

EuropaCorp presents

MICHELLE YEOH DAVID THEWLIS

THE LADY

DIRECTED BY LUC BESSON

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DISTRIBUTION

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“Suu Kyi's struggle is one of the most extraordinary examples of civil courage in Asia in recent decades.”

The Norwegian Nobel Committee (1991)

“In physical stature she is petite and elegant, but in moral stature she is a giant. Big men are scared of her. Armed to the teeth and they still run scared.” - **Desmond Tutu**

“She is a hero of mine and a source of inspiration.”

Barack Obama

“Aung San Suu Kyi is an inspiration for all of us who believe in freedom of speech, democracy and human rights.”- **David Cameron**

“Your determination and courage continue to inspire friends of freedom around the world” - **Bill Clinton**

“She’s my hero” - **Bono**

Synopsis

THE LADY is the extraordinary story of Aung San Suu Kyi and her husband, Michael Aris.

It is also the epic story of the peaceful quest of the woman who is at the core of Burma's democracy movement.

Despite distance, long separations, and a dangerously hostile regime, their love endures until the very end.

A story of devotion and human understanding set against a backdrop of political turmoil that continues today.

THE LADY was written over a period of three years by Rebecca Frayn. Interviews with key figures in Aung San Suu Kyi's entourage enabled her to reconstruct for the first time the true story of Burma's national heroine.

INTERVIEW WITH LUC BESSON

"Please, use your freedom to promote ours" (Aung San Suu Kyi)

How did you get involved on *The Lady*?

One day Michelle came to see me for help. She told me she had a compelling screenplay about Aung San Suu Kyi and was looking for a producer, and that it would be great if I were free to direct it. At first I told her I wasn't available. But then I read the script and I was blown away!

I was very moved by the story of this woman about whom I realized I knew almost nothing, except for the tip of the iceberg I'd read in the papers. I immediately got back to Michelle to say I wanted to support the project, and that if she hadn't found a director, I was a candidate. She was delighted.

Then Virginie read it and was really enthusiastic. Michelle introduced us to the UK producer Andy Harries who had developed the script with his company Left Bank Pictures and we were off on the adventure.

How did you make the screenplay your own?

The script was very well written, even if at times it veered too far toward documentary. We spent several months reworking it to give it a broader, more "cinematographic" feel. I wanted to find the right balance between the portrayal of this woman's political struggle for democracy and the fiction and dream inherent to her trials. To make the story believable and even more enthralling, I needed "bad guys". We therefore had to show the generals and the Burmese junta that have ruled the country with an iron fist for the past 60 years, as well as the relationship between Suu Kyi and the military.

Since you weren't able to meet Aung San Suu Kyi in person, what liberties did you take with her character?

It's always frustrating to tell the story of a living figure when you can't meet him or her. There's a fear of betraying the truth or, on the contrary, leaning too heavily upon it. Especially when no one is able to guide you. We delved into three or four books about her which helped us better grasp her incredible destiny. Aung San Suu Kyi's story and destiny can be traced back to her father, General Aung San. He was the great instigator of the Burmese revolution that liberated the country in the 1940s. But he and his ministers were assassinated when she was only three. When Suu Kyi took up the flame of the revolution some 30 years later, she immediately benefitted from her father's aura. Like the protagonist in *Sophie's Choice*, who had to choose between her two children during the war, Suu Kyi had to choose between her country and her family. Beyond the historical aspect, it was the people close to her who guided us as to what was plausible or not. And then there was also a lot of research and documentation to do about the people in her circle, like the writer U Win Tin, who spent 25 years in prison, or Zargana, Burma's only comedian who got 45 years for his irony about the military during his shows.

What about the generals?

That was even worse because we have almost no photos and no book has been written about them. We relied on Amnesty International's extremely well-documented reports about the hundreds of thousands of imprisoned Burmans by those who, liberated after a few years, were able to tell their story, their ordeal, and the way the military treated them. But I have to say the film is quite toned down with respect to the generals, because I think that some of the stories we learned of were so savage, that they would have lost all credibility.

Did you know from the get-go that Michelle Yeoh would embody Aung San Suu Kyi so powerfully?

Even before the shoot, when we saw just how absorbed Michelle was by the character, we knew she'd give an exceptional performance. She was possessed by the role. Aside from Mulan, there are not many other major roles outside Aung San Suu Kyi for an Asian actress. Not only is Michelle roughly the same age as Suu Kyi, she looks just like her! When she arrived on stage in the morning, silence fell as the two hundred Burmese around her wondered whether it was her or not. To get into the role, Michelle had about 200 hours of rushes on Suu Kyi at her disposition and that helped her acquire her model's body language and accent. When I met Suu Kyi six months later, I had the impression it was Michelle, only twenty years older.

She had to learn Burmese for the film...

Burmese is surely the hardest language there is to learn. At first I thought the fact she already spoke several languages like Mandarin and Malay would help. But she explained it wasn't at all the case, and that the consonants were very different. She spent six months learning her texts in Burmese. In particular, she had the original Shwedagon speech, which enabled her to grasp Suu Kyi's intentions. She practised a lot and it's sometimes difficult to distinguish the actress from the veritable Suu Kyi. I really take my hat off to her for this scene with its particularly difficult speech. She demanded a lot of herself because she was set on speaking impeccable Burmese that would give the feeling it was her native language.

David Thewlis, in an amazing double role, is as believable as Michael Aris as he as Anthony.

He's one of that school of magnificent English actors with theatre training. He told me it had been a long time since he'd cried on reading a script like he did this one. From the moment he agreed to do the picture, he was a delight, all about good mood, friendship and generosity. Plus, he and Michelle got on very well.

What about the children?

In London I saw a lot of children. The top criterion was resemblance. Then came motivation, we chose actors that really wanted to do the film.

How did you recreate Suu Kyi's house?

Her house was a very important element. She spent 14 years there, cut off from the world, no access to the telephone, the press, or television. We researched a lot of photos of the house, especially for the interiors, and we even checked Google Earth to get the exact dimensions. We then rebuilt the house identically, down to the last detail. For example, the piano is the same brand as Suu Kyi's and the frames on the photos of her parents are the same. It was even troubling for some people who had had the opportunity to visit the house before and who had the impression they were entering the real one.

How complex was it to shoot the scene of the Nobel Peace Prize ceremony?

For this scene, no doubt one of the film's most powerful, we had access to real footage since the ceremony was shot by several cameras from around the world. It was really interesting for the actors, particularly David Thewlis and the children, because they were able to build on minute details that guided them. On the other hand, we didn't have any images at all of Suu Kyi listening to the ceremony on the radio, so it was the first time we'll see these two concomitant moments: the awarding of the Nobel Prize before a crowd of two thousand and this woman, alone, listening to her little radio.

Was the scene of the military barricade inspired entirely by reality?

This scene actually took place in Danubyu, a few hundred kilometres from Rangoon. Suu Kyi walked alone across the military barricade to go speak to the captain, telling her supporters to wait for her. The soldiers didn't dare shoot. But at the time of filming, she was still under house arrest, so we weren't able to ask her what happened. My main problem was not having

a photo of Danubyu. We have no idea what it looks like and I would have preferred to base our sets on the similar ones. I talked to Burmese who knew someone who had been there, but I didn't get any firsthand accounts of people that were in Danubyu at the time of the events—they are probably dead or in prison now. So this scene is fictional since I filmed it the way I think it rolled out. But I didn't invent it. Suu Kyi really did cross, alone, that wall of armed soldiers.

