



FESTIVAL DE CANNES

OFFICIAL SELECTION

COMPETITION

**LES
CHANSONS
D'AMOUR
(LOVE SONGS)**

Paulo Branco presents



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**LOUIS GARREL LUDIVINE SAGNIER CHIARA MASTROIANNI
CLOTILDE HESME GRÉGOIRE LEPRINCE-RINGUET**

LES CHANSONS D'AMOUR (LOVE SONGS)

A film by CHRISTOPHE HONORÉ

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SYNOPSIS

Every love song tells the same story:

"There are too many people who love you"...

"I could never live without you"...

"Sorry Angel"...

LES CHANSONS D'AMOUR tells that story too.

INTERVIEW WITH CHRISTOPHE HONORÉ

The origins of LES CHANSONS D'AMOUR lie in pre-existent musical material: the songs written by Alex Beaupain...

I've known Alex ever since we were both twenty. He has composed the music for all of my films, I myself have written a few lyrics for him. After the warm reception given to DANS PARIS allowed me to get to work quickly on another project, I asked him if I could use his songs - some from his latest album, others that were much older - and I placed them within a screenplay that told a fairly painful story that we both shared. I subsequently adapted some of his lyrics and asked him to write a few new songs.

This is the first time that you have dealt so directly with the emotions of love...

In DANS PARIS, I dared to present people who felt love for each other but it was above all brotherly love, I still felt embarrassed about the emotions of love. For me, it was a big step to place emotion at the heart of a story, I've never been able to do it before. This led to the idea of a film in which the characters start singing as soon as they are in a state of love because they are incapable of expressing it otherwise. I have always loved songs, the way they allow you to express a strong emotion in a fleeting manner, with a permanent need for lightness. I have always been a huge fan of love songs, I can be moved by a French popular song that, in theory, holds no interest for me musically, simply because I am touched by a chorus, a voice or an emotion that I find expressed in a pertinent manner.

Had you wanted to make a musical for a long time?

Yes, but I wanted the choice of the genre to be justified rather than make a lampoon of its codes. Irony is often very flattering because you feel you're being smart but it is totally devoid of interest. There was no question of me making a parody of the genre. I simply approached it by saying, "This film is a musical because the characters can only express their feelings by singing." I like the spirit of musicals, which resembles that of pop music: never complain, never dwell on things, offering the possibility of lyricism with its roots in everyday tragedy.

Did the fact of using pre-existent material alter the way in which you approached the screenplay?

LES CHANSONS D'AMOUR tells such a personal story that I knew it by heart. The issue of the story was never raised in fact, only the idea of how to deal with it without becoming petrified, how to tell it and make it work in a musical structure that reflects on the whole film. The settings, such as the parents' apartment, return like a chorus, with a different tone according to what happened in the previous verse. And, as in a song where certain instruments return or vanish while others are added on, the secondary characters give fresh impetus to the story while others are ejected from it.

How did the musical work on the film unfold?

We re-arranged Alex's songs with Frédéric Lo, who has worked notably with Daniel Darc - never losing sight of the fact that we didn't have a whole year ahead of us, nor the budget to bring in an orchestra. We tried to match our desire to our means and I think that this has ended up creating an aesthetic approach and a form of precision. People often talk about the precision of an actor, about the right distance adopted by a director but the general aesthetic approach of a film has to be just as precise. Alex and I did not want the songs to sound "cheap". The actors rehearsed a great deal with Alex. We did the first readings all together in early November, then recorded the songs just before Christmas so that the actors could lip-synch to them during shooting that began in early January.

Did filming characters who sing change your approach to directing?

Filming characters who sing is very complicated in physical terms. You have to make sure that the changeover from speech to song, then the return to speech again, looks completely natural... but, at the same time, something that is "not natural" takes place. Direction has to take a step back from realism, but without becoming a music video. The fear of turning my film into 13 music videos made me come out in a cold sweat. To the extent that the first

song I filmed was shot as a single take and I refused to break it down into different shots. However, I saw right away that this was a very bad idea because I was going to end up in the cutting room with a series of single takes that I wouldn't be able to cut. I therefore opted for increasingly complex direction and shots depending on the songs or according to the emotion that they express.

"The departure", "The absence", "The return"... A three-part structure...

It was during editing that I realized there were three parts to the film. This is the classical structure of any romantic comedy or drama. In LES CHANSONS D'AMOUR, the return of the emotion of love comes about through a third party exterior to the tragedy and through the appearance of a ghost. In fact, perhaps the basic idea of the film was to allow that ghost to return to earth just long enough for a song.

Each character reacts differently to the sudden arrival of tragedy...

I have the impression that they react above all at different speeds. Ismaël (Louis Garrel) walks along blindly but he keeps walking in spite of everything. From the very beginning of the story, I have filmed him in motion and I refused to halt that motion in spite of the sudden tragedy. And then Erwann (Grégoire Leprince-Ringuet) quickens his pace a little. Jeanne (Chiara Mastroianni), on the other hand, is condemned to be immobile: she remains a fixed point. The tragedy freezes her. As for Alice (Clotilde Hesme), she walks alongside Ismaël, then she turns away from his path to follow another story with this Breton guy that she meets. In my previous films, tragedy arose from the expectation of disaster. LES CHANSONS D'AMOUR is more about the consequences of it and how to resist. It's a film more rooted in the present in fact. Here, the tragedy opens up new lands to explore.

