



BURNING GHOST

A FILM BY **STÉPHANE BATUT**



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ZADIG FILMS presents



THIMOTÉE ROBERT • JUDITH CHEMLA

BURNING GHOST

A FILM BY
STÉPHANE BATUT

1H46 • FRANCE • 2019 • 1.66 • SOUND 5.1

FRENCH THEATRICAL RELEASE AUGUST 28, 2019

Photos and press pack can be downloaded at
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Juste wanders the streets of Paris looking for people only he can see. He collects their last memory before helping them into the afterlife. One day Agathe, a young woman, recognizes him. She belongs to his previous life. She is alive and he is a ghost. How will they manage to love each other and seize this second chance?



INTERVIEW WITH STÉPHANE BATUT

/ *Burning Ghost* is your first feature, but you have considerable experience as a casting director. Can you talk us through your journey to your directorial début?

Stéphane Batut – When I graduated from Paris University, I wanted to direct. My first internship was on a Xavier Beauvois picture and I was responsible for extras casting. The film was produced by Why Not, a young company that wasn't afraid to trust youth. I kept working with them, on films by Desplechin, Podalydès and Beauvois. I gradually began to handle the whole casting process, starting with Noémie Lvovsky's *Petites*, for which Yann Corridian and I looked for a group of teenage girls. I enjoyed it and kept going, and working with actors in auditions and rehearsals isn't so far removed from directing.

/ And the decision to direct?

I felt fortunate to work with very talented filmmakers, but it's also a trap. In one sense, the pleasure of always learning something new maybe stops you from taking that step up. My

admiration for their work overcame my urge to direct. Then I worked with filmmakers like Nicolas Klotz and Claire Simon with a documentary background, and I realized I could take a documentary approach to subjects that engaged me. I made two documentaries: *Le Chœur*, shot in a café between the two rounds of the 2007 presidential election; and *Le Rappel des oiseaux*, which I shot in Tibet. Zadig Films helped me finish the film and secured a theatrical release. Working with Mélanie Gerin and Paul Rozenberg on my first feature was a no-brainer. I started writing alone, then worked on the script with Frédéric Videau and Christine Dory, both of whom are filmmakers, which is a great asset when writing. I did most of the writing, but their feedback always anchored the text visually. They brought me around to an intimate understanding of my film. In the first drafts, for example, Juste's visions when he listens to memories did not result in the passage toward death. Christine had that idea. Frédéric brought the idea that is expressed in the final scene into the scene with the father: the idea of



being able to summon up the dead in your thoughts.

/ Which came first, the big love story or the living dead?

Neither. My starting point was an amalgamation of memories I had of people I met in auditions. Professionals and non-professionals alike, I often ask them to tell me a memory. I started to edit together recollections that had a universal dimension. The idea was to make a portrait of the city through chance encounters with people on the streets. It occurred to me that the link between all these memories could be a kind of fantasy alter-ego. When I listened to those stories, I pictured something fatal, a kind of depiction of those people's destiny. I saw them as ghosts already, eminently cinematic figures. The love story came later. If the observer of stories were to experience one himself, it had to be a love story. Discovering love would be, for him, the first and last story.

/ Among all the films about ghosts, revenants and the living-dead, which ones were references for you?

My film is made up of collages, stories I was told and transcribed, films and works that left a mark on me... I own up to influences such as Guitry and Franju. I pilfered lots of things from films I love. I think that films are

often reinterpretations of films that we have absorbed. What I like about Franju is that his films blend fantasmatic and documentary elements. I wanted those two styles to collide rather than merge to play on contrasts of complementary colors. We filmed passers-by and non-professional actors on the streets to capture something of the city and the period, which eludes performance. Something that forces itself upon us. I positioned in parallel the fantasy of a very fictional, fantastical and melodramatic film. Fantasy and documentary in friction. Films by Jean Rouch, Abbas Kiarostami and Charles Burnett were as much of an influence as Franju, which may seem strange after watching the movie.

/ You bring the fantastical into the here-and-now, making prosaic daily life take off toward new wonders...