Aung San Suu Kyi's speech at Shwedagon is awe-inspiring.

Beside Michelle on the podium were 15 or so people from Suu Kyi's party, the NLD (National League for Democracy). One of the extras standing near her, aged about sixty, was among the crowd that gathered 20 years earlier in Rangoon to listen to the speech. He spent the day in tears, finding himself on the podium and reliving the scene that had had such a strong emotional impact on him. Another young, highly talented Burmese actress told me she was born the day of the speech. Her parents always teased her, saying that because of her they'd missed the speech!

Of course, it was unthinkable to shoot in Burma...

We knew we would never get authorisation to shoot given the nature of our topic—or any topic for that matter! We basically shot our 15 hours of footage in Thailand not far from the Burmese border in a landscape that really looked like Burma. We did however shoot the Shwedagon Pagoda—located smack in Rangoon—from every angle, and we shot actors against a green screen who we were able to overlay in front of the pagoda. We also filmed right in Rangoon (with a hidden camera) and it gives the feeling the film was shot entirely in Burma, even if in the final count, we only filmed thirty or so shots.

What was it like to shoot in Thailand?

Pure delight. Unlike what is currently thought in Europe, a lot of films are shot there every year. Film crews are professional, quick and friendly, and they do a remarkable job. The most complicated aspect—aside from the cloying heat and humidity—had to do with communication, since someone had to translate my requests into English, which was then translated into Thai, and then again for the Burmese actors. But the Thai casting director was great and I had a very good first assistant with an excellent sense of organization. I was therefore able to work at my own pace, with intense days and reduced breaks. I think the energy was good for the film and for the actors.

How did you work with the composer Eric Serra?

I met Eric when we were 17 years old, and he did the music for my first short film. We therefore have a very friendly and affectionate rapport, even if his rhythm of work is the opposite of mine. I like to plan everything and prepare it all ahead of time, while he prefers to think about it, observe, and take his time. Then, when there's only 11 weeks left to do the job—which is impossible!—he panics, he stops eating, he stops breathing, and he works. He can only create under extreme pressure. It's extremely painful for him. When he's finished, he sleeps 20 days straight. It's surely a part of his talent; he needs the pressure because he lives with his music.

Aung San Suu Kyi's liberation in Novembre 2010 must have come as a shock.

We never expected it to happen since she'd been held for over ten consecutive years. It was, in fact, one of the reasons for doing the film: we wanted to say we hadn't forgotten about this woman, or her fight. She was freed while we were in the middle of the shoot in Thailand, whereas her liberation should have come much earlier. We were thrilled at first, then we were thrown off balance. We were doing this film to help get her freed, and here we learn she was freed before the end of the shoot. That November morning in 2010, I had shot her first liberation in 1995: she walked out a wooden gate, then climbed stairs to wave at the crowd who was waiting for her. When we got back to the hotel that evening, we turned on the

television and saw the same gate, and Suu Kyi, dressed almost the same way, with the same flowers in her hair, going up the stairs with the same wave...

How did it make you feel?

If felt like somebody had stolen our morning's footage.

For a brief instant, I wondered what was happening and if it made sense to be doing the film. But we quickly learned of the restrictions surrounding Suu Kyi's liberation. She wasn't really any freer than she had been under house arrest. If she leaves her country, she can never return. Officially, her political party no longer exists. She cannot express herself, nor can she organize meetings. Her fundamental rights are scorned, even if she has been liberated. As a result, the film has retained all its meaning. Suu Kyi got this phrase out through the press, "*Use your liberty to promote ours*". It's a call she made to all artists.

Do you think the film will help raise awareness?

Beyond Burma and this woman's personal trials, what interests me in this film is the echo it could have in all democratic countries. It should make us aware of the freedom we enjoy in France—where no one goes to jail for reading a newspaper—while at the same time demonstrating what a fragile thing democracy is. In Burma, most Parliament seats are reserved for the military: already that's not a democracy. Moreover, 95% of the 50% remaining are occupied by former military leaders. It's a farce, coming from a country that's trying to buy itself a democratic image in order to attract business and tourism. Twenty years ago, one strong vote was expressed. Suu Kyi's party, the NLD, won 392 seats. The military rulers won only seven. But the election results were never held to. It is our duty to watch our democracies closely and stay on the alert to with respect to freedom of speech, human rights and the constitution.

How did your meeting with Aung San Suu Kyi go?

First off, before I even met her, I wanted her to know about the project. After trying for three months, we managed to get a message to her. When I finally met her, I felt like I was standing before Gandhi. A person can't help but feel small and silly in the face of this woman who radiates extraordinary kindness, gentleness and simplicity. She fears nothing. For her, not even 60 years of prison would change a thing. What's important to her is that her people be free to share the riches of their country. She has no personal stake. It's a lesson in humility. Once you've met her you won't dare complain for five years to come! You want to know all about her and all she does is ask about you. She is curious, and hasn't even any interest in doing a book about her own life. She is an admirable person.

PRODUCTION NOTES

THE LADY: Genesis of an amazing story

Aung San Suu Kyi is one of the leading opponents to the military junta in power in Burma. Her whole life has been devoted to fighting for the advent of democracy in her country. After winning the 1990 general election and being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize the year after, she remained under house arrest for over fifteen years but never gave up fighting. In 1999 she was unwilling to go to England to see her husband, who was dying of cancer, for fear of being denied re-entry to Burma – she was never to see him again. And when Aung San Suu Kyi was eventually released from house arrest in November 2010, she had not seen her two children, Alex and Kim, for ten years.

It was the unfailing determination and extraordinary courage of this woman fighting alone a brutal, tyrannical regime that made Michelle Yeoh and Luc Besson want to make her extraordinary journey into a film. "When I received Rebecca Frayn's script in 2007, I thought that it was not only a deeply moving story of love and sacrifice but that it offered me a role which I couldn't turn down," Michelle Yeoh explains. "I have long believed that we lack powerful female characters in cinema." Producer Virginie Besson-Silla agrees, "It took me just one hour to read the script. I knew right away that EuropaCorp Company must produce it. If you're going to struggle for a couple of years and be totally involved in a project, you must be blown away at once. The fact that a woman could prove to be so heroic was all the more touching as it is usually men, who are portrayed as heroic characters. There was no doubt we had to make this film." She goes on enthusiastically, "what mattered was that Luc and I had the same vision of the film, which we wanted to show onscreen. Well, my priority was to focus on the purpose of the project, and deal with the financial aspect later. Andy Harries and Rebecca Frayn came to Paris to meet with us. We all saw the same film and understood its potential impact." Producer Andy Harries agrees, "After three years of working without financial support it was wonderful to join forces with Europacorp and have the opportunity to make this film with Luc Besson who is a director I have always hugely admired. Luc and Virginie were incredibly supportive from the first meeting and embraced this challenging project with us. It has been a brilliant experience."