Does our period have a right to its own tragedies?

Tragedy arrives unannounced, we don't need the Trojan War for it to burst into our lives. The idea was to physically locate the story in the city... Without necessarily making a documentary or militant film, I wanted a topical dimension, resulting in the idea of Ismaël being a newspaper editor, in order world someone in charge of the fold's news. The end of his idyll and his carefree days does not take place outside that world.

You are gaining a reputation as a filmmaker of the early 21st century who films today's world and is fully implicated in it...

Yes, I feel this need to deal with the modern world very strongly. I believe that this need is also linked to the production conditions of this film and my previous one. Very little time went by between the moment when I expressed the desire to make these films and the moment when we shot them. Paulo Branco can make very quick decisions, deciding in October to make a film in January. As a result, you don't have time to build up another world in your mind, you can only deal with what you are experiencing personally in the present, the present lives of the actors, the city, society...

This grounding in reality is all the more striking since the film has elements of the musical...

In musicals, you often have the impression of being in a fairly kitsch bubble, with slightly acid references and songs that create a distance with reality. When the exterior world is present, it is there as a guest. In LES CHANSONS D'AMOUR, I treat the real world as a partner more than as a guest. I think that the fact of filming the city where I live has its importance. In DANS PARIS, it was a "museum" Paris. With LES CHANSONS D'AMOUR, on the contrary, I opted to stick to the 10th arrondissement of the city. The 10th is one of the few neighbourhoods where people work out in the open, with men unloading delivery trucks... There was no question of blocking streets to shoot: I wanted life to slip into the

shots as much as possible and, at the same time, respect the geography of the setting. I forced myself to abide by this constraint, not so much as to produce an effect of reality as to prevent myself from toppling into fantasy.

How did you go about casting the film?

The first obvious choice was Chiara. I had wanted to work with her for a long time and I had heard her sing. Working with her was a revelation. I had the impression that I had found my female double and I plan to make many other films with her. As for Ludivine, I met her in an unexpected manner, I had heard her sing too. On a human level, something resembling a form of trust quickly fell into place between us. But I still didn't have the male lead at the time of our meeting and so I couldn't really commit then. That didn't bother her: she simply told me, "Remember, I'm here if you need me." And, of course, I needed her. Needed and wanted. I had worked with Clotilde Hesme on stage a long time ago, even before she made LES AMANTS RÉGULIERS. I found it amusing to reform, in a totally different manner, the couple that she created with Louis in LES AMANTS RÉGULIERS. And, above all, I wanted to make her perform in a livelier register. Her character continually turns up to refuel the story. In my opinion, Clotilde will soon be making her place in French cinema with the force of a dainty bulldozer.

This is the third time that you have worked with Louis Garrel...

Yes, but I nearly didn't pick him! I thought that he couldn't sing. And, in the beginning, I was looking for an Ismaël older than Louis. And so I started seeing other actors and I realize that the way in which the character spoke was that of Louis, his specific music. During that time, Louis was calling me regularly to ask how the casting process was going and to suggest actors. Then he asked me if he could read the screenplay. He left me messages on my voice-mail: "You know, I sing a little too..." I never considered making a third film with him but he kept insisting! So I sent him one of Alex's songs, suggesting that he prepares

it. One day, he came to my place to present his work to Alex and me. He asked us to turn round so that he could sing without seeing our faces and he took the plunge... His voice was quaking with fear but, for Alex and me, he was the obvious choice. In fact, the role was his from the beginning, I think that I had written it for him without realizing. Something has been built up between us with all these films, something that eludes us but that has helped us to grow and change. He has helped me to find my style, my identity as a filmmaker.

And Grégoire Leprince-Ringuet as Erwann?

He was in André Téchiné's LES ÉGARÉS. I remembered his voice well; it has a very specific quality like Chiara's or Ludivine's. Indeed, we found out later that André had spotted him in a choir. Grégoire represents a certain idea of youth without falling into the clichés or sexual fantasies of our times. His beauty has an open and unostentatious side to it. I wanted the character to be a young man who has no doubts about his homosexuality but who hasn't had an affair yet. Erwann isn't tormented by his sexuality but by his feelings. Grégoire displayed a form of simplicity and kindness that quickly convinced me that he was the right actor for the part.

These days, it's still possible to die of love...

Yes, the feeling has its dangerous side. I belong to a generation for which the idea of "dying for love" was necessarily linked to Aids and I wanted to relocate this danger in the realm of the emotions without the sexual side. Aids is still there, but the danger also lies in the way in which you don't feel loved or don't know how to love.

With the idea of finding your own rhythm too. "Love me less but love me for a long time," as Ismaël asks...

In the 1980s, one of Carax's characters asked: "Is there such a thing as love that moves fast but that lasts forever?" Twenty years later, LES CHANSONS D'AMOUR expresses this same feeling but with an extra shot of lucidity. Ismaël isn't asking for proof of love, he would rather be loved in a covert manner but with doggedness. In fact, today, I think contrary to Cocteau: "Proof of love doesn't exist, only love exists."

