

KINO LORBER
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presents

A PARIS EDUCATION

(Mes provinciales)

A film by JEAN PAUL CIVEYRAC



****OFFICIAL SELECTION / 2018 BERLINALE PANORAMA****

**FRANCE | 2018 | 136MIN | B&W | ASPECT RATIO: 2:39:1
FRENCH W/ ENGLISH SUBTITLES**

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SYNOPSIS

Etienne (Andranic Manet), a serious and impressionable shaggy-haired young cinephile, leaves behind his steady girlfriend (Diane Rouxel) in Lyon to study film in Paris. Settling into a dingy flat with a rotating cast of roommates, he immerses himself in a bohemian world of artists, intellectuals, and fellow film geeks who excitedly share their passion for Bresson, Ford, and obscure Russian directors. It's a seemingly idyllic life of the mind—until more complicated matters of the flesh, as well as jealous creativity, intrude. Shooting in timeless black and white and interweaving references to philosophy, music, and cinema—from Pascal to Mahler to Parajanov—Jean-Paul Civeyrac conjures a bittersweet ode to the heady days of student life that evokes the films of the French New Wave. -- *Film Society of Lincoln Center*



DIRECTOR BIOGRAPHY

Born in 1964, Jean Paul Civeyrac graduated in philosophy from the University of Lyon before studying film at La Fémis in Paris. *La vie selon Luc* (1991), the short feature he made there was selected in competition at Cannes. In 1996, he shot his debut feature, *Neither Eve nor Adam*, followed by *Les Solitaires*, *Fantômes* and *Man's Gentle Love*. *All the Fine Promises* won the Jean Vigo Prize in 2003. His other credits include *Through the Forest*, *Young Girls in Black*, which premiered in Directors' Fortnight at Cannes 2010, and *My Friend Victoria* in 2014. Alongside his work as a filmmaker, Jean Paul Civeyrac has taught at La Fémis, Paris VIII University and Cours Florent drama school. In 2014, De l'incidence Editeur published *Écrit entre Les Jours*, a collection of his texts devoted to cinema and music, and in 2017, P.O.L. published an essay he did on filmmaking, *Rose Pourquoi*.

INTERVIEW WITH WRITER-DIRECTOR JEAN PAUL CIVEYRAC

What made you want to make this film now?

This film is intimately linked to my encounter with Frédéric Niedermayer, my producer. We wanted to make a relatively inexpensive film that could be done rapidly. It all took place in a context of complete trust and unstinting energy, as if in a dream, the way everything came together in almost miraculous fashion. At every stage of production, we encountered people who were excited by the project (distributors, actors, crew, etc). As for the screenplay, about a group of film students, it draws on various sources that suddenly crystallized. First of all, personal experience: having studied at La Fémis, then headed up the directing department there, and teaching now at Paris VIII University, I have spent thirty years in constant contact with film students. So that's a subject I know well. There are also the Blow Up shorts that I made for Arte's website, which feature characters talking about cinema, such as An Hour with Alice, starring Adèle Haenel and Grégoire Leprince-Ringuet, based on Milos Forman's Loves of a Blonde. And discovering Marlen Khutsiev's Ilyich's Gate was also decisive. That film, which blew me away, is the story of the friendship between three young men starting out in life. I saw it in June 2016. I started to write in July. With the story underpinned by a sentimental education, I wanted to talk about cinema, friendship, love and also politics, and to make a movie with the urgency of a first feature, even though it could not have become what it is, of course, without the experience of my previous movies.

Is the students' fervor for cinema an inextinguishable flame?

Yes, of course, but of all the students, only a minority truly possess it. At that age, many of them are trying to find themselves or flirting with the film business and, if they carve out a place in it, they don't direct. The fervor for cinema that features in A Paris Education is the one that drives anybody for whom making a film is an existential quest. They have to be worthy of the vision they have of their artform and themselves. Naturally, life takes care of teaching them exactly where they are at.

You were once a young man leaving the provinces for film school in Paris.

Yes, I grew up near St. Etienne, and arriving in Paris was a major upheaval. Seen from Firminy, Paris, where I knew no one, might as well have been Tokyo. It was a huge adventure! But at least half my classmates at La Fémis came from the provinces. In our little gang of four or five, it brought us closer together. We met up at the Cinémathèque, chatted with Parisian critics we had read and with filmmakers we liked. The world of cinema, previously experienced from the teenage solitude of our bedrooms, suddenly took shape. During all those years, someone like Jean-Claude Durant, for example, was hugely important to me. And more concretely, coming to Paris also meant resolving housing issues, money difficulties... Fortunately, like many students at La Fémis, I had a scholarship. To some extent, filming Paris in black & white was an attempt to bestow on it a romantic aspect, to render that sense of adventure felt by every person from the provinces who discovers it. In other words, deep down to give it a quite singular beauty.