However, it was not easy to come to terms with Aung San Suu Kyi's decision to sacrifice her private life for the sake of her ideals. "As I was reading the script, I couldn't help wondering how a mother could make such a choice," Virginie Besson-Silla goes on. "And it was so far from my own nature that I wanted to understand what had driven her to give up everything for her country. But after doing some research and meeting people who had known her and more than anything else, after meeting up with her just after her release, I understood that she had done it all out of love. She chose not to take into account her own feelings in order to help millions of people." Michelle Yeoh agrees, "while her husband was dying, Suu Kyi was busy giving a speech and performing her duties as an activist. You could, at first, think that she was cold and distant but, on second thought, you'd realise that she had a strong personality that you couldn't help admiring." Likewise, David Thewlis, who acts both as Michael Aris and his twin brother Anthony, had to force himself to come to terms with the idea of a person living a life of self denial. "She and her husband would sometimes spend years without seeing each other or talking to each other, which is totally unthinkable to me," the actor notes. "He had no idea whether she was being tortured or beaten, or if she was in an isolated prison cell. He raised their two sons alone and didn't see her even when he was told he had cancer. As I have never been through anything like this, it was difficult for me to fully grasp this situation."

Actors haunted by their characters

Michelle Yeoh, nobody else.

If choosing the right cast is crucial, it is even more so when a film is based on real facts. Without a doubt, Michelle Yeoh, the woman at the origin of the project, was the right person to play the title role. "Nobody but Michelle could have acted as Aung San Suu Kyi, given that even without the slightest make-up there is a striking resemblance between the two women," the producer states. "Not only are both women delicate and slender but I think that Michelle unconsciously mimics Aung San Suu Kyi whom she knows well and has long looked up to." The actress notes: "Of course I had heard of her but I was not aware of the minute details of her story, nor did I know what she had to give up on. Indeed it was difficult to be performing the part because she embodies the yearning for freedom found among all the world's every oppressed people's. I felt that I had great responsibilities."

First, Michelle Yeoh read all of Aung San Suu Kyi's works as well as the books she loves. She learnt that Suu Kyi was a Buddhist and a supporter of the philosophy of non-violence famously advocated by Gandhi. "It was not so much a question of mimicking her by adopting her hair-do, her gestures or her beautiful English accent but of capturing her soul and understanding what made her leave everything including a husband and two children, whom she cherished, in order to embody hope for millions of people in Burma. Even though she had never given a public speech, all of a sudden there she was, addressing a million people. That's why I wished to understand where this kind of strength came from. "

As she was playing a character that put a premium on language, Michelle Yeoh wanted to pronounce Burmese properly. But she had a hard time learning it. "I first thought I'd never manage," she explains. "Well for three weeks I was to learn Burmese with this incredible Burmese teacher who spoke brilliant English and had lectured in the United States. It was a very challenging learning process but as I am relentless I came to the conclusion that I had to memorize the lines. And wherever I was, in the car, on the boat or in the shower, I'd just say the lines over and over again until I got them right."

But there were other challenges as well. The events recounted in the film taking place over a period of more than ten years, the actress had to work out whatever changes her character was undergoing. "It was not only a matter of hair-do or make-up," Michelle Yeoh explains. "Between 1988 and 1995, for example, Suu Kyi's looks and demeanour slightly changed, and so did the way she related to others. So I had to be constantly on my toes because we would be doing a scene happening in 88 in the morning, another scene happening in 95 in the afternoon and yet another one back in 89 in the evening because of the weather or the location. So every single day was challenging!"

In order to perfectly embody the character, Michelle Yeoh says that it was necessary for her to meet Aung Sang Suu Kyi in person. While several crew members had applied for a visa to enter Burma, only the actress got a green light from the Burmese government, albeit for only 24 hours. "They all envied me and at the same time we were wondering why the junta had granted me a visa," she remembers. "Luc [Besson] and Virginie [Besson-Silla] were both a bit anxious but quite happy for me. I went alone but I was carrying lots of messages and gifts on behalf of the whole team!" Once in Burma Michelle Yeoh went to visit Aung Sang Suu Kyi and the first thing that struck her was that there were books everywhere in the house. "I knew she was an avid reader because I had done research about her but that was when I fully realised how books had been her companions all these years: they were not only the source of her information and inspiration but they were also the source of her sanity. And they helped her to keep fighting." The encounter with Suu Kyi was like a moment out of time: "As soon as you see her you feel her warmth and generosity," Michelle Yeoh recalls. "No matter how

petite she looks, she exudes amazing strength. More than anything else, I felt like I already knew her, like she was an old friend because I'd been watching her so intently and she was exactly what I figured she would be."

David Thewlis playing two parts

Best Actor winner at the Cannes Film Festival for Mike Leigh's *Naked* (1993), David Thewlis plays both Michael Aris, Aung San Suu Kyi's husband, and Anthony, his twin brother. Virginie Besson-Silla was more interested in the chemistry between the actors than in the physical resemblance of the actor with the characters he embodies. "Michael Aris was a unique character and a leading authority on Asian, Tibetan and Himalayan culture," the producer explains. "David and Michelle are a good physical match, there is the same contrast between them as between Suu Kyi and Michael, she being very tiny and he very tall." The producer praises the courage of the actor, who was willing to perform both parts. "He had to work hard for both parts, and he made it," she adds. It was quite hard in the beginning. "Of course, it was very challenging," David Thewlis notes. "I was a little worried about how to find the delineation between the two brothers."

To begin with, the English actor tried to focus on Michael Aris's personality. "The only pieces of footage that I had were the interviews Michael had given on television. He looked solemn and quite mournful," he says. "So, I had to imagine what he was like at a party or when he was in his private moments with Suu, what kind of father, or what kind of teacher he was, given that I had no access to that kind of information." However, the main key to the role for David Thewlis was the voice. "Like his brother, Michael had an extraordinary way of speaking," he continues. "It is a peculiar upper class accent, quite eccentric, that's not Standard English. It would have been wrong not to imitate this intonation and this way of speaking because that was the key to the whole character for me. I was a little worried too about how the audience will react to this odd accent!"

The actor never met Michael Aris, but he had long conversations with his brother, which was a great help for him. "I was very lucky to meet Anthony because otherwise I would have gotten Michael wrong," he adds. "Thanks to him, I understood that Michael was extremely courageous and committed. From the very beginning, he had accepted that his wife, whom he worshipped, would give up her family, for the sake of her country and her ideals of democracy. How couldn't I have admired a man who showed such resilience and self denial in the face of adversity? Who would raise two boys alone and be willing to die without seeing his wife? I can only see his devotion to his wife as being unconditional love and respect of her own commitment. At no moment did he ever question her actions, not even when she was on hunger strike."

The encounter with Anthony also allowed David Thewlis to better understand the difference between the two brothers and to prepare to embody the two characters. He explains, "Anthony is more articulate than his brother, he is a bon vivant, a very charismatic man and very funny too! The first time I met Anthony, he said 'you don't look anything like us,' and we don't really. We have a different frame, we have a very different facial structure, so they pushed up my ears, gave me bushier eyebrows and I had to put on some weight to look more like Anthony. But what really mattered was that I could express the difference between the two brothers, the voice, the mannerism or the way of moving."