FILMOGRAPHY

CINEMA

FEATURE FILMS

- 2007 LES CHANSONS D'AMOUR
- 2006 DANS PARIS
- 2003 MA MÈRE
- 2002 17 FOIS CÉCILE CASSARD

SCREENPLAYS

- 2006 APRÈS LUI DIRECTED BY Gaël MOREL
- 2004 LE CLAN DIRECTED BY Gaël MOREL
- 2002 NOVO DIRECTED BY Jean-Pierre LIMOUSIN
- 2000 LES FILLES NE SAVENT PAS NAGER
DIRECTED BY Anne-Sophie BIROT

SHORT FILMS

- 2001 NOUS DEUX

STAGE WORK

DIRECTOR

- 2005 DIONYSOS IMPUISSANT
- 2004 BEAUTIFUL GUYS
- 2001 LE PIRE DU TROUPEAU ET PAS DES ...
- 1998 LES DÉBUTANTES

NOVELS

WITH LES ÉDITIONS DE L'OLIVIER

- 2005 LE LIVRE POUR ENFANTS
- 2002 SCARBOROUGH
- 1999 LA DOUCEUR
- 1997 L'INFAMILLE

BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

- 2006 VIENS
- 2005 TORSE NU
NOËL C'EST COUIC !
- 2004 M'AIMER
- 1999 LES NUITS OÙ PERSONNE NE DORT
MON CŒUR BOULEVERSÉ
- 1998 ZÉRO DE LECTURE
UNE TOUTE PETITE HISTOIRE D'AMOUR
- 1997 JE JOUE TRÈS BIEN TOUT SEUL
L'AFFAIRE P'TIT MARCEL
- 1996 C'EST PLUS FORT QUE MOI
- 1995 TOUT CONTRE LÉO

INTERVIEW WITH ALEX BEAUPAIN

Would you define LES CHANSONS D'AMOUR as a musical?

Not really. When you talk about a musical, you think of music-hall movies, sheer entertainment, the way the Americans know how to make them, with choreographed numbers and songs that comment on the action. Or the films of Jacques Demy, who invented a new musical language: sung words. I feel that LES CHANSONS D'AMOUR is more part of a French tradition of the 1960s and 70s, films like Truffaut's JULES ET JIM for instance where the characters suddenly start singing "Le tourbillon de la vie". Except that instead of having one or a few songs, as was also the case in DANS PARIS, here we have 13 songs that give structure to the film.

How did you work on the musical arrangements?

For us, it was obvious that we needed to rearrange the songs to create homogeneity between those from the first album and those that exist separately. That was very exciting! But I knew the songs too well, I needed an outside gaze. We quickly decided to work with Frédéric Lo, producer of Daniel Darc's "Crève-cœur", a very lyrical and rich album in spite of its minimalist arrangements. Frédéric had managed to make Daniel Darc use "speech-song", something that resembled our problems in adapting the songs for actors: favouring the reading rather than the vocal technique.

Unlike a song that you listen to over and over on an album, a song in a film must have an immediate effect on the audience and inscribe itself in the story...

There's the idea of a path through the film, the songs and the moments when the characters sing them are never innocuous. Nor how they sing them: alone, as a duo, as a trio, as a family... The film starts with fairly light-hearted songs. And we slowly move towards a more intense and lyrical musicality. We worked a great deal on the aural atmospheres according to how the scenes would be built up, whether they would take place out of doors or in a bedroom. But these

orientations occurred in a totally natural manner, probably because Christophe, in writing his screenplay, had already thought out precisely how to integrate the songs in the scenes.

The decision not to dub the actors but to have them sing for real was that an obvious choice?

Yes, because of the experience of having made Romain Duris sing in DANS PARIS, which had convinced us that an actor, even without any vocal technique, has qualities of interpretation and intention that make him ten times more moving than a professional singer. But since there were 13 songs and not just one as in DANS PARIS, we could no longer play on the surprise effect of hearing an actor sing, something that makes the audience less critical and less attentive to his vocal limitations.

Did the actors rehearse the songs with you?

Yes, we had three weeks of rehearsals at my place before going to the studio. I simply worked with the piano and their voices. Since they were actors, I thought that we would work on the «speech-song» technique but, in fact, they all had a lot of capabilities, they really sang, they dared to tackle the melody and rhythm.

In "Pourquoi viens-tu si tard ?", sung by Julie's ghost, there's the idea that a song can be sent through time...

I hadn't written the song with that in mind. For me, it was a "separate" song that had no ties with the story told in the film. I had written it for someone else. Therefore, I was very surprised, on reading the screenplay, that Christophe should use it in such a way. You would think that once Julie is dead, she could no longer sing. But she suddenly reappears with this song. I think that it is a very beautiful idea, especially in this film that was written to keep someone alive somewhere...

INTERVIEW WITH LOUIS GARREL

Christophe Honoré didn't originally consider you for LES CHANSONS D'AMOUR. Was it important for you to persuade him to make this third film together?

Yes, I like working with Christophe, it's easy and amusing, natural even. I played on fate, on the old saying that "things come in threes"! One day, I went to Christophe's place to prove to him and Alex Beaupain that I could sing. For me, singing in front of others was more shocking than what I did in MA MÈRE! Singing... That's something you can't control, it's so unnatural to start singing in front of others. Most of the time, we sing alone... For me, there is a feminine side to singing, it is part of women's charm, of their siren side!

For the film, how did you approach the sung scenes?