Another theme of the film is the passage from dream to reality.

Alone in the provinces, you feel gifted, invincible, but when you arrive in Paris, you measure up to others. It engenders a kind of rivalry that is not always healthy. You're often forced to contemplate what you're doing and what you can do, and what you thought you could do becomes a hazy dream. It's brutal, painful, and occasionally you fall into abominable holes. The scene where Etienne has to be dragged from bed because he doesn't want to shoot really happened to me. I was so sure that what I was doing was terrible that I refused to show my face. So, in the film, Etienne gradually takes the measure of himself and others, and comes to terms with his own limits.

The French title, *Mes Provinciales*, seems to operate on various levels.

On the one hand, it evokes the young women with whom Etienne has relationships – which made me think of Rimbaud's *Mes petites amoureuses*. On the other hand, of course, it refers to Pascal and particularly to what he said about imposture and the purity of intentions being in accordance with acts. Etienne gradually learns not to lie to himself, not to delude himself about his own abilities, be they artistic or romantic. For example, not to consider himself faithful when he isn't.

Is the film very autobiographical?

The film takes a very free approach to combining real-life experiences and pure fiction. While it's more «autofiction» than autobiography, I have to admit that it must be the first time I have so little perspective on my characters because I know them so intimately. I was able to talk to each actor extensively and precisely about the character, text and subtext, and what references came into play. During preproduction, we had regular preparatory work sessions, like in the theatre. I tried to infuse in them some of that fervor for cinema, and they immersed themselves in their characters with such generosity and eagerness that it still impresses me today. As we had decided to shoot without delay, the momentum we picked up in those rehearsals never dissipated.

The actors are almost all unknowns.

Working with young actors is always a great pleasure. With every film, they give me the feeling that I'm at the beginning of something again. Devoid of an image, they are incredibly receptive and touchingly modest. In *A Paris Education*, there's a kind of echo between the actors and the film student protagonists. The students I rub shoulders with all year long at Paris VIII, who greatly influenced the script by infiltrating the autofiction of my own time as a student, have something in common with these budding actors: they are just starting to make films, they are unsure of their talent and worried about the future the world reserves for them (socially as well as ecologically, politically, etc). They at once display innocence and lucidity, which often leads them to engage very strongly. To have that embodied in the film by a new generation of French film actors helped, I believe, to establish credibility and thereby touch on very contemporary issues and emotions.

How did you set about casting the movie?

In auditions, I never use a scene from the script. Seeing it performed repeatedly wears it out so that, by the time you come to shoot, it is barely possible to breathe life into it. I prefer to write a separate scene featuring the film's protagonists. For *A Paris Education*, I wrote a dialogue about art and its importance in life because, in the movie, the discussions about cinema had to be perfectly credible. Some of the actors who auditioned were unable to look as if they knew what they were talking about. That enabled me to make an initial selection. Then I added a second part to the scene, where one of the characters confessed their love for another, which was intended to bring out how the actors in both roles could depict strong emotions. Only when we had chosen the actors who reached the greatest intensity did we allocate parts. So they found out which character they were going to play at the same time as me. A read-through involving the whole cast allowed us to check there had been no slip-ups in the distribution of roles, which was entirely feasible because each actor brought something to his or her character that I had not foreseen, adding another dimension to it. My whole process was based on the idea that combining a real-life person and an on-paper character creates the unique personality of a character on screen.

A Paris Education is a realistic film, which is not true of all your movies.

I have made films with internal realism and others with external realism, as Jean Renoir called it. While some portray an almost dreamlike fantasy world, others such as *A Paris Education* portray a very real world, even though I am far removed from naturalism, of course. In this film, there is a real-life context, a real-life city, with relationships between people that we can identify with. Bergman excelled in these two forms of realism: *Persona*, on the one hand; *Scenes from a Marriage* on the other. With *Fanny and Alexander*, he succeeded in combining both forms in the same picture, and it's one of my go-to movies.

What was your aesthetic approach?