The couple's inner circle

Two newcomers in English cinema play the parts of Aung Sang Suu Kyi's sons. Jonathan Woodhouse, a Philippine actor, is Alex, the elder brother. "Alex is a rather quiet boy, he's

very intelligent and interested in academic studies," he says. "I think he was more aware than his brother of the circumstances surrounding his family. The thing that helped me relate to him was that, like him, I have a strong mother who had overcome her own trials, and who gave me a sound education." Although the young man never met with Alex, he read quite a few books about him and about Burma's political situation. "As I play a half-Burmese character, I wanted to better grasp the country's situation and how the dictatorship came to power," he adds. "I read two biographies of Aung Sang Suu Kyi, *Perfect Hostage* and *Letters from Burma*, and I learnt a lot of things about the junta in power. I also found a lot of information about Alex," he resumes. "When you play a real person, you feel a real sense of responsibility and I wanted to do him justice." Jonathan Woodhouse was more interested in getting the character and the story right than in mimicking Alex. "Of course I worked on my accent, but what really mattered to me was to understand Alex's mindset especially when he collected his mother's Nobel Peace Prize. The hardest thing was playing a 14- or 15- year-old teenager when you are 23."

There is even less information about Kim, Aung Sang Su Kyi's younger son. But when Jonathan Raggett, who plays Kim, met with him, he realised that the character he was playing was no different from him. "I did some research on the Internet and I found a couple of pictures," he relates. "When I met him, I found out that he was an extrovert, more attracted to skateboarding than to academic studies! When he was young, he was quite mischievous and cheeky, just like me! I am very much like him; I can't sit in class, listening to a teacher, for very long. I have always preferred music and photography to studies. It was quite comforting to know I didn't have to play a completely new person. I even had to get linguistic coaching to get rid of my Brighton accent." Moreover, Jonathan Raggett had the same kind of relationship with his brother as Kim: "When I found out that they kept fighting, it helped me get into the character's mindset because I keep fighting with my brother too. So it was not a character part!"

Apart from his wife and his two sons, Michael Aris was very close to Karma, his loyal student from Oxford University. When Benedict Wong was approached for the part, he knew nothing about the project: "Even after several auditions and after I got the job, I still didn't know what it was all about," he explains. "I must admit it was quite unusual and even a bit scary." Fortunately the actor could figure out the character when he read the script. "First, Karma was Michael Aris's student, then over the years the relationship grew into a friendship, so much so that they became like two brothers," he goes on. "He was there to guide him, and nurse him when he got ill. There was this compassion he felt for him and I guess he accompanied Michael through to his death really."

An actor's dream director

Some actors were startled by the unusual subject matter of *The Lady*, but they were all eager to be working with Luc Besson. Whether they had already worked with him – like David Thewlis – or just admired his films, they were all delighted when they heard the name of the director of *The Fifth Element*.

It was Michelle Yeoh who asked him to work on her project. "When I learnt that he would direct the film it was like a dream come true," Michelle Yeoh confides. "I have been a fan of his work for such a long time and when I was told that 'he does action movies' I replied that it didn't mean he wasn't a great director. For an action movie to be successful you must feel for the characters – and only a director who knows how to bring the best out of his actors makes successful action movies. And Luc does. Not only does he bring flesh and soul into his characters, he has always championed very strong female roles."

David Thewlis agrees, "Luc is a great director, who brings the best out of me. I can be lazy sometimes if I'm not directed but Luc never lets me be lazy and he does a lot of takes until he is satisfied. I like his method very much because each take is different and Luc gives me a lot of advice from behind the camera during the take."

Michelle Yeoh agrees, "I admit that he is very demanding and, contrary to most directors, he is very punctual, which is one of the things I loved about him. When he said 8 o'clock on the set, he meant 8! And all the cast, even the extras had to be on their toes, ready to act. I love his way of working."

The actors are unanimous about Luc Besson's hands-on approach and his total commitment to the project he works on. "He is behind the camera, and it helps enormously," David Thewlis agrees. "He is technically highly proficient and is in charge of every level of the set. He's not behind the monitor twenty feet away from us. He watches your performance and gives you very subtle indications, including on English inflexions, which I find fascinating considering that English is not his mother tongue – but 99% of the time he's absolutely right." Jonathan Raggett adds, "He's hands on, he really works well with the actors and steers you in the direction that he wants. This allows him to be very specific in setting up every sequence." Benedict Wong concurs, "I sort of see him like the captain of a ship, orchestrating the shooting. Everybody's scrubbing the deck and he's very hands on." "It's because he knows exactly what he wants and he has a very clear, distinctive vision of his film," Michelle Yeoh points out. "So I had great trust in him: when he said I had to do the take again, I trusted him. This kind of trust is necessary especially when it's a very vulnerable, very emotional role like that of Aung Sang Suu Kyi."

However the director gave the actors some room to breathe. "And on the set, when we are rehearsing, I like throwing around ideas and Luc has always encouraged me, even if, at the end of the day, he is the one making the decision," Michelle Yeoh explains. "There were some scenes we just improvised entirely," Jonathan Woodhouse adds. "He gives the actors a chance to give their own interpretation of the scene even if it was not in the script. He gave me one piece of direction, which for me was really invaluable, which was not to think too much, but just go ahead and do it." Jonathan Raggett nods, "sometimes you didn't know exactly when he was going to say 'Action!' or 'Cut', so that you forgot about the camera and got more into the part. It's interesting because he gives the actors a chance to have their own interpretation of the scene and go on their own impulse and yet he's hands on, and it's great."

Shooting with your heart

From Burma to Thailand

Obviously, it was not an option to shoot a film on Aung Sang Suu Kyi in Burma, so Thailand was the scene of the action instead. Virginie Besson-Silla explains, "Geographically speaking Burma and Thailand are very similar and many movies are shot in Thailand. We had all the technicians and the infrastructure on the spot and we didn't have to bring them along from France." Better still, there is a large Burmese community in Thailand, which made it easy for production to hire supporting actors and extras.

But Luc Besson and his producer still felt it was necessary to go to Burma because, "it would have been preposterous to talk about a country you've never set foot in," Virginie Besson-Silla explains. It was a unique experience to get to understand Burmese culture, "and even if we didn't stay as long as we wished, we still had time to get the feel, the energy, the tastes, the mores and the particular climate" she adds. "We spent some time in Rangoon, walking in the markets, the harbour, visiting the Shwedagon Pagoda and getting to understand the

inhabitants' way of life. Luc took a few pictures that he inserted in the movie. We discovered an extraordinary country, different from all the places I have ever visited, sheltered from any Western influence and from all form of modernity. Of course we tried to come near Aung Sang Suu Kyi's house but we couldn't"

Although principal photography took place in Thailand, it was necessary to be secretive about the movie subject matter. "We had been warned that we risked being expelled from the country if we were too conspicuous because the government was concerned there might be upheavals," Virginie Besson-Silla recounts. "The good news was that the main setting was the house in which our protagonist lived. So we built a house in an enclosed, private place, which granted us complete freedom. However, the minute we were out in the street or in public places, we had to be careful. Not only did the whole team understand it, but they all played ball. And the inhabitants were not too inquisitive; none of them ever took pictures of us with their mobile phones, or posted anything on the Internet."