The hardest thing in the film was performing on screen the songs that we had pre-recorded. How can you show the effort of singing when you're not really singing? For me that was as tough as a mathematics problem! It drove me mad, even if Christophe told me to let myself go, to assume the unnatural side of singing in a film...

According to you, what specific things does singing allow you to express?

At the Conservatoire, I realized on singing Don Giovanni that singing has a divine side to it. It is a way of addressing heaven, it allows you to go beyond your earthly tie. In singing, we communicate with distant times. Singing in a film means bringing together a very ancient art and an art that is 110 years old, a venerable old man and a baby... I think that singing allows us to express the tragedy of apparently banal lives. Singing is the way in which tragedy can enter the story.

You have worked with Christophe Honoré on 3 films now, have you noticed an evolution in his work?

In DANS PARIS, there was a great deal of improvisation. His direction on LES CHANSONS D'AMOUR was tighter, it was like an old film for Christophe, he had been carrying the story with him for a long time. I could tell that his desire came from a long way back, it was like a late birth. In MA MÈRE, I was the son; in DANS PARIS, I was the brother; in LES CHANSONS D'AMOUR, I play a potential father who refuses to play that role. We never see Ismaël's family, we don't know where he comes from. I wondered why Christophe had made him Jewish... Perhaps simply because the Jewish people have always been drifting, with no ties. I know of Jews who never feel more at home than in other people's homes, like Ismaël in Julie's family clan.

And Julie's heart...

In the screenplay, the couple argued because he didn't want a child. This aspect is less present in the film but I kept that guilt in mind to play my character: killing a woman because you don't give her a child. If Julie has a heart attack, it's because she cannot go on living without a child. I don't think that it's a coincidence that Ismaël then meets a boy. Ismaël falls in love with someone who cannot have a child someone totally different from Julie who will not encroach upon his love with her. Erwann quickly enters Ismaël's life. Desire and laughter snap their fingers at death...

Even at the heart of the tragedy, you bring a breath of lightness to your character...

On reading the screenplay, the scene with the puppet in the kitchen struck me as particularly tricky... How can you be light with Julie's family just after she has died? Laughter isn't moral and I try to approach it as a clown. Ismaël is living through tragic events but he tries to be light-hearted, without necessarily losing his awareness of the tragedy...

In LES CHANSONS D'AMOUR, did your past complicity with Christophe Honoré place you in a special position?

In French the "hôte" is both the host and the guest... Well, I was the «hôte» on this film: I was Christophe's guest on his film and I was a host for the others who were working with him for the first time. It's a very pleasant position to be in: I left all the inconvenience to Christophe and, at the same time, I felt responsible for making everyone happy.

FILMOGRAPHY

CINEMA

FEATURES

- 2007 LES CHANSONS D'AMOUR by Christophe HONORÉ
- 2006 LE RÊVE DE LA NUIT D'AVANT by Valéria BRUNI-TEDESCHI
- DANS PARIS by Christophe HONORÉ
- 2004 LES AMANTS RÉGULIERS by Philippe GARREL
- Venice Mostra 2005 - Silver Lion
- César as Most Promising Male Newcomer
- 2003 MA MÈRE by Christophe HONORÉ
- 2002 THE DREAMERS by Bernardo BERTOLLUCCI
- 2000 CECI EST MON CORPS by Rodolphe MARCONI

SHORT FILMS

- 2006 CHOISIR D'AIMER by Rachi HAIM
- 2005 UN LEVÉ DE RIDEAU by François OZON

STAGE WORK

- 2006 BAAL by Bertold BRECHT
- Directed by Sylvain CROUZEVAULT
- 2005 VIOLS by Botho STRAUSS
- Directed by Luc BONDY
- LES VAGUES by Virginia WOOLF
- Directed by Guillaume VINCENT
- 2004 HOUM B
- Direction and choreography by Caroline MARCADE
- LA TRILOGIE DE BELGRADE by Biljana SRBLJANOVIC
- Directed by Christian BENEDETTI

INTERVIEW WITH LUDIVINE SAGNIER

How did you come to work on LES CHANSONS D'AMOUR?

Ever since 17 FOIS CÉCILE CASSARD, Christophe had been among the people I wanted to work with, he was on my "list". We met by chance in a bar and then my agent organized a meeting with him... At first, he was a little hesitant but then everything quickly came together. One month later, we were recording the songs. This film was made in a rush, with a small budget, in a fairly light and impromptu manner. The expressionism of the songs heightens this spontaneity, notably in the way of approaching the dialogue. The songs are explicit enough and require no further stress. They allow us to be more direct, to create a situation without a lengthy set-up. It's very enjoyable to make a film in which the music is a character in its own right that drives the situations along. Before beginning the film itself, we were already fine-tuning our performances, thanks to the songs that we had pre-recorded. We each had a CD, the whole crew bathed in this musical ambiance as in a bubble.

Were you apprehensive about performing a sung role?

It was a pleasure in fact... I had sung before, in François Ozon's films, and these songs don't require incredible skill. We don't force our voices, we're in a very intimate register. And the intimate is less scary than the showy. At the end of the day, the film doesn't use our talents as singers but rather our talents for performing and listening, our precision and sensitivity. Christophe's film unfolds in an everyday and naturalistic register. It was hard for me at first to hold myself back: I wanted to walk to the beat, dance, twirl or nod my head! We could hear the music over a loudspeaker, it was very hard to stay still and ignore the rhythm.