Burning Ghost envisions a world after death in order to capture the life we all share at its basic, material level. The fate that might be in store for each of the characters colors every moment with a sense of urgency and necessity. The wondrous aspects of the movie are conceived in that basic awareness, as well as in the idea that time is circular. It goes around and sometimes stands still.

/ Your treatment of the passage toward





death is very realistic, like a medical consultation or therapy session.

I didn't want the film to be pure allegory, but rather provoke questions, for people to ask if this character supervising the passage to the hereafter is a shrink or the equivalent of St. Peter. Not to create confusion to say something about modern-day psychiatry, for instance, but so we might accede to a particular transformation of perception. And then the characters' dual nature produces an open, vivid reverie. Similarly, Juste is a spirit and a smalltime thief. Alpha is a tailor and former smuggler.

/ The love affair between Agathe and Juste is alternately obsessive and fettered by their radically different states: she is alive and he is one of the living dead. Is impossible love even more romantic?

I am very keen to believe that love is possible, but it's also a way of evoking fantasy. For Agathe, Juste brings to mind a youthful romance. He embodies a fantasy, the chance to relive an unfinished love story. She doubts her own eyes but her desire, however chimerical, leads her to him. Juste goes along with the fantasy, which makes him a protagonist of his life or somebody else's. He's not sure which it is, and neither are we. When are they actually together? The film constantly poses the question through Juste's or Agathe's invisibility. And also through the

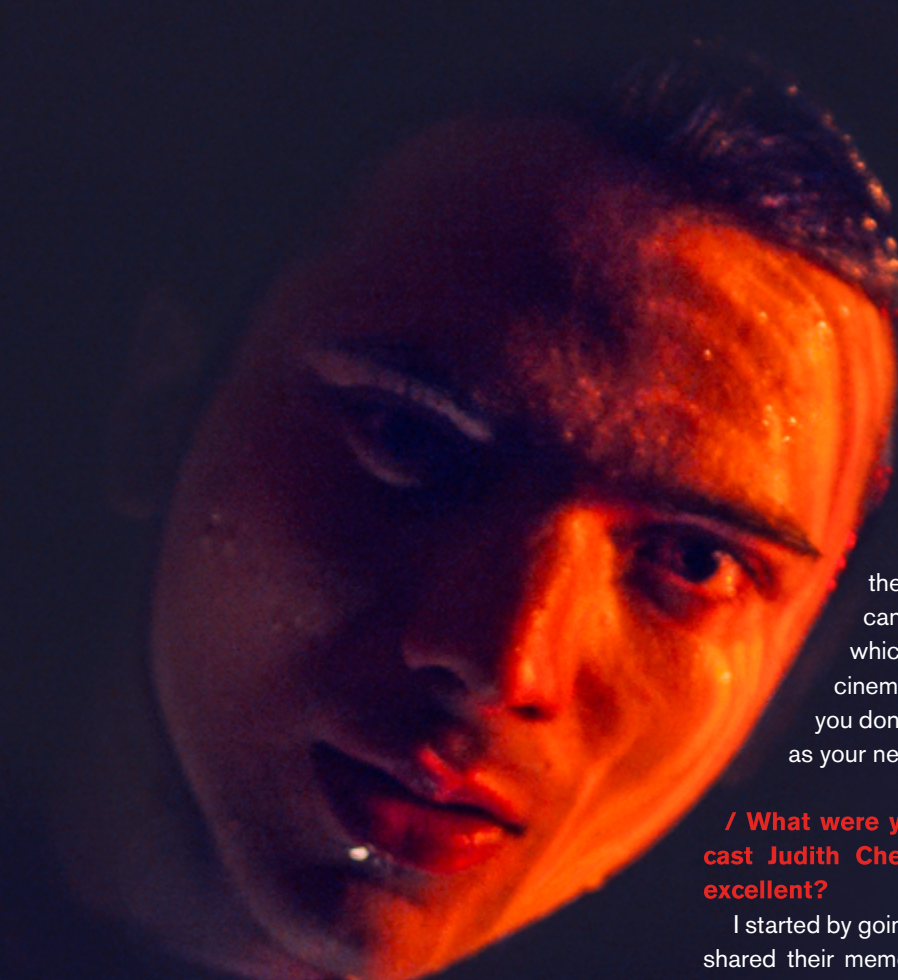
nagging doubt that they cannot completely believe what is happening to them. At the end, Agathe says to Juste, «Look, it's us down there.» He replies, «Yes, looks like it.» For me, his «looks like it» is important. The stories we tell ourselves often help to ward off death. Sure, they are fictional, but they are nonetheless essential.

