THE MOTHER AND THE WHORE

A FILM BY JEAN EUSTACHE

FESTIVAL DE CANNES SPECIAL GRAND JURY PRIZE 1973

RESTORED IN 4K
The Mother and the Whore has been restored and remastered in 4K in 2022 by Les Films du Losange with the support of CNC and the participation of La Cinémathèque suisse and of Chanel. Image restoration by L’Immagine Ritrovata/Eclair Classics, supervised by Jacques Besse and Boris Eustache. Sound restoration by Léon Rousseau - L.E. Diapason.
Alexandre, a young, idle dilettant, lives with his lover, Marie, and strolls around Paris’s Left Bank. One day, he meets Veronika, a young nurse. He begins an affair with Veronika, without leaving Marie...
Before making this movie, I was in a bit of a bind. Everybody liked my films. I received very good reviews, and none of my films made a loss. But nobody would give me any money to make another one. My only funding until now came from Godard, late in the shoot, and ORTF, the public broadcaster, after much discussion, because they were documentaries, so not a problem apparently. This contradictory situation infuriated me. And that fury helped me write the dialogue of The Mother and the Whore. Dialogue, or rather monologues without shot structure, piled up every day to form the basis of a colossal film running 5-6 hours.

That fury translated into the fact that the protagonist contravened everything that people said and thought at the time. A curious but beneficial approach, I think. No matter the degree of accuracy or approximation of what he says. What matters is the creativity deployed by the character, or the writer perhaps, to systematically gainsay. In the process, as in all paradoxes, an element of truth is revealed. And this excess takes the audience into a closed environment, specific to the character, which might be fairly hallucinatory and without comparison to what is usually shown. To give an idea of the need for provocation driving me, I should mention that the working title was Du Pain et des Rolls (Bread & Rolls). Along the way, in shooting and post-production, there was a shift, which has rarely occurred in film history, if you exclude the Pagnol trilogy and Hitchcock’s Psycho: an invasive, omnipresent character yields to another character, played here by Françoise Lebrun, who becomes the film’s main protagonist. Jean-Pierre Léaud, with his weary wordiness, becomes a frail being who depends entirely on her. Less provocative than Léaud’s and playing to the gallery less, Françoise Lebrun’s take on life is more inhabited, more spontaneous, as well as even more invasive. It brings a new dimension to the movie.

Until now, in France, a swingeing tax, known as the release tax, was applied to each film in proportion to its length, which prohibited the distribution—and often production—of movies that took their time and were not blockbusters. The suppression of that tax in late 1972 enabled the development of filmmaking based on the duration, such as Rivette’s Out 1: Spectre. The Mother and the Whore took advantage of this new situation. Obviously, from nearly four hours, more dramatic moments can be set apart from those when nothing happens, which are much more in keeping with real life. I might even say that four hours is the bare minimum, and that each cut I made to bring it down to three and a half hours caused me great pain. And that closed environment became more powerful the longer the film went on. With each second, the audience departs further from its own life to enter into the characters’ tragic world. It is no longer about making the characters’ reality credible or not. The runtime means that they are indisputably there.

It’s the only one of my movies where the past plays no part. It chimed with the life I was leading at the time it was shot, and matched it in a tragic way sometimes. Rite is also absent. Unless a rite in gestation can be perceived in these Left Bank lifestyles. We’ll see in a few years. Unless the formal inflections and principle of the triangle reference the rites of classical tragedy with a modern veneer.

It is the only one of my films I am able to hate, because it keeps bringing me face-to-face with myself, in the present day. The past in my other films protects me. ·

JEAN EUSTACHE
Standing like a totem for film buffs and filmmakers, in France and overseas... The cult it generates among men and women who make cinema what it is today is international, and the list of its fans, from generation to generation is dizzying, going from Wim Wenders to Michael Haneke, from Jane Campion to Claire Denis, from Jim Jarmusch to Jacques Audiard, from John Waters to Gaspar Noé, from Noah Baumbach to Cédric Klapisch and Guillermo del Toro...

Forty-nine years after the scandal provoked by its screening at Cannes in May 1973 (the film won the Special Jury Prize and International Critics’ Prize), and forty years after Jean Eustache’s premature death in November 1981, The Mother and the Whore still speaks to us.

It had, however, become rare since its release, and never been restored. Nonetheless, it continued to symbolize something like the ultimate in auteur cinema, bedroom cinema, relationship cinema.