Each character reacts differently to Julie's death...

What I like about Christophe is that he's never judgemental, in particular in relation to Ismaël who seeks refuge in the arms of a boy. Jeanne, meanwhile, tortures herself with material details. I understand that well, it's a very human reaction, rendered sublime here by the musical aspect. LES CHANSONS D'AMOUR echoes UNE FEMME EST UNE FEMME. The film is set in

the same area of Paris, a woman wants a child... Godard also had a very light-hearted way of dealing with adultery and a ménage à trois. On the surface, the dialogue is very light but, deep down, it tells a tragic story.

How did your work with Louis Garrel go?

Louis has become a key figure in Christophe's cinema. He has an aura, a singularity, a freedom of performance and a way of representing his times that has nothing artificial about it. He is in an off-key mode that it is a delight to watch. Opposite him, I was in the type of cinema that I love.

Does Christophe Honoré have a special way of working?

He is very relaxed and devotes a great deal of time to the actors. There is great complicity between him and his actors, he likes to touch them, position them, stand in their marks, we have the impression of fusing with him in a way. I like it when a director is a double for his actors, when he performs with us.

Julie's family is very present...

I love the scene in which all the sisters are lying on the couch with their father who looks like a fat cat surrounded by his kittens. On reading the screenplay, I had the feeling that I knew this family. There was something obvious about it. Christophe has a totally incredible feeling for dialogue. He has humour, a sense of detail and complicity. I love the character of the youngest sister (Alice Butaud). She displays incredible cynicism, she seems indifferent, she is like the young girl that I could play in the past.

Can we perceive the end of an overly agitated heart?

Julie is fond of Alice but she also wants to move ahead in her couple. Deep down, I think that she is in a state of self-denial, she goes along with the threesome to keep her man happy. There is a form of devotion in her character. Julie has an elevated vision of love and she expects her man to be the same. What she hasn't realized is that men are self-centred! The film doesn't focus on Ismaël's egoism but it nonetheless, in a cover manner, asks the question, "Why do I give you everything I have and why don't you give me all your love? Why don't you tell me that you love me, why don't you tell me that you want children, why do you beat about the bush and why don't you tell me what I want to hear?" Julie is looking for something that will last, she fights against fleeting love affairs, she has a fairly classical vision of love. Sometimes, people die for no reason, that's the brutality of life... What I love in the film is that this threesome is not presented as a form of dissoluteness or transgression. Christophe's cinema has nothing subversive about it, he accepts anything that comes along. That's fairly symptomatic of this period of ours that is trying to get over the Aids years and to feel less guilty about the emotions of love. From this angle, Erwann is a magnificent character: he's the angel of redemption.

FILMOGRAPHY

CINEMA

FEATURES

- 2007 L'ENNEMI PUBLIC N°1 - L'INSTINCT DE MORT
by Jean-François RICHEL
- 2007 LES CHANSONS D'AMOUR by Christophe HONORÉ
- 2006 LA FILLE COUPÉE EN DEUX by Claude CHABROL
- 2006 UN SECRET by Laurent TIRARD
- 2005 PARIS JE T'AIME by Alfonso CUARON
- 2005 LA CALIFORNIE by Jacques FIESCHI
- 2005 UNE AVENTURE by Xavier GIANNOLI
- 2003 PETER PAN by P.J. HOGAN
- 2003 LA PETITE LILI by Claude MILLER
Official Selection Cannes 2003
- 2003 SWIMMING POOL by François OZON
Official Selection Cannes 2003
- 2001 PETITES COUPURES by Pascal BONITZER
- 2001 HUIT FEMMES by François OZON
Silver Bear for Best Artistic Contribution - Berlin Festival
- 2000 MA FEMME EST UNE ACTRICE by Yvan ATTAL
- JEU D'ENFANTS by Laurent TUEL
- 2000 TOOTHACHE by Ian SIMPSON
- 1999 BON PLAN by Jérôme LÉVY
- 1999 GOUTTES D'EAU SUR PIERRES BRÛLANTES by François OZON
- 1998 REMBRANDT by Charles MATTON
- LES ENFANTS DU SIÈCLE by Diane KURYS

SHORT FILMS

- 1996 ACIDE ANIMÉ by Guillaume BRÉAUD
Lutin as Best Actress (Nuit des Lutins)
- WINNER OF THE PRIX ROMY SCHNEIDER IN 2003

INTERVIEW WITH CHIARA MASTROIANNI

Did you know Christophe Honoré's films before appearing in LES CHANSONS D'AMOUR?

I had seen DANS PARIS and liked it a lot, especially the song between Romain Duris and Joana Preiss, which was my favourite moment. When he talked to me about LES CHANSONS D'AMOUR, I was delighted to see that he was taking the use of songs in a film even further. I love Christophe's spontaneity. He is both shy and audacious at the same time.

For you, what do songs allow you to express in the film?

For a start, they allow you to have fun! Songs have a very playful dimension. Even if I don't perform the happiest song in the film! Jeanne doesn't talk much, she is a fairly withdrawn character. In the song "Parc de la Pépinière", she can express herself at last. Christophe wanted this moment to be a dramatic one. He told me that if I could cry, that wouldn't be bad either... I think it's beautiful that Christophe decided to use songs to tell this painful story. The songs are a breath of fresh air that eases the characters' suffering. Songs never take themselves seriously.