I thought the film needed simple, sparing, transparent direction, so the camera is forgotten, self-effacing rather than intruding between audience and characters. It's the exact opposite of *A travers la forêt*, which is ten long takes with the camera as a character generating space and time. If the camera in *A Paris Education* is motionless or at most panning (except in the ultimate shots), and filming dialogue between people who are walking or sitting, it's precisely because I felt the point of the film lay in those characters, and therefore in those actors. Orson Welles recalled someone asking Chaplin, «Why is your framing never interesting?» And Chaplin replied, «Because what's interesting is me.» That seems to me the perfect answer.

Did the film change a lot in editing?

The crux of each scene posed few problems. On the other hand, the overall structure of the film required quite a few adjustments with regard to the script. I had pictured the film as a chronicle of student life, freely juxtaposing scenes without any particular link of cause-and-effect. That mosaic, however, was not completely effective. I realized that the film had an unexpectedly large narrative dimension. As a result, in editing, we reestablished the causes and effects, reinforced the narrative structure, and reduced the «chronicle» dimension that had been in the script.

As so often in your films, Bach is omnipresent.

He's the only composer I can listen to every day without ever getting bored. It's a liking that I wanted Etienne to share because when I was a student, I forged my character with the help of radical artists – Godard, Straub/Huillet, Bresson, Pasolini, Genet, Emily Dickinson and, yes, Johann Sebastian Bach. Having solid points of reference seems to me a legitimate need when you're a student, but they wind up crushing all the rest. Over time, you learn to love many other things, without the contradictions that you might rather dogmatically presuppose. Such as, in the film, the fairly romantic music, associated with love, which is by Giya Kancheli.

You filmed your characters with a great deal of indulgence.

Once more, it's the legacy of Renoir and his famous "We all have our reasons." I don't like movies that lead a whole swathe of mean, stupid or alienated characters to the slaughter, while the director leads the flattered and suddenly complicit audience members to believe that they are not like the people on screen. I try to shine a light on all the characters in my film, while leaving the audience to make up their own minds about them.

Filmography of Jean Paul Civeyrac

2017 A Paris Education (Fiction, 136 mn)

2014 My Friend Victoria (Fiction, 95 mn)

2012 Fairy Queen (Fiction, 45 mn) Françoise au Printemps (Fiction, 10 mn)

2011 Louise, le Dimanche (Fiction, 4mn) Une Heure Avec Alice (Fiction, 13 minutes).

2010 Young Girls in Black (Fiction, 85mn)

2008 Malika s'est envolée (fiction, for the Théâtre de Gennevilliers, 35mn)

2006 Ma Belle Rebelle et mon Prince Charmant (fictions ADAMI-Talents Cannes, 2x11mn)

2005 Through the Forest (fiction, 65mn)

2004 Tristesse Beau Visage (fiction, for ARTE, collection of Portraits, 17mn)

2003 All the Fine Promises (TV fiction - ARTE, 85mn) 2002 Man's Gentle Love (fiction, 80mn)

2001 Fantômes (fiction, 95mn) 2000 Les Solitaires (fiction, 75mn) 1997 Neither Eve Nor Adam

(fiction, 90 mn) 1991 La Vie Selon Luc (fiction, 15 mn – End of studies film)

Literature

2017 Rose Pourquoi (POL edition)

2014 Écrit Entre Les Jours (De l'incidence edition)

Cast

Etienne.....Andranic Manet



Jean-Noël.....Gonzague Van Bervesselès



Mathias.....Corentin Fila



Lucie.....Diane Rouxel



Valentina.....Jenna Thiam



AnnabelleSophie Verbeeck



Barbara.....Valentine Catzeflis
Héloïse.....Charlotte Van Bervesselès
Paul Rossi.....Nicolas Bouchaud
William.....Laurent Delbecque
Solange.....Jeanne Ruff

Crew

Written and directed by.....Jean Paul Civeyrac
Assistant director.....Tigrane Avédikian
Director of Photography.....Pierre-Hubert Martin Film
Editor.....Louise Narboni
Production Designer.....Brigitte Brassart
Costumes/Script Supervisor.....Claire Dubien
SoundFrançois Méreu
Re-recording Mixer.....Philippe Grivel
CastingConstance Demontoy
Unit Manager.....Flore Camus
Produced byFrédéric Niedermayer
.....Michèle et Laurent Pétin
Production.....Moby Dick Films
Coproduction.....ARP Sélection