On whichever level you take it, it captivates: its uncommon length (three hours and forty minutes), its spectral and somehow primateal black & white. The performances (of three actors essentially: Jean-Pierre Léaud, Françoise Lebrun and Bernadette Lafont) are anticonformist in their manner of rejecting naturalism while not rejecting sentiment. The director’s restrained, pared-down touch is reminiscent of the mesmerizing assurance of the classics, the «fundamentals» that Eustache admired above all others: Renoir, Lubitsch, Guitry, Pagnol, Mizoguchi, Lang, Dreyer, Murnau...

With sparse resources at his disposal, Jean Eustache’s direction deployed a rigorous shot breakdown to devote itself entirely to «dialogue on fire» in the words of Bernadette Lafont. That dialogue served as a repository for the generation that made May ‘68 and those that have followed since, including our own.

The film’s exploration of relationships, the unrestrained freedom to love and the unassumable grip of love, its words, caught in the fever of romantic discourse, and lyricism, going from the sublime to the ridiculous via the sublime again, captured intimacy, like no other film, as it is spoken and written between two lovers over one, two or a hundred nights.

In that respect, fifty years, or nearly, have not aged it. Quite the contrary. The Mother and the Whore is the movie of men and women who ponder having to reinvent love.

Eustache said that, of all his movies, The Mother and the Whore was the one he «detested.» It could not be any other way: the story plunged him into the period of serial

FOR NEARLY HALF A CENTURY, THE MOTHER AND THE WHORE HAS HAUNTED CINEMA
loves in his recent past (Catherine Garnier, who ran a fashion store not far from Le Select on Boulevard du Montparnasse and who was responsible for the film’s costumes, and Marinka Matuszewski, a nurse anesthetist at Laennec Hospital on Rue de Sèvres, who makes a brief appearance in the film outside Café de Flore), forming a love triangle within a few streets of the “neighborhood,” as it is called in the film, whose parameters are located between Montparnasse and Saint-Germain-des-Prés. Eustache felt impelled to write after he failed to receive a grant in the expected proportions for what was supposed to be his first feature: Mes petites amoureuses. But The Mother and the Whore interrupted that schedule. This was an emergency. Eustache shot The Mother and the Whore in Paris in seven weeks across June and July, 1972, demanding of his actors that they respect to the letter what was on the page. It could not be any other way for him: before revisiting childhood memories, he had to write, direct and, therefore, see and hear the present-day disorder of his love life in order to begin to understand it. The first thing to strike the audience is the film’s rawness—a boundless love story that only the cinema might, perhaps, console. Eustache believed he could write the script of The Mother and the Whore in a week. He reported that, at the end of one week, he had not yet completed the opening scene.

On its release, in 1973, The Mother and the Whore provoked a scandal: like no other, the film speaks of free love and a love triangle with gripping authenticity; it also raises the issue of abortion, a hot-button topic at the time. Some audience members spluttered in outrage at what they considered pornographic dialogue (Oh, a Tampax! Oh, an irrepressible urge to puke! Oh, garrulous intoxication! Oh, naked bodies and women discussing the shape of a dick!). Today, these pretexts might raise a smile but they require consideration, for they express the filmmaker’s desire to spare nothing in what plays out in relationships between men and women in 1972, beyond the couple: all-powerful male, fawning young woman.

That idea takes a beating. The Mother and the Whore is the film from which no cliché, nor presumption emerges intact. That is what continues to make the film not only modern but also our contemporary. It portrays the collapse of convictions set in stone. Amid alcohol, love and conversation.

Today, The Mother and the Whore is re-released. Restored at last and presented in the full 1973 version, including a scene cut by Boris Eustache for an initial re-release in 1982: Alexandre and Marie go to the movies to see Les Idoles du Jour from 1968 edited by Eustache (who worked as an editor from 1965 to 1971, notably for Luc Moullet and alongside Jacques Rivette on Jean Renoir, le Patron).

The re-release of The Mother and the Whore only the first and most emblematic stage in a long process of restoration of the director’s work, which will be progressively re-released throughout 2022-2023, accompanied by new releases on DVD/Blu-Ray and a fresh critical overview. For too long, Eustache’s inflammatory film was classed with those of the great doomed talents. It was urgent to show his movies again, to make them scandalous again, still controversial, moving in every way, and alive. There is no mother and there is no whore. And this film keeps on telling us so, in the present tense. ■
CAST

Bernadette LAFONT  Marie
Jean-Pierre LÉAUD  Alexandre
Françoise LEBRUN  Véronika
Isabelle WEINGARTEN  Gilbette
Jacques RENARD  Alexandre’s friend
Jean-Noël PICQ  The man in green
Jean DOUCHET  The man from Flore
Jean EUSTACHE  The man at the supermarket and
Jessa DARRIEUX
Bertha GRANDVAL
Geneviève MNICH
Marinka MATUSZEWSKI
CREW