Despite your experience as a singer, were you afraid of these moments of song?

Yes, I was afraid. I'm always afraid anyway! But my fear stimulated me rather than paralyzed me. I'm not sure that my experience as a singer really helped me because there's a big difference between singing alone in a studio and being filmed while you sing. But I was encouraged by my love of musicals, from Minnelli to Jacques Demy. And Christophe really played down the stakes in the sung scenes. He approached them in a simple manner, without overdoing it. He almost «trivialized» his project to avoid intimidating us.

Do you like love songs?

Of course, especially the sad ones! I'm a real sucker for them.

Your character, Jeanne, is perhaps the one who is the saddest when Julie dies. Unlike Ismaël or Alice, her grief immobilizes her...

Jeanne doesn't lead a very fulfilled life. So sorrow necessarily takes up a lot of room when she loses her sister. Jeanne has less spirit than the others. This period of mourning comes very early in her life, too early... especially as Julie's death remains unexplained, as if fate had come knocking at the door of this family. This leads to Jeanne's feelings of guilt: why was Julie the one who died and not her? Jeanne has the guilt of the one who is left behind. Ismaël rebounds more easily. Julie's grief overwhelms her and centres her at the same time, forcing her to pull herself together, to wake up. It is accompanied by an impulse to live.

Julie has a "cardiac arrest". Symbolically, do you think it is possible to die from too much emotional suffering?

Yes, I think it's possible to die because of one's feelings, to let oneself die. It happens to animals, so why not to human beings?! I love Christophe's film because of that to: he is proud to tell a love story, literally, without any snobbery.

In making this film, did you think about LES PARAPLUIES DE CHERBOURG, about your mother in that film?

Not at all. Christophe never referred to it. It was only when I saw the stills of Ludivine in her little white coat that I thought about it. But when I read the screenplay and when we were filming, not at all. The film was made in a very spontaneous manner, in very easy conditions. Christophe put the film together very quickly, he wanted to capture a moment of life. I'm used to these low-budget films produced by Paulo Branco and the economic constraints don't bother me. As long as the director can make the movie he wants to make, as long as there's enough film in the camera!

FILMOGRAPHY

CINEMA

FEATURES

- 2007 UN CONTE DE NOËL by Arnaud DESPLECHIN
LES CHANSONS D'AMOUR by Christophe HONORÉ
- 2006 L'HEURE ZÉRO by Pascal THOMAS
- 2004 AKOIBON by Edouard BAER
IL EST PLUS FACILE POUR UN CHAMEAU... by Valéria BRUNI-TEDESCHI
- 2001 CARNAGES by Delphine GLEIZE
Selected for «Un Certain Regard» - Cannes Festival 2002
- 2000 LE PAROLE DI MOI PADRE by Francesca COMENCINI
Selected for «Un Certain Regard» - Cannes Festival 2001
HÔTEL by Mike FIGGIS
- 1998 BRACCIA DI BURRO by Sergio CASTELLITTO
LA LETTRE by Manoel DE OLIVEIRA
Jury Prize - Cannes Festival 1999
LE TEMPS RETROUVÉ by Raoul RUIZ
Official Selection - Cannes Festival 1999
SIX PACK by Alain BERBERIAN
- 1997 À VENDRE by Laetitia MASSON
- 1996 CAMELEONE by Benoît COHEN
- 1995 COMMENT JE ME SUIS DISPUTÉ by Arnaud DESPLECHIN
Official Selection - Cannes Festival 1996
LE JOURNAL D'UN SÉDUCTEUR by Danièle DUBROUX
NOWHERE by Gregg ARAKI
TROIS VIES ET UNE SEULE MORT by Raoul RUIZ
Official Selection - Cannes Festival 1996

- 1994 PRÊT À PORTER by Robert ALTMAN
N'OUBLIE PAS QUE TU VAS MOURIR by Xavier BEAUVOIS
Prix Jean Vigo 1995
Jury Prize at the Cannes Festival
- 1993 LA BELLE ÉTOILE by Antoine DESROSIÈRES
- 1992 MA SAISON PRÉFÉRÉE by André TÉCHINÉ

- 1994 César nomination as Most Promising Female Newcomer

VOICE

- 2005 PERSEPOLIS by Marjane SATRAPI and Vincent PARONNAUD

SHORT FILM

- 1999 LA FAUTE AU VENT by Emmanuelle BERCOT

INTERVIEW WITH CLOTILDE HESME

How did you come to work on LES CHANSONS D'AMOUR?

I had already worked with Christophe Honoré on stage in one of his plays called LES DÉBUTANTES. Unfortunately, it only ran for four performances in Dijon. We regretted it and we promised to work together again one day. He called me for a part in DANS PARIS but I was working on stage at the time. With LES CHANSONS D'AMOUR, I couldn't miss the boat again! I have a great deal of admiration for Christophe, for his work as a writer, a filmmaker, a playwright and a director of actors. He is very fond of language and words but doesn't approach them in a cerebral manner. With him, the rehearsals are very physical, the language passes through the body.

This is especially true of the very vibrant Alice, the character you play...

