shots, adding that she was asked by the film's producers not to speak publicly about it during the Oscar season.^[88] Director Aronofsky defended Portman by issuing a statement insisting that Portman performed 80 percent of the on-screen dancing in the movie.^[88] Portman was trained by professional ballerina Mary Helen Bowers for her role in the film and later wrote the foreword to Bowers' book, *Ballet Beautiful*.^[89]

Portman co-starred in the 2011 film *No Strings Attached*, alongside Ashton Kutcher. She was also an executive producer on the film. She then starred in *Your Highness*, op-

posite James Franco and Danny McBride, and also played the role of Jane Foster in Kenneth Branagh's superhero film adaptation *Thor* and reprised the role in *Thor: The Dark World*.^[90] In 2010, Portman dropped out of the lead role of Elizabeth Bennet in the novel adaptation, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, but served as producer of the finished film, which was released in 2016.^[91]

In 2010, Portman signed on with Dior and appeared in several of the company's advertising campaigns. In October 2012, Britain's Advertising Standards Authority banned a Dior advertisement that featured Portman wearing Dior mascara after a complaint from Dior's competitor, L'Oreal. The ASA ruled that the photographs of Portman "misleadingly exaggerated the likely effects of the product".^[92]

By February 2012, Portman had signed on for two Terrence Malick projects, one named *Knight of Cups* and one yet untitled, both planned for release within two years.^[93] In April 2012, Portman starred in Paul McCartney's music video, "My Valentine", alongside Johnny Depp.^[94] Portman is scheduled to star in the Western film *Jane Got a Gun*.^{[95][96]}

In July 2013, Portman announced she had chosen an adaptation of Israeli author Amos Oz's autobiographical novel *A Tale of Love and Darkness* as her directorial feature debut. Portman also starred in the film and was a co-writer on the script.^[97] *A Tale of Love and Darkness* premiered at the 2015 Cannes Film Festival.^[98]

In May 2015, Portman signed on to play the title role in director Pablo Larrain's *Jackie*, a biographical drama about 1960s American First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy following the death of her husband, President John F. Kennedy.^[99]

4 Social and political causes

Portman, who is an advocate for animal rights, became a vegetarian when she was eight years old, a decision which came after she witnessed a demonstration of laser surgery on a chicken while attending a medical conference with her father.^[100] She became a vegan in 2009 after reading Jonathan Safran Foer's *Eating Animals*.^[101] She does not eat animal products or wear fur, feathers, or leather. "All of my shoes are from Target and Stella McCartney", she has said.^[102] In 2007, she launched her own brand of vegan footwear.^[103]

During her pregnancy in 2011, Portman went off her vegan diet and returned to vegetarianism,^[104] though she resumed a fully vegan diet afterwards.^[105]

In 2007, Portman traveled to Rwanda with Jack Hanna, to film the documentary, *Gorillas on the Brink*. Later, at a naming ceremony, Portman named a baby gorilla Gukina, which means "to play."^[106] Portman has been an advocate of environmental causes since childhood, when she



Speaking about her work with global microfinance organization, FINCA International at Columbia University in 2007

joined an environmental song and dance troupe known as World Patrol Kids. She is also a member of the One Voice movement.^[107]

Portman has also supported antipoverty activities. In 2004 and 2005, she traveled to Uganda, Guatemala, and Ecuador as the Ambassador of Hope for FINCA International, an organization that promotes micro-lending to help finance women-owned businesses in developing countries.^[108] In an interview conducted backstage at the Live 8 concert in Philadelphia and appearing on the PBS program *Foreign Exchange with Fareed Zakaria*, she discussed microfinance. Host Fareed Zakaria said that he was “generally wary of celebrities with fashionable causes”, but included the segment with Portman because “she really knew her stuff”.^[109]