/ The love scene between Agathe and Juste's ghost is magnificent. Filmmakers sometimes say they make a movie for one scene they cannot get out of their heads. Did you make this movie for that scene?

Not particularly. There is a first love scene filmed from his point of view, discovering the act of love, female pleasure escaping him. The love scene you refer to, the second one, is filmed from her point of view. We might even wonder if she's dreaming. The idea was to depict two subjective experiences of a moment of love, reflecting the inescapable mystery of the other person. Scenes like that usually emphasize fusion rather than otherness.

/ That love scene between living and undead sums up the principle of the film, the juxtaposition of the fantastical and the real.

Yes, perhaps. It's a place where the impossible becomes possible, where the film proposes a utopia. The final scene operates on



the same basis, the idea that we can meet up in a shared dream, which is a utopia that inhabits cinema and love alike. It's just that you don't always see the same movie as your neighbor.

/ What were you looking for when you cast Judith Chemla, who is once more excellent?

I started by going through all the people who shared their memories with me and who play themselves, such as Babakar Ba. For the male and female leads, I wrote with other actors in mind. I thought Judith was too young, because I had in mind an older actor for Juste. The age difference should function on a fantastical level. With two casting director friends, Alexandre Nazarian and Judith Fraggi, we continued to look for Juste. Alexandre had met Thimotée

Robart for a Eugene Green movie. He didn't get the part in the end. He was a complete new-comer. Thimotée was naturally funny and sensual, with just the right combination of innocence and insouciance. As for Judith, I know her very well and have worked with her before. She is someone I like a lot and, as everyone knows, an exceptional actress. When I saw that this could be a role for her, I contacted her. She really does light up the film.