Intense moments

The crew and the cast have intense memories of this extraordinary shoot, which took them from Thailand to Oxford (England) to France over a period of three and a half months. The scene of Aung Sang Suu Kyi delivering a speech in Shwedagon, with nearly three thousand extras, was particularly memorable. "Seeing Michelle with so many supporters around her, speaking on behalf of the people, was absolutely incredible and exciting," Jonathan Woodhouse remembers. "It didn't feel like acting, it felt real," Jonathan Raggett nods. "Sometimes, we would forget it was a movie. Like this scene when Suu Kyi got put under house arrest and we huddled together like a real family, I was holding Michelle tightly like she was my real mother. I was even scared when the guys acting as the soldiers were really aggressive, and they did it fantastically well..." For Jonathan Woodhouse, the Nobel Prize scene was the most difficult one. "It was shot toward the end and I had been anticipating it for months," he says. "It was really very daunting for me, and I did feel under pressure, and I remember David (Thewlis) tapping me on the shoulder and saying 'no pressure'. I had studied the speech so much and when I saw that there were hundreds of extras, I felt that I was not really acting; I felt I was delivering a real speech. It was doing justice to the real Alex, to Suu Kyi and to her people." David Thewlis recalls his relationships with Michelle Yeoh and the two young actors playing their sons, "Michelle is very smart and very funny and she is a great actress. It wasn't hard to form that bond with such a lovely woman. As to the two Jonathans, they made me laugh a lot on the set; we played lots of jokes on each other, so that it was easy to form a great bond with them. We were like a real family."

A long-awaited release

As Luc Besson was almost finishing *The Lady*, the team heard of Aung Sang Suu Kyi's release on November 13, 2010, after serving several years of house arrest. The emotions were very raw. "Even if the date of the release had long been known, until the very last minute – until we saw it with our own eyes – we didn't believe it," Virginie Besson-Silla states. "And then, we saw it live on TV. We saw the soldiers removing the barricades that cordoned off the street where she lived and we thought, 'that's it, they are releasing her!' It was an amazing moment because, only the day before, we had been shooting the scene of her previous release in 1995. Suddenly facts were meeting fiction, Suu Kyi walked with a determined stride toward the gates, as if nothing had changed, she put flowers in her hair, in the same way as we had filmed Michelle putting flowers in her hair, the day before, while the supporters were waiting at the gates." Michelle Yeoh nods, "I think the look on Luc's [Besson] face was priceless, I'll never forget it. It was a very intense moment for all of us." David Thewlis adds, "It was one of the most memorable days of my life. We were with Kim, Suu Kyi's younger son. At last, he could speak freely with his mother. It was an incredibly real piece of history in the making."

A film with a message of hope...

In conclusion, all those who have worked on this movie hope that it will raise audiences' awareness of Burma's political situation and do justice to Aung Sang Suu Kyi's values. "The film shows that, in some countries, there is no freedom and that some rare people are willing to make sacrifices to help their country," Virginie Besson-Silla points out, "I would hope that the film does raise awareness of Suu Kyi's cause and that a lot of people will be moved by her story, and that Burma does not disappear from the headlines." David Thewlis adds, "The way things are today, things arise to prominence and overnight Burma does not make the headlines any more. It is true that terrible things happen in the world all the time. But we must always remember that Suu Kyi chose to stay in her country to fight, when she could have become a leader in exile." Jonathan Woodhouse goes on, "it would be great if the film made people want to take action about Burma and stop thinking, were it for a brief moment, about their own struggles".

"I do hope Suu Kyi will be touched by the film," Virginie Besson-Silla concludes. "We filmed her husband and sons during private moments, even if she has not actually lived those moments since she was separated from them. I hope she will endorse 'our story' and will think we have been true to her message."

ABOUT THE CAST

Michelle Yeoh (Aung San Suu Kyi)

Hailed by critics for her beauty and her talent, Hong Kong film star Michelle Yeoh gained fame by going toe-to-toe against her male counterparts in many action and martial arts movies. Like action hero Jackie Chan, Michelle Yeoh was celebrated for performing her own mind-boggling stunts and handling her own fight scenes, which were not without their inherent dangers. Throughout her career, Michelle was capable of matching her male colleagues without ever compromising her femininity, making her one of the most versatile actresses to have emerged from Asia in years.

Born in Malaysia, Yeoh displayed an early propensity for all things physical, even competing nationally in squash, Malaysian Jr champion, swimming and diving in her teens. But her true love was dance, which started after taking up ballet at four years old. Moving to England when she was 16, Michelle attended boarding school before earning her bachelor of arts in Creative Arts, majoring in dance with drama as her minor. A serious back injury ended her dreams to become a ballerina and a full time dance course, forcing a shift toward a more academic side of dance and also, choreography. Upon graduation, Michelle returned to Malaysia to plan her future. Dance school or more studies in London.. But back home, she was dismayed to find out that her mother had signed her up for a beauty pageant. Nevertheless, she followed through with her mother's unsolicited initiative and went on to be crowned Miss Malaysia in 1983.

During her reign, Yeoh was approached by D&B Films to make a commercial with action-comedy star Jackie Chan, which soon led to more advertisements with star Chow Yun-Fat and a contract with the production company. Urged to try her hand at features, Michelle made her film debut in *Owl vs. Dumbo* (1984), an action comedy directed by and starring Sammo Hung, where she played the damsel in distress. It was only in her 2nd movie, *Yes Madam* (1985), that her extensive background in dance and movement gave her the strength and agility needed to appear credible in her action scenes that wowed the audiences. Meanwhile, her willingness to work through pain and injuries quickly won her the respect of Hong Kong action producers, directors and stunt men.

Yeoh made four more films in the ensuing four years, including *Royal Warriors* (1986), *Magnificent Warriors* (1987) and the globe-trotting caper flick *Easy Money* (1988), which turned the actress into a beloved star. But at the peak of her success, Michelle stunned fans with the announcement of her impending marriage and retirement. Michelle put family life as priority with studio head Dickson Poon, and left acting for the three years they were married. After divorcing Poon, the former action diva made a resounding comeback opposite Jackie Chan in *Police Story 3: Supercop* (1992). Playing a mainland Chinese policewoman aiding a Hong Kong cop (Chan) on an undercover mission in China, Yeoh was the first female co-star to receive equal footing with her celebrated lead while receiving more strong notices for her breathtaking stunt work.

Yeoh's renewed popularity was even more impressive than her initial success. Having become the highest paid actress in Hong Kong, she appeared in 10 films over the next four years. In the fantasy adventure *The Heroic Trio* (1992), she joined forces with Anita Mui and Maggie Cheung to play the Invisible Woman, a heroine who turns invisible with the help of a special suit. Yeoh also suffered her first serious injury making the action thriller *Stunt Woman* (1997). Michelle fell 18 feet while jumping from a bridge and landed on her head, thinking she had heard the sound of her back snapping in the process. Though temporarily sidelined, she managed to complete the film, much to the amazement of her doctors.

Yeoh was back on her feet and ready to pursue a film career and Hollywood came calling, turning up in the 18th James Bond feature, *Tomorrow Never Dies* (1997) opposite Pierce Brosnan. She played a Chinese agent posing as a journalist who teams up with Bond to stop a powerful industrialist (Jonathan Pryce) from manipulating world events in order to trigger World War III.