In the “Voices” segment of the April 29, 2007, episode of the ABC Sunday morning program *This Week with George Stephanopoulos*, Portman discussed her work with FINCA and how it can benefit women and children in Third World countries.^[110] In fall 2007, she visited several university campuses, including Harvard, USC, UCLA, UC Berkeley, Stanford, Princeton, New York University, and Columbia, to inspire students with the power of microfinance and to encourage them to join the Village Banking Campaign to help families and communities lift themselves out of poverty.^[111]

Portman is a supporter of the Democratic Party, and in the 2004 presidential race she campaigned for the Democratic nominee, Senator John Kerry. In the 2008 presidential election, Portman supported Senator Hillary Clin-

ton of New York in the Democratic primaries. She later campaigned for the eventual Democratic nominee, Senator Barack Obama of Illinois, during the general election. In a 2008 interview, she also stated: “I even like John McCain. I disagree with his war stance — which is a really big deal — but I think he’s a very moral person.”^[112]

In 2010, Portman’s activist work and popularity with young people earned her a nomination for VH1’s *Do Something Awards*, which is dedicated to honoring individuals who do good.^[113] In 2011, Portman and her then-fiancé Benjamin Millepied were among the signers of a petition to President Obama in support of same-sex marriage.^[114] Portman supported Obama’s re-election campaign.^[115]

In January 2011, Portman became an ambassador of Free the Children, an international charity and educational partner, spearheading their Power of a Girl campaign.^[116] She hosted a contest challenging girls in North America to fundraise for one of Free The Children’s all-girls schools in Kenya. As incentives for the contest winner, she offered her designer Rodarte dress, worn at the red carpet premier of *Black Swan*, along with tickets to her next premiere.^[116] Free the Children’s all-girls school was also the beneficiary of proceeds from sales of *Nude Grege #169*, the lipstick Portman designed for Christian Dior.^[117] It was announced in May 2012 that Portman would be working with watch designer Richard Mille to develop a limited-edition timepiece with proceeds supporting Free the Children.^[118]

In February 2015, Portman was among other alumni of Harvard University including Robert F. Kennedy, Jr, Darren Aronofsky and Susan Faludi who wrote an open letter to the school demanding it divest its \$35.9 billion endowment from coal, gas, and oil companies.

Those students have done a remarkable job in garnering overwhelming student support for divestment, and the faculty too have delivered a strong message. But so far [Harvard] has not just refused to divest, they’ve doubled down by announcing the decision to buy stock in some of the dirtiest energy companies on the planet. — Open letter to Harvard University from notable alumni, 2014^[119]

Later that year in May, she spoke at the annual Harvard Class Day to the graduating class of 2015.^[120]

5 Personal life

In 2006, she commented that she felt more Jewish in Israel and that she would like to raise her children Jewish: “A priority for me is definitely that I’d like to raise my kids Jewish, but the ultimate thing is to have someone who is a good person and who is a partner.”^[121]



Holding her Oscar at the 83rd Academy Awards, 2011

After starring in the video for his song “Carmensita”, she began a relationship with folk singer Devendra Banhart,^[122] which ended in September 2008.^[123]

Portman began dating ballet dancer Benjamin Millepied in 2009. The couple met while she was filming *Black Swan*, for which he was the choreographer.^[124] In December 2010, Portman announced their engagement and confirmed her pregnancy.^{[125][126][127]} Portman gave birth to their son Aleph Portman-Millepied on June 14, 2011.^{[128][129]} In February 2012, Portman and Millepied were photographed wearing wedding rings at the Academy Awards ceremony,^[130] but representatives did not respond to requests for comment on the couple’s marital status.^{[131][132]} On August 4, 2012, Portman and Millepied married in an intimate Jewish ceremony in Big Sur, California.^{[133][134]}

In January 2013, the Paris Opera Ballet announced that Millepied had accepted the position of director of dance, beginning September 2014.^[135]

The couple subsequently announced plans to relocate to Paris. Portman has said she would like to become a French citizen.^[136] In January 2014, Millepied said he was in the process of converting to Judaism.^[137]

6 Awards and nominations

Main article: List of awards and nominations received by Natalie Portman

7 Filmography

Main article: Natalie Portman filmography

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11.1 Text

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