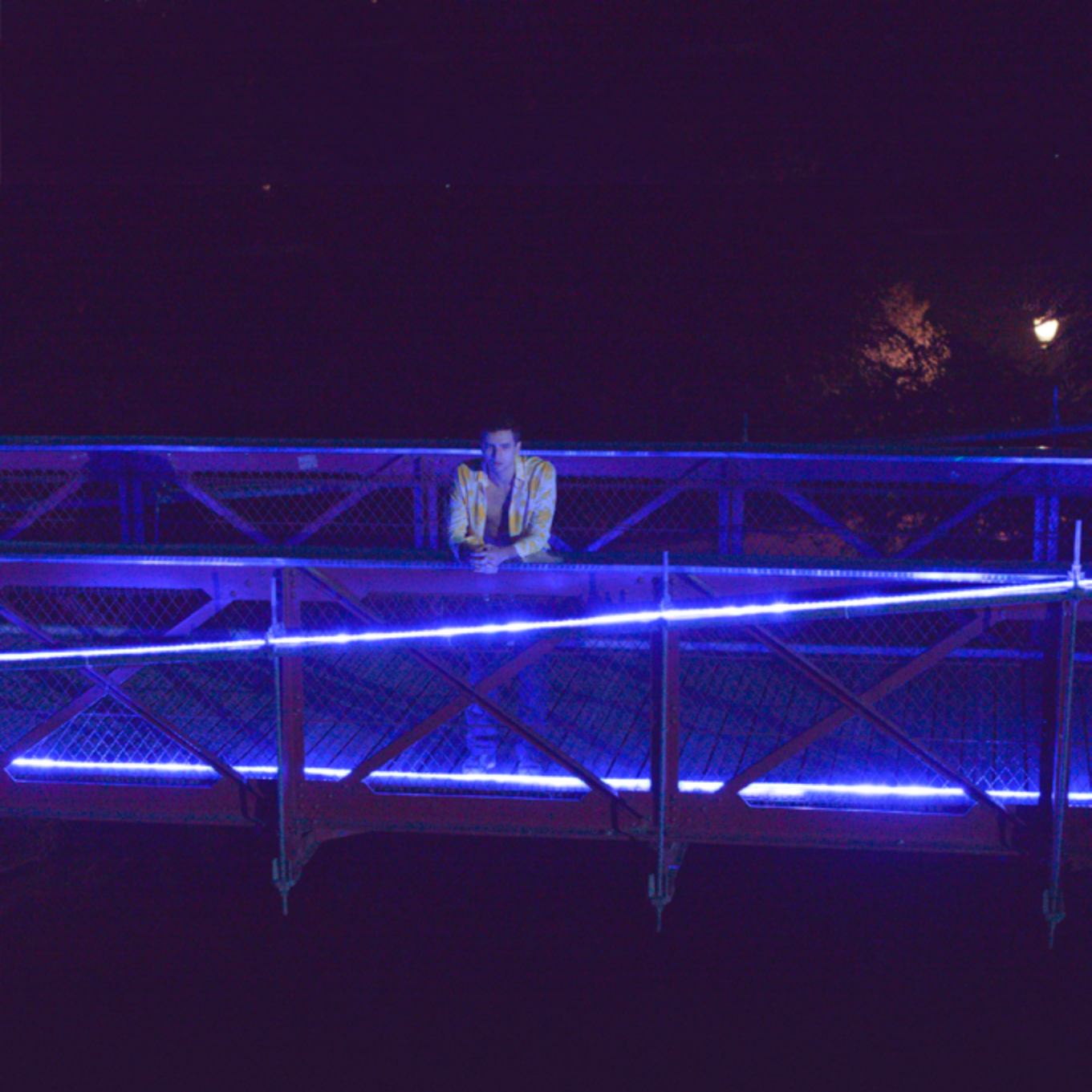
/ And Cecilia Mangini, who plays the Italian grandmother?

She is a great Italian director and documentary-maker, who worked with Pasolini and others. I met her through Maria Bonsanti at Cinéma du Réel, and visited her in Rome. She has such humanity and humor, and such power on screen. That was an excellent encounter.

/ The music—very lyrical, very romantic—plays a fundamental role in the film. How did you conceive of it? Who are the composers?

There is a progression in the music toward overt romanticism at the end. I didn't want the music to illustrate a feeling or follow a character but epitomize the idea of tragic destiny taking hold of individuals and overwhelming them. The music seems to know more than them. The Scriabin piece, for example, when Juste discovers

the other side from a cab, seems to belong to another time, another film. Its anachronistic aspect provokes a sense of the film as part of a pre-existent romantic movement: melodrama. I was very keen for the miraculous connection between picture and music to be heard, along with the artificiality that the connection produces. As with the cinematography in this part of the film, which is more fantastical, I was tempted toward excess. The musicians, Gaspar Claus, a super cellist, and Benoît de Villeneuve, who composes with a heavy reliance on synthesizers worked with that in mind. The aim was to start with a score with blurred, unstructured harmonies and gradually move toward more melodic moments, paving the way for the symphonic pieces at the end. I really liked their score for *Makala*, and the combination of acoustic cello and Benoît's synthesizers seemed ideal for the dialogue between different styles that combine in the film and characters. Meanwhile, Reno Isaac elegantly adapted Ray Davies's *I Go To Sleep* and composed two tracks for the party in the park. The sound editor, Benoît Hillebrant, and re-recording mixer, Florent Lavallée, also made important contributions to the music at the end. The sound design was intended to be impregnated with musicality. That is essential for me. ■