Yeoh achieved her biggest exposure to date with a starring role in the Oscar-winning *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000). Beautifully directed by Ang Lee, this martial arts epic set in 19th century China was equally balanced between thrilling action sequences and emotionally resonant characters. She gave one of her finest performances as Yu Shu Lien, the secret love of Li Mu Bai (Chow Yun-Fat), a retiring martial arts master who entrusts her with delivering the Green Destiny, an invincible 400-year-old sword, to another master.

In 2002, Michelle formed her own production company, Mythical Films, she produced and starred in contemporary romantic action adventure *The Touch* (2002) and *Silver Hawk* (2004).

Yeoh next appeared in *Memoirs of a Geisha* (2005), Rob Marshall's long-awaited adaptation of Arthur Golden's best-selling novel about a poor Japanese girl torn from her home and raised in a geisha house.

Yeoh followed up by joining the cast of *Sunshine* (2007), Danny Boyle's sci-fi thriller about a group of astronauts sent to discover what happened to a missing space crew. Because of her international appeal, Yeoh was able to secure roles in major Hollywood movies, playing a double-crossing sorceress teamed with star Brendan Fraser to stop a resurrected emperor (Jet Li) from enslaving the human race in *The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor* (2008).

Following Mathieu Kassovitz's *Babylon A.D.* (2008) starring Vin Diesel, she returned to China to team up with her long time mentor Terence Chang and good friend John Woo to star in *Reign of Assassins* (2010), directed by Su Chao-Pin. Michelle was playing an ex-assassin trying to escape her former life with a gang of killers hot on her trail. The movie was premiered at Venice Film Festival in September last year, and nominated for Best Director, Best Picture, Best Actress at the Asian Film Awards and Hong Kong Film Awards this year.

Yeoh continues to surprise audiences by turning to animation to voice The Soothsayer in the sequel, *Kung Fu Panda: The Kaboom of Doom* (2011). Her performance as Burmese Nobel Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi in Luc Besson's *The Lady* (2011) is highly anticipated.

David Thewlis (Michael et Anthony Harris)

Internationally acclaimed actor David Thewlis is one of the UK's most versatile.

His breakthrough performance came in Mike Leigh's *Naked*, for which he won awards for Best Actor at the Cannes Film Festival, the New York Film Critics Awards, the National Society of Film Critics Awards, the London Critics Circle Film Awards and the Evening Standard British Film Awards. Since then he has starred in a range of critically acclaimed roles.

Thewlis recently finished shooting two films: *Warhorse*, directed by Steven Spielberg, and *Anonymous*, directed by Roland Emmerich for Sony Pictures. Other recent film work includes: *London Boulevard*, directed by Bill Monahan; *Mr Nice*, directed by Bernard Rose; *Veronika Decides to Die*, directed by Emily Young; and *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*,

directed by Mark Herman. Thewlis also plays the returning character of Professor Lupin in the *Harry Potter* films.

Other film credits include: Paul Auster's *The Inner Life of Martin Frost*, John Moore's *The Omen*, Jordan Scott's *All the Invisible Children*, Terrence Malick's *The New World*, Ridley Scott's *The Kingdom of Heaven*, Richard Donner's *Timeline*, Paul McGuigan's *Gangster No. 1*, Bernardo Bertolucci's *Besieged*, Joel and Ethan Cohen's *The Big Lebowski*, Jean Jaques Annaud's *Seven Years in Tibet* and John Frankenheimer's *The Island of Dr Moreau*, Agnieszka Holland's *Total Eclipse*, Rob Cohen's *Dragonheart*, Mike Hoffman's *Restoration*, Caroline Thompson's *Black Beauty*, David Jones' *The Trial*, Paul Greengrass' *Resurrected*, Beban Kidron's *Vroom* and *Short and Curlies* and *Life is Sweet*, both for Mike Leigh.

On television, Thewlis recently played the twin roles of Joe and Harry in *The Street*, for which he was nominated as Outstanding Actor in a TV Series Drama at the 2008 Monte Carlo TV Festival. Other TV credits include *Dinotopia*, *Prime Suspect III*, *The Singing Detective*, *Journey to Knock*, *Filipino Dreamgirls*, *Skulduggery*, *A Bit of a Do*, *Road*, and *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*.

In addition to his screen work, Thewlis has also starred on stage in Sam Mendes' *The Sea* at the Royal National Theatre, Max Stafford-Clark's *Ice Cream* at the Royal Court, *Buddy Holly at the Regal* and *Ruffian on the Stairs* at Farnham, and *Lady and the Clarinet* at the Kings Head.

Thewlis is also known for his work as a director, with his feature film *Cheeky*, which he also wrote and starred in and his short film *Hello, Hello, Hello*, which was nominated for a BAFTA Award for Best Short Film.

Thewlis' many achievements were recognised at the 2008 British Independent Film Awards when he received the prestigious Richard Harris Award for Outstanding Contribution to Film.

Outside of his screen work David Thewlis is also a recognized author. His first novel *The Late Hector Kipling* was published in 2007 to great critical acclaim.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

Luc Besson (Director)

Luc Besson began his career in cinema in 1977, working a number of assistant director positions in France and the United States, and thereby gradually positioning himself as one of the few French directors and producers with an international scope.

In 1983, he directed his first feature film, *The Last Battle*, which earned him recognition at the Avoriaz Film Festival.

Two years later he directed *Subway*, starring Isabelle Adjani and Christopher Lambert. The industry rewarded him with three César Awards. Luc Besson's visual style was clearly established.

Building on his success, he undertook the direction of *The Big Blue*. Though poorly received at the Cannes Film Festival, the film gained 10 million admissions and went on to become a veritable social phenomenon.

Despite an unfavourable critical climate, both *La Femme Nikita* (1990) and *Leon: the Professional* (1994) were publicly acclaimed, solidly establishing his popularity in France and earning him an international reputation.

Between these films, he directed *Atlantis* (1991), a documentary aimed at raising awareness about the beauty of nature and the need to protect the environment.

In 1995 he launched into directing a bold science fiction picture: *The Fifth Element*. The blockbuster became one of the biggest box office hits of any French film in the United States. In 1998, Luc Besson took home a César Award for Best Director.

In 1999, he directed his version of *Joan of Arc*, winning him another nomination as Best Director at the César Awards.

In 2000, he was named President of the Jury for the 53rd Cannes Film Festival, becoming the youngest jury president in the history of the festival.

He devoted most of the next five years to production. Since creating EuropaCorp ten years ago, the studio has become one of European cinema's most important.

In 2005, he returned to directing with *Angel-A*, and the following year with his first animated picture, *Arthur and the Invisibles*, adapted from the book he wrote. This animation was followed up by two others: *Arthur and the Revenge of Maltazard* (2009) and *Arthur 3: The War of the Two Worlds*.

In 2010, Luc Besson adapted Tardi's series of graphic novels with *The Extraordinary Adventures of Adèle Blanc-Sec*, with Louis Bourgoïn starring in the title role.

2011 marks the release of *The Lady*, starring Michelle Yeoh in the role of Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi.