Pierre COTTRELL presents
A co-production
ELITE FILMS
CINE QUA NON
LES FILMS DU LOSANGE
SIMAR FILMS
VM PRODUCTIONS

Written and directed by
Jean EUSTACHE
Cinematography
Pierre LHOMME
With the assistance of
Jacques RENARD, Michel CENET
Sound
Jean-Pierre Ruh, Paul Laine
Mixing
Nara KOLLERY
Costumes
Catherine GARNIER
Editing
Jean EUSTACHE, Denise de CASABIANCA
Editing Assistant
Monique PRIM
Script
Irène LHOMME
Director’s Assistants
Luc BERAUD, Rémy DUCHEMIN
Set photographer
Bernard PRIM
Gaffer
Claude BERTRAND
JEAN EUSTACHE’S FILMOGRAPHY
ROBINSON’S PLACE / BAD COMPANY
France, 1963, 42 min, B&W, 16mm blown-up in 35mm
Written, directed and produced by Jean Eustache • Cinematography Philippe Théaudière, with the help of Michel H. Robert • Editing Jean Eustache • Music César Gattegno
Script, gaffer, assistant Jeanne Delos
Cast: Aristide Demonico (Jackson), Daniel Bart (his friend), Dominique Jayr (the young woman), Jean Eustache (the men with the R4)
Premiere: Evian Film Festival 1964
The film was screened in Evian and Paris in 1964 under the title ROBINSON’S PLACE. For its re-release with SANTA CLAUS HAS BLUE EYES in 1967, the program made up of these two short films took the title BAD COMPANY. Since then, this title has been used most of the time to designate Jean Eustache’s first film.

SANTA CLAUS HAS BLUE EYES
France, 1965/66, 47 min, B&W, 35mm
Written and directed by Jean Eustache • Production Anouchka Films (Jean-Luc Godard) • Cinematography Philippe Théaudière, Nestor Almendros • Camera assistants Daniel Cardot, Daniel Lacambre • Editing Christiane Lack, Jean Eustache • Sound Bernard Aubouy Mixing Antoine Bonfanti • Gaffer and assistant director Bernard Stora, Jeanne Delos • Script Aline Lecomte • Music René Coll, César Gattegno
Cast: Jean-Pierre Léaud (Daniel), Gérard Zimmerman (Dumas), Henri Martinez (Martinez), René Gilson (the photographer), Carmen Ripoll (Martine), Maurice Domingo (Maurice), Michèle Maynard (the woman at the bank), Noëlle Baleste (Janine), Rosette Mourut (Rosette), Jean Eustache (the former boxer), Jeanne Delos (the bookstore saleswoman), Alain Derboy, Georges Riccio, Jacques Larson, Cendrine Carnero
Premiere: May 1966, Cannes Film Festival (Critics’ Week)
The film is dedicated to Charles Trenet

THE VIRGIN OF PESSAC
France, 1968, 65 min, B&W, 16mm blown-up in 35mm
Directed by: Jean Eustache • Production Jean Eustache / Films Luc Mouillet, Mediane Films • Assistant director and editing Françoise Lebrun • Cinematography Philippe Théaudière, Jean-Yves Coïc, Daniel Cardot • Editing Jean Eustache • Sound Jean-Pierre Ruh, Alain Sempé
Premiere: 28th of December 1968 (TV), May 1969 at Cannes Film Festival (Critics’ Week)

THE PIG
France, 1970, 52 min, B&W, 16mm
Directed by Jean Eustache, Jean-Michel Barjol • Production Luc Mouillet, François Lebrun • Cinematography Philippe Théaudière, Renan Poilès • Editing Jean Eustache • Sound Jean-Pierre Ruh, François Carré
Premiere: February 1971. The film was presented in 1971 at the Festivals of Tours and Hyères