CAST

Juste	Thimotée Robart
Agathe	Judith Chemla
Alpha	Djolo Mbengue
Kramarz	Saadia Bentaïeb
The Old Man	Jacques Nolot
Baïlo	Marie-José Killolo Maputu
Nonna	Cécilia Mangini
The Father	Antoine Chappey
The Cop	Frédéric Bonpart
The Man on the Scooter	Bernard Mazzinghi
The African	Babakar Ba

CREW

Writers **Stéphane Batut, Christine Dory, Frédéric Videau** • Director **Stéphane Batut** • 1st assistant director **Ludovic Giraud** • 2nd assistant director **Sylvain Yonnet** • Script Supervisor **Julie Darfeuil** • Casting **Alexandre Nazarian** and **Judith Fraggi** • Original music **Benoît de Villeneuve** et **Gaspar Claus** • Producers **Mélanie Gerin, Paul Rozenberg** • Production Manager **Paul Sergent** • Post-Production Manager **Mélanie Karlin** • Unit Manager **Sabrina Guillerm** • Director of Photography **Céline Bozon** • Editing Manager **François Quiqueré** • Sound Engineer **Dimitri Haulet** • Sound Editor **Benoît Hillebrant** • Sound Mixer **Florent Lavallée** • Production Designer **Laurent Baude** • Propman **Bruno Lefèbvre** • Costume Designer **Dorothee Guiraud** • Make Up Artist **Delphine Jaffart** • Hair Stylist **Boris Garcia**



JUDITH CHEMLA

(Feature films)

2019 - **Burning Ghost** by Stéphane Batut • 2017 - **The Elephant and the butterfly** by Amélie van Elmbt • 2017 - **C'est la vie !** by Éric Toledano et Olivier Nakache • 2016 - **A woman's life** de Stéphane Brizé • 2016 - **This summer feeling** by Mikhaël Hers • 2015 - **Rendez-vous à Atlit** by Shirel Amitai • 2014 - **In the name of my daughter** by André Téchiné • 2011 - **Camille rewinds** by Noémie Lvovsky (*Best Actress in a Supporting Role Nomination - César 2013 Most Promising Actress - Prix Lumière 2013*) • 2010 - **Beautiful lies** by Pierre Salvadori • 2010 - **Je suis un roman's land** by Thierry Jousse • 2009 - **The Princess of Montpensier** by Bertrand Tavernier • 2008 - **A day at the museum** by Jean-Michel Ribes • 2008 - **Versailles** by Pierre Schöller • 2007 - **Let's dance** by Noémie Lvovsky • 2006 - **Hellphone** by James Huth

THIMOTÉE ROBERT

Burning Ghost by Stephane Batut is his first part in a feature film.



STÉPHANE BATUT

For the best part of twenty years, Stéphane Batut has assembled the casts of movies, combining two passions—for new encounters and actors, professional or otherwise—on behalf of filmmakers with a wide range of backgrounds and worlds: Mathieu Amalric, Sharunas Bartas, Xavier Beauvois, Serge Bozon, Thomas Cailley, Laurent Cantet, Claire Denis, Arnaud Desplechin, Nicole Garcia, Alain Guiraudie, Cédric Kahn, the Larrieu brothers, Noémie Lvovsky, Jean-Marc Moutout, Jacques Nolot, Bruno Podalydès, Axelle Ropert, Riad Sattouf, Claire Simon, Joann Sfar, Frédéric Videau, Nadav Lapid, Paul Verhoeven, and more besides.

Four years studying film at Paris University VIII under the benevolent and alert eye of Jean-Henri Roger and the steely gaze of Philippe Arnaud were a perfect opportunity to make shorts but, curiously enough for someone who has encountered so many actors, fifteen years later, Stéphane's first films were documentaries (*Le Chœur* in 2007, *Le Rappel des oiseaux* in 2014). Most likely because he learned « *from watching directors at work that fiction and documentary feed off each other.* » Stéphane's aim is « *to capture the fable, the myth of a chance encounter on the street, like in literature, discovering freedom and the unpredictability of the world.* »

Burning Ghost is his debut feature. ■