Throughout his directing career, Luc Besson also directed a number of music videos, including Serge Gainsbourg and Mylène Farmer, as well as commercials for internationally renowned brands.

In addition to the films he has directed, Luc Besson has written over twenty screenplays for features. Among them are the *Taxi* series and the recent *Taken*, which as of today lays claim to being the biggest box office hit of any French film in the United States.

Filmography as director

2011 *The Lady*

2010 *Arthur 3: The War of the Two Worlds*

2010 *The Extraordinary Adventures of Adèle Blanc-Sec*

2009 *Arthur and the Revenge of Maltazard*

2006 *Arthur and the Invisibles*

2005 *Angel-A*

1999 *Joan of Arc*

1997 *The Fifth Element*

1994 *Leon: The Professional*

1991 *Atlantis*

1990 *La Femme Nikita*

1988 *The Big Blue*

1985 *Subway*

1983 The Last Battle
1981 L'Avant-Dernier (short)

Virginie Besson-Silla (Producer)

Virginie Silla, born in Ottawa, Canada, to a family of diplomats, spent her childhood travelling the world, from Mali and Senegal to the United States and France.

After graduating from the American University in Paris with a degree in Business Administration, she sought her first job in the field she loved more than any: cinema.

In 1994, she began working for Patrice Ledoux, the Gaumont's company general director. She saw Luc Besson's *The Fifth Element* through to the release, then the same director's *Joan of Arc*.

When in 1999 Luc Besson founded EuropaCorp, he offered Virginie a position in the venture. She accepted and became a producer. A year later, she produced her first film, *Yamakasi-les samourais des temps modernes*, a major success with 2.2 million admissions in France.

Then came:

- *Once upon an Angel* by Vincent Perez (2002) starring Guillaume Depardieu
- *Happiness Costs Nothing* by MIMO Calopresti (2003) starring Valeria Bruni-Tedeschi
- *À ton Image* by Aruna Villiers (2004) starring Nastassja Kinski and Christopher Lambert
- *Au Suivant* by Jeanne Biras (2005) starring Alexandra Lamy and Clovis Cornillac
- *Revolver* by Guy Ritchie (2005) starring Jason Statham and Ray Liotta
- *Love and other Disasters* by Aleck Keshishian (2006) starring Brittany Murphy
- *The Secret* by Vincent Perez (2007) starring Olivia Thirlby and David Duchovny
- *From Paris with Love* by Pierre Morel (2009) starring John Travolta and Jonathan Rhys Meyers

In 2004, Virginie Silla became Virginie Besson-Silla, but it was only after ten years of collaborating on projects that Luc and Virginie decided to actually team up on a film.

So it was that in 2010 Virginie produced Luc Besson's *The Extraordinary Adventures of Adèle Blanc-Sec* starring Louise Bourgoin.

Then came the most important film of her young career: *The Lady*, starring Michelle Yeoh and David Thewlis, directed by Luc Besson, and previewed at the Toronto Film Festival. Thanks to the film, Virginie had the privilege of meeting Aung San Suu Kyi in Rangoon in June 2011, a indelible memory.

At the same time, Virginie has been working since 2009 on a 3D animated film, *The Boy with the Cuckoo-Clock Heart*, adapted from the book by author Mathias Malzieu, who is also the singer for the group Dionysos. The film is due for release in 2013.

Andy Harries (Producer)

Andy Harries is one of the UK's most successful and respected film and television producers and is Chief Executive of his own London-based production company Left Bank Pictures. Notable films from throughout his career include *The Queen*, *The Damned United*, *Pierpoint* and the forthcoming *All In Good Time*. His television career has seen him win

three Golden Globes in 2006 for Longford (written by Peter Morgan and directed by Tom Hooper), and Emmy Awards for Prime Suspect 6 and Prime Suspect 7.

In 2006 *The Queen* grossed over \$150 million worldwide and saw Andy nominated for an Academy Award for his role as producer. The film had a run of awards that include Best Actress, Best Screenplay and The Fipresci Award at the Venice Film Festival 2006; Best Actress, Best Score and Best Screenplay at the 64th Golden Globes and Best British Film, Best Actress, Best Screenplay and Best Director at the London Film Critics' Circle Awards. Recognition in the UK was sealed with two BAFTA award wins for Best Film and Best Actress while the film's incredible run continued with six Academy Award nominations with Helen Mirren memorably winning Best Actress.

Harries recently produced the award-winning film *The Damned United* (2009) with Michael Sheen as legendary soccer manager Brian Clough (directed by Tom Hooper and written by Peter Morgan) and *All In Good Time* (2011) a big screen adaptation of the National Theatre's Olivier Award-winning play by Ayub Khan Din and starring Harish Patel (directed by Nigel Cole).

Between 2000 and 2007 Andy Harries was Controller of Drama, Comedy and Film for Granada Productions. During this period he produced a huge range of dramas, comedies and films for ITV1 and other broadcasters, winning awards from the Emmys and Golden Globes to BAFTA and the RTS and receiving an Academy Award nomination.

This prolific period subsequently produced dramas such as *The Forsyte Saga*; *Dr Zhivago* starring Keira Knightley and Sam Neill and *The Deal* which brought together Stephen Frears and Peter Morgan for the first time. That same year Andy executive produced Peter Morgan's *Henry VIII* and the critically acclaimed factual dramas *Wall Of Silence* starring James Nesbitt, *Danielle Cable: Eyewitness* and the Emmy award-winning *Prime Suspect 6* starring Helen Mirren.

Other successes during this period included *Life Begins*, *Dirty Filthy Love* and *Vincent* for ITV and *The Street* for the BBC. In 2006 *Prime Suspect: The Final Act* won three Emmys for outstanding directing, writing and actress in a mini-series while other dramas that year included *Cracker*, *See No Evil: The Moors Murders* and a return of *The Royle Family* for a Christmas Special which won both a BAFTA and RTS award. Andy was executive producer for *Murder In The Outback* for ITV and the triple Golden Globe winner *Longford* for HBO / Channel 4.

Left Bank Pictures was established by Andy Harries in July 2007 with investment from BBC WorldWide and a creative board made up of key players from across the film and television industries.

In its first four years Left Bank Pictures has produced a wide range of drama and comedy productions for HBO, BBC, ITV1, Channel 4, E4 and Sky and three feature films, with many more in development.

Left Bank Pictures productions to date include three series of the seven times BAFTA award-winning *Wallander* (starring Kenneth Branagh); eight episodes of *Inspector Banks*, a four-part thriller *Father & Son* and *Married; Single, Other* for ITV1; two series of *Strike Back* for Sky1 HD and subsequently HBO; two series of the E4 sketch show *School Of Comedy*; the critically acclaimed *Zen* for BBC1 and two series of *Mad Dogs* for Sky1 HD.

In 2011 Andy was awarded with a Royal Television Society Fellowship. In 2007 he received a BAFTA for outstanding contribution to the industry, given by the BAFTA council and in honour of the documentary maker Alan Clarke.