NUMERO ZERO / ODETTE ROBERT
France, 1971, 110 min, B&W, 16mm
A 54-minutes version edited by Jean Eustache was broadcast on French television under the title ODETTE ROBERT. After the reconstruction of the full version in 2002, NUMERO ZERO was blown up to 35mm.
Directed by Jean Eustache • Production Jean Eustache, Luc Mouillet • Cinematography Philippe Théaudière (interiors), Adolfo Arrieta (outdoor) • Editing Jean Eustache • Sound Jean-Pierre Ruh
Cast: Odette Robert, Jean Eustache, Boris Eustache
Premiere: ODETTE ROBERT in August 1980 (TV), NUMERO ZERO in July 2002 at the Marseille FID
THE MOTHER AND THE WHORE
France, 1973, 220 min, B&W, 16mm blown-up in 35mm
Written and directed by Jean Eustache • Produced by Pierre Cottrell • Production Elite Films, Simar Films, Cine-Qua-Non, V.M. Productions, Les Films du Losange
Cinematography Pierre Lhomme • Camera assistants Jacques Renard, Michel Cenet • Editing Jean Eustache, Denise de Casabianca • Editing assistant Monique Prim
Sound Jean-Pierre Ruh, Paul Lainé • Mixing Nara Kollery
Costumes Catherine Garnier • Assistants director Luc Béraud, Rémy Duchemin • Script Irène Lhomme • Music: Zarah Leander (Ich weiß, es wird einmal ein Wunder geschehn'), Damia (Un souvenir), Marlene Dietrich (Falling in love again), Fréhel (La chanson des Fortifs), Edith Piaf (Les amants de Paris), Deep Purple (Concerto for Group and Orchestra), Mozart (Requiem), Offenbach (Die schöne Helena)
Cast: Jean-Pierre Léaud (Alexandre), Françoise Lebrun (Veronika), Bernadette Lafont (Marie), Isabelle Weingarten (Gilberte), Jacques Renard (Alexandre’s friend), Jean-Noël Picq (the men in green), Jean Douchet (the man at the Café Flore), Noël Simsolo (the intellectual), Jessa Darriex (the woman with the bandage), Geneviève Mnich (Veronika’s friend), Berthe Grandval (Marie’s friend), Bernard Eisenschitz (Maurice), Pierre Cottrell (Maurice’s friend), Jean Eustache (Gilberte’s partner), Marinka Matuszewski, Jean-Claude Biette, André Tchékhine
Premiere: May 1973 at Cannes Film Festival (Official Competition)
The film is dedicated to Catherine Garnier

MY LITTLE LOVES
France, 1974, 123 min, color, 35mm
Written and directed by Jean Eustache • Produced by Pierre Cottrell • Production Elite Films
Cinematography Nestor Almendros • Camera assistants Jean-Claude Rivièreme, Dominique Le Rigoleur • Editing: Françoise Belleville, Alberto Yaccelini, Vincent Cottrell, Jean Eustache • Sound Bernard Aubouy, Bernard Orton • Mixing Bernard Aubouy, Nara Kollery
Costumes Renée Renard • Assistants director Luc Béraud, Bertrand Van Effenterre, Alain Centonze, Denys Granier-Deferre • Script Irène Lhomme, Danièle Desouches • Music Charles Trénet (Douce France), Théodore Botrel (La maman du petit homme)
Cast: Martin Loeb (Daniel), Ingrid Caven (his mother), Jacqueline Dufranne (the grandmother), Dionys Mascolo (José), Henri Martinez (Henri, the workshop owner), Jean-Noël Picq (Henri’s friend), Maurice Pialat (Henri’s friend, the man who makes Daniel recite the alphabet), Pierre Edelman (Louis), Marie-Paule Fernandez (Françoise), Patrick Eustache (the 6th grade boy)
Premiere: December 1974
The film is dedicated to Odette and Louis Robert

A DIRTY STORY
France, 1977, 28 min, 35mm, color (first version), 22 min, 16mm, color (second version)
FIRST VERSION: Cinematography Jacques Renard • Camera assistants Jean-Noël Ferraguët, Jacques Steyn • Editing Chantal Colomer, Jean Eustache • Sound Roger Letellier • Assistant director Elisabeth Couturier, Bertrand Van Effenterre • Script: Claude Luquet
Cast: Michaël Lonsdale (the narrator), Jean Douchet (the director), Douchka, Laura Fanning, Josée Yann, Jacques Burloux
SECOND VERSION: Cinematography Pierre Lhomme, Michel Cenet • Editing Chantal Colomer, Jean Eustache • Sound Bernard Orton • Assistants director Luc Béraud, Bertrand Van Effenterre
Cast: Jean Noël Picq (the narrator), Elisabeth Lanchener, Françoise Lebrun, Virginie Thévenet, Annette Wademant
Premiere: Österreichisches Filmmuseum Wien, October 1977
THE VIRGIN OF PESSAC 79
France, 1979, 67 min, color, 16mm
Directed by Jean Eustache • Production INA, ZDF, Médiame Films • Cinematography Robert Alazraki, Jean-Yves Coic, Armand Marco, Philippe Théaudière • Camera assistants Florent Bazin, Patrick Beraux, Michel Thiviet, Caroline Champetier, Françoise Manceaux • Editing Chantal Colomer, Jean Eustache • Sound Gérard Barra, Bruno Charier, Gérard de Lagarde, Georges Prat • Mixing: Dominique Hennequin • Assistant director: Boris Eustache
Premiere: Österreichisches Filmmuseum Wien, December 1979