Yes, Alice has a hellish delivery, when she speaks she sounds like a machinegun going crazy. When Christophe got me to work on Alice's rapid manner of speaking, I had the impression that I was having a diction work-out!

Weren't you afraid of singing?

At the Conservatoire, I skipped all the singing classes because I was terrified by the idea of having to sing. I would burst into tears, to the extent that the teacher thought that it hid some kind of trauma, that maybe my mother was a famous opera singer! It was only later that I took classes. I followed a year-long course with a brilliant teacher who made me want to sing. And a good job too! Without knowing it, I had prepared myself for Christophe's film...

Do you like love songs?

I love them ! I'm a big pop fan. My sister writes songs, I'm very close to that form of culture.

According to you, what do the songs bring to this story?

They provide the opportunity to talk about death while remaining grounded in life, while being joyful. Joy is something that typifies Christophe. He is an artist firmly on the side of life. Like Alex Beaupain too. I believe that it was very important for them to tell this story together. I thought that the sung scene on the phone between Romain Duris and Joana Preiss in DANS PARIS was fantastic. I would have liked it to last even longer, with more scenes like it. That is now the case with LES CHANSONS D'AMOUR and I'm happy and proud to have been involved in this adventure.

What is your view of the bonds that unite Julie, Alice and Ismaël?

Love is possible between them because there are three of them. As soon as Julie is no longer there, everything becomes shaky, the love between Ismaël and Alice no longer has any reason to exist. It would be almost indecent for Alice to carry on loving Ismaël now that Julie is no longer around. Alice has to come to terms with a dual loss: that of Julie and that of her love for Ismaël. Julie's loss reveals to her the love that she feels for Ismaël. Up until that point, her bisexuality protected her from her love for Ismaël, she sheltered behind her feelings for Julie.

In LES CHANSONS D'AMOUR, Christophe Honoré tackles the emotions of love without beating about the bush...

Yes, he is not at all afraid of emotion and feelings. He approaches all that without any cynicism but occasionally with a hint of self-derision, notably thanks to my character when she makes fun of Julie and Ismaël: "All this soppieness makes me sick!" But there is also a hint of envy in Alice's words. In a way, she would like to be in their shoes... In LES CHANSONS D'AMOUR, Christophe films people who love each other and I find it very noble and brave to be like that these days, to tell such a story. We are living in an age where we find it hard to accept great and noble feelings...

FILMOGRAPHY

CINEMA

FEATURES

- 2007 LES LIENS DU SANG by Jacques MAILLOT
LES CHANSONS D'AMOUR by Christophe HONORÉ
- 2006 LE FILS DE L'ÉPICIER by Eric GUIRADO
24 MESURES by Jalil LESPERT
- 2003 LES AMANTS RÉGULIERS by Philippe GARREL
À CE SOIR by Laure DUTHILLEUL
- 2001 LE CHIGNON D'OLGA by Jérôme BONNEL

SHORT FILMS

- 2006 LA PAIRE DE CHAUSSURES by Ismaël FERROUKHI
- 2005 COMMENT ON FREINE DANS UNE DESCENTE by Alix DELAPORTE
Golden Lion for Best Short Film - Venice Festival 2006
- 2001 FOCUS by Sébastien FABILOUX

STAGE WORK

- 2006 GETTING ATTENTION by Martin CRIMP
Directed by Christophe RAUK
LES NEVROSES SEXUELLES DE NOS PARENTS
by Lukas BARFUSS
Directed by Bruno BAYEN
- 2005 DESERT INN by Michel DEUTSCH
Directed by Michel DEUTSCH
- 2000-2001 LE RETOUR AU DESERT by B.M KOLTES
Directed by Thierry DE PERETTI
- 1999 LE BONNET DE FOU by L. PIRANDELLO
Directed by François ORSONI

INTERVIEW WITH GRÉGOIRE LEPRINCE-RINGUET

How did you come to work on LES CHANSONS D'AMOUR?

I knew all of Christophe's films. I saw DANS PARIS on the day it was released and I sent text messages to everyone: "Don't miss this film, it's brilliant!" The next day, by pure coincidence, I had a call from the casting director of LES CHANSONS D'AMOUR...

How would you describe Erwann, your character?

Erwann isn't very mysterious or very complicated. He's a young man who has his whole life ahead of him and who experiences love instead of going to school. That's very beautiful, we've all dreamt of doing that! Erwann quite simply accepts the fact of falling in love with a guy ten years older than he is and who may not necessarily be homosexual. Erwann is naïve enough to believe that if he gives all his love, shouting it from the rooftops, it's bound to work...

Do you know why Christophe Honoré chose you?

For a start, because I look Breton, even though I'm from Normandy! In the screenplay, Erwann was described as a beam of sunlight and I tried to get that across by singing the notes a little higher, by adding thirds, some of which made it into the film, notably in the final song, "J'ai cru entendre je t'aime".

Did singing help you to build up your character, to figure out who he was?

Yes, the desire to try for high-pitched and clear notes helped me to get a handle on the character. In fact, I think it would be a great exercise if you always needed to sing a song to know what your character is like... When you sing, the vocal work is necessarily more evolved. If only to hit the right note. You listen to yourself more carefully when you sing than when you speak, you are more aware of the tone of your voice and your intonation. I sang when I was little, I was in the Paris Opera children's chorus, as an alto.

How would you describe Christophe Honoré's cinema?