LES PHOTOS D’ALIX
France, 1980, 18 min, color, 35mm
Directed by Jean Eustache • Production Médiame Films. Cinematography • Robert Alazraki • Editing Jean Eustache, Chantal Colomer • Sound: Bruno Charier
Cast: Alix Cléo-Roubaud, Boris Eustache
Television broadcast : 982 on Antenne 2, in the program « Histoires courtes »
BERNADETTE LAFONT

1957 - Handsome Serge by Claude Chabrol
1959 - Web of Passion by Claude Chabrol
1959 - Good Time Girls by Claude Chabrol
1959 - Mouth Watering by Jacques Doniol-Valcroze
1964 - Male Hunt by Edouard Molinaro
1964 - The Sleeping Car Murders by Costa-Gavras
1965 - High Lifers by Georges Lautner
1966 - Idiot in Paris by Serge Korber
1966 - The Thief of Paris by Louis Malle
1969 - Male Hunt by Edouard Molinaro
1971 - Catch Me a Spy by Richard Clement
1972 - The Mother and the Whore by Jean Eustache
1972 - A Gorgeous Girl Like Me by François Truffaut
1977 - Violette by Claude Chabrol
1983 - Dog Day by Yves Boisset
1985 - An Impudent Girl by Claude Miller
1986 - Inspector Lavardin by Claude Chabrol
1986 - Masks by Claude Chabrol
1991 - Genealogies of a Crime by Raoul Ruiz
2001 - Lovers of the Nile by Eric Heumann
2007 - London mon amour by Lorraine Lévy
2010 - Skylab by Julie Delpy
2010 - A Cat in Paris by Alain Gagnol, Jean-Loup Felicioli
2012 - Attila Marcel by Sylvain Chomet
2012 - Paulette by Jérôme Enrico

JEAN-PIERRE LÉAUD

1957 - King on Horseback by Georges Lampin
1958 - The 400 Blows by François Truffaut
1959 - Testament of Orpheus by Jean Cocteau
1960 - Boulevard by Julien Duvivier
1964 - Secret Agent FX18 by Jean-Louis Richard
1965 - Masculin féminin by Jean-Luc Godard
1965 - Pierrot le fou by Jean-Luc Godard
1966 - Made in U.S.A. by Jean-Luc Godard
1966 - The Oldest Profession in the World by Jean-Luc Godard
1967 - The Chinese by Jean-Luc Godard
1967 - The Departure by Jerzy Skolimowski
1967 - Joyful Wisdom by Jean-Luc Godard
1968 - Stolen Kisses by François Truffaut
1968 - Porcle by Pier Paolo Pasolini
1970 - Bed & Board by François Truffaut
1972 - The Mother and the Whore by Jean Eustache
1972 - Day for Night by François Truffaut
1972 - Love on the Run by François Truffaut
1984 - Detective by Jean-Luc Godard
1987 - Virgin by Catherine Breillat
1987 - Jane B. for Agnès V. by Agnès Varda
1990 - I Hired a Contract Killer by Aki Kaurismäki
1991 - Paris Awakens by Olivier Assayas
1991 - The Bohemian Life by Aki Kaurismäki
1993 - The Birth of Love by Philippe Garrel
1995 - My Man by Bertrand Blier
1996 - Irma Vep by Olivier Assayas
1999 - Just for Laughs! by Lucas Belvaux
2000 - A Question of Taste by Bernard Rapp
2000 - The Pornographer by Bertrand Bonello
2008 - Face by Ming-liang Tsai
2010 - Le Havre by Aki Kaurismäki
2011 - Camille Rewinds by Noémie Lvovsky
2015 - The Death of Louis XIV by Albert Serra

FRANÇOISE LEBRUN

1972 - The Mother and the Whore by Jean Eustache
1975 - French Provincial by André Téchiné
1997 - Just for Laughs! by Lucas Belvaux
2000 - Seraphine by Martin Provost
2006 - The Diving Bell and the Butterfly by Julian Schnabel
2008 - Julie & Julia by Nora Ephron
2012 - The Nun by Guillaume Nicloux
2014 - Looking for Her by Ounie Lecomte
2016 - The Sower by Marine Francen
2021 - Vortex by Gaspar Noé
les films du losange

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https://filmsdulosange.com/en/