Christophe's cinema is very modern in its ideas and its characters that are on the cutting edge of today's adventures and sorrows. Melancholy is a very contemporary feeling. Christophe is someone very modern in his way of being and living and this is reflected in LES CHANSONS D'AMOUR, that films sexual - and emotional - liberty with a great deal of simplicity.

FILMOGRAPHIE

CINEMA

FEATURES

- 2005 LES CHANSONS D'AMOUR by Christophe HONORÉ
- 2006 LA VIE D'ARTISTE by Marc FITOUSSI
- VOLEURS DE CHEVAUX by Micha WALD
- 2005 SELON CHARLIE by Nicole GARCIA
- 2004 FAMILLE À VENDRE by Pavel LOUNGUINE
- 2002 LES ÉGARÉS by André TÉCHINÉ

SHORT FILMS

- 2005 LE PLAT À GRATIN by Rodolphe TISSOT
- 2002 DÉSHABILLEZ-MOI by Nuno PIRES

THÉÂTRE

- 1998/2002 WOYZECK
Directed by Patrice CHEREAU
LA FLÛTE ENCHANTÉE (soloist) with the Gruss circus
Directed by Michèle BROCA
CARMEN, TOSCA, LA BOHÈME, LA DAME DE PIQUE, Opéra Bastille
LE PETIT RAMONEUR (soloist) at the Opéra Comique
Directed by Mireille LAROQUE.

CAST

ISMAËL	Louis GARREL
JULIE	Ludivine SAGNIER
JEANNE	Chiara MASTROIANNI
ALICE	Clotilde HESME
ERWANN	Grégoire LEPRINCE-RINGUET
MOTHER	Brigitte ROÛAN
JASMINE	Alice BUTAUD
FATHER	Jean-Marie WINLING
GWENDAL	Yannick RENIER
BAR WAITRESS	Annabelle HETTMANN
ERWANN'S FRIEND	Esteban CARVAJAL ALEGRIA
POLICEMEN	Sylvain TEMPIER Guillaume CLERICE

CREW

Screenplay and Direction	Christophe HONORÉ
Music and original lyrics	Alex BEAUPAIN
Cinematography	Rémy CHEVRIN (AFC)
Sound	Guillaume LE BRAZ
Production design	Samuel DESHORS
Costume design	Pierre CANITROT
1st assistant director	Sylvie PEYRE
Casting	Richard ROUSSEAU
Management	Alexandre MELIAVA Philippe SAAL
Editing	Chantal HYMANS
Mix	Thierry DELOR
Produced by	ALMA FILMS
In partnership with	FLACH FILM
With the participation of	CNC CANAL+ CINÉCINÉMA
In partnership with	COFINOVA 3 & 4 COFICUP a BACKUP FILMS funds
Producer	Paulo BRANCO

AS-TU DÉJÀ AIMÉ ?

(Music and Lyrics) : Alex Beaupain)

Editions musicales naïve - Interpreted by Grégoire Leprince-Ringuet and Louis Garrel.

As-tu déjà aimé
Pour la beauté du geste
As-tu déjà croqué
La pomme à pleine dent
Pour la saveur du fruit
Sa douceur et son zeste
T'es-tu perdu souvent

Oui, j'ai déjà aimé
Pour la beauté du geste
Mais la pomme était dure
Je m'y suis cassé les dents
Ces passions immatures
Ces amours indigestes
M'ont écœuré souvent

Les amours qui durent
Font les amants exsangues
Et leurs baisers trop mûrs
Nous pourrissent la langue

Les amours passagères
Ont de futiles fièvres
Et leurs baisers trop verts
Nous écorchent les lèvres
Car à vouloir s'aimer

Pour la beauté du geste
Le ver dans la pomme
Nous glisse entre les dents
Il nous ronge le cœur
Le cerveau et le reste
Nous vide lentement

Mais lorsqu'on ose s'aimer
Pour la beauté du geste
Ce ver dans la pomme
Qui glisse entre nos dents
Nous embaume le cœur
Le cerveau et nous laisse
Son parfum au-dedans

Les amours passagères
Font de futiles efforts
Leurs caresses éphémères
Nous fatiguent le corps

Les amours qui durent
Font les amants moins beaux
Leurs caresses à l'usage
Ont raison de nos peaux

Have you ever loved
For the sheer sake of it
Have you ever taken
A bite of the apple
For the taste of the fruit
Its sweetness and its zest
Have you often lost your way

Yes, I've already loved
For the sheer sake of it
But the apple was hard
And I cracked a tooth
Those unripe passions
Those indigestible loves
Often made me feel sick

But a true love that lasts
Leaves lovers exhausted
And their overripe kisses
Rot on our tongues

But fleeting love affairs
Know such futile fevers
And their kisses so green
Chafe against our lips
For if you wish to love
For the sheer sake of it
The worm in the apple

Can slip between our teeth
It eats away at our heart
Our brain and all the rest
Slowly bleeding us dry

But when we dare to love
For the sheer sake of it
This worm in the apple
That slips between our teeth
Can make our heart fragrant
Our brain too and leave us
Its perfume inside us

But fleeting love affairs
See such futile efforts
Their passing caresses
Can wear out our bodies

But a true love that lasts
Makes the lovers less fine
Often the test of time
Gets the better of us

NOTES