Rebecca Frayn (Writer)

Rebecca Frayn is a filmmaker, screen writer and novelist with her finger on the pulse of contemporary issues. She has directed a wide variety of critically acclaimed documentaries for the BBC, Channel 4 and ITV on a range of subjects from Tory wives to identical twins. She has also made her directorial debut with a television drama, *Whose Baby?* that tackled father's rights, starring Sophie Okonedo and Andrew Lincoln. And her screenplay for the BBC, *Killing Me Softly* told the real life story of Sara Thornton, whose conviction for murder helped bring about a reform of the law on domestic violence. Over the years, she has made a number of films about prominent women of our times, including Leni Riefenstahl, Annie Leibovitz and Nora Ephron. In 2006, her first novel, *One Life*, dealt with the complex emotional and ethical landscape of IVF. And in 2008, after making a short viral film opposing the proposed expansion of Heathrow airport, she co-founded *We CAN*, a group that lobbied the government to take action on climate change in the run up to the 2010 Copenhagen Conference.

In addition to Rebecca's screenplay about Aung San Suu Kyi, *The Lady*, her second novel, *Deceptions*, a psychological thriller about a boy who goes missing has recently been published with glowing reviews in the UK, US and most recently, France.

Rebecca is currently working on a third novel that will tackle environmental activism and a screenplay set in 1970 about the women's movement.

Thierry Arbogast (Director of Photography)

Cinematographer for Jean-Paul Rappennau, André Téchiné, Emir Kusturica and, of course, Luc Besson, Thierry Arbogast has a knack for switching from one register to another, and a gift for plays of shadow and backlighting.

His interest in photography began at age 11 and before long he was developing his own photos and shooting shorts in Super 8. By his own admission he did poorly in school, dropping out of high school at 17 for a job as assistant cameraman. What Arbogast did study, however, was the work of the great cinematographers like Vittorio Storaro (*Apocalypse Now*) and Gordon Willis (*The Godfather*).

Choosing his projects in light of the overall universe of a given director, he has created faithful ties with several directors, often taking radically different lighting approaches. Thus with *I Don't Kiss* (1991), he began a collaboration with André Téchiné whose aesthetics he explains he found "almost embarrassing" and he is "attached to other values like the way the talent acts and moves." At the other end of the spectrum, by lighting Emir Kusturica's *Black Cat, White Cat* (1998), he discovered an altogether different approach: "He's very creative and needs to visualize a shot to enrich it" he says of the filmmaker. "He builds it up little by little, and that takes time." He met Luc Besson in 1990 on *La Femme Nikita*. The two men quickly realized they were on the same wave length. "Luc always manages to surprise me by doing the opposite of what I would have done", Thierry Arbogast explains. "He works for the film-goer which may account for that rare osmosis that exists between him and his public. The crews he directs must stay concentrated and he puts on a lot of pressure early on during a shoot. The first half is therefore often very tense, but once you've passed the Azores, it's

smooth sailing and Luc loosens up. The second half becomes a film among friends, like on *Leon*.” A wonderful working relationship that culminates in *The Lady*.

Eric Serra (Composer)

A major enthusiast of rock, jazz and African music, Eric Serra has collaborated on about fifty albums as a bass guitarist. But his name is first and foremost associated with Luc Besson’s long string of films.

Born in 1959, he grew up in a musical environment and began learning guitar very young. “My father bought me my first guitar when I was five” he says. “It became my favourite toy. I played it like my father, without real instruction. Later, when I was 11, I got my first electric guitar. What I loved was to play back the guitar choruses that I heard on records. It was a game that really made me work my instrument and develop an ear. It was my only school of music. That’s how my instructors ranged from Ritchie Blackmore (Deep Purple) and Alvin Lee (Ten years after) to Jeff Beck and John McLaughlin.”

In 1976, he worked for major musicians like Dider Lockwood, Mory Kante, Murray Head and Youssou N’Dour, becoming Jacques Higelin’s bassist in the early 1980s. Around that time, Eric Serra met Luc Besson through Pierre Jolivet. “Luc, who was 18 like me, wanted to direct his first short film and asked me to write the music” says the composer. “That’s how I came to do the musical scores on all his films. You might say we started out together.”

In 1985, Serra won a double gold record for the original score to *Subway*, which was also nominated for a César. Dividing his time between the stage and film music, the musician finally chose film, since Luc Besson left him a lot of freedom and allowed him to start working from the first draft of a screenplay. Three years later, he wrote the score for *The Big Blue* (César for the Best Original Score and a Victoire Award for music), with a New Age inspired electronic sound. He went on to compose for *La Femme Nikita* (1990), *Atlantis* (1991), which he says was his “first real symphonic music”, and *Leon: the Professional*, a clever blend of African percussions, synth and Arabic tonalities. “Looking back, if I was to choose my favourite music, even though it’s a tough choice, I’d say *Leon* because there’s an emotional power there that fascinates me.”

Recognized internationally, Eric Serra was contacted by the producers of *Goldeneye* (1995) to renew the musical style of James Bond. Two years later, the composer released his first solo album RXRA, where he sang his own lyrics. In 1999, Serra worked once again with Luc Besson on *Joan of Arc*, drawing inspiration from Carl Orff’s *Carmina Burana*, and leaving aside for a time an electronic sound.

After working in the United States for the second time on a remake of *Rollerball* (2002) by John McTiernan, Eric Serra attempts a new experience for the animated trilogy *Arthur and the Invisibles* (2006-2010) when Luc Besson obliges him to radically change his usual working methods. Thanks to their long working history, the two men are able to overcome their different approaches. Today they have once again worked together on *The Lady*.

AUNG SAN SUU KYI

Her Father: Aung San

- Major figure of Burma's independence
- Murdered a few months before the declaration of independence. Aung San Suu Kyi is 2.

Her Country: Burma

- Independence is signed with the British Empire in 1947
- Putsch of General Ne Win in 1962

The Lady of Rangoon

- Born in 1945, raised in India and in the United Kingdom.
- She studies philosophy, economics and political science at Oxford, and worked for the United Nations in New York
- 1988: she came back to her country to take care of her mother
- Inspired by Gandhi and Martin Luther King, she founded the National League for Democracy
- 1989: The military junta placed her under house arrest
- 1990: during a general election, NLD received 59% of the votes guaranteeing them 80% of seats in parliament. The results were nullified, and the military refused to hand over power
- 1991: She was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.
- 1999: Her husband died of cancer
- 2007: Anti-government protests led by Buddhist monks in support of human rights. While still under house arrest, Suu Kyi made a brief public appearance at the gate of her residence to accept the blessings of the monks.
- November 2010 : Aung San Suu Kyi was released from house arrest.

CAST

Michelle Yeoh
David Thewlis
Jonathan Raggett
Jonathan Woodhouse
Susan Wooldridge
Benedict Wong
Htun Lin
Agga Poechit

Aung San Suu Kyi
Michael Aris
Kim
Alex
Lucinda
Karma
Général Ne Win
Than Shwe

CREDITS

Director
Screenplay
Producers

Original music
Cinematography
Production design
Costume design
Casting
Casting (Thai)
Editing
Sound

Production Manager
First assistant director

Luc Besson
Rebecca Frayn
Virginie Besson-Silla
Andy Harries
Éric Serra
Thierry Arbogast
Hugues Tissandier
Olivier Bériot
Fiona Weir
Raweeporn “Non” Jungmeier
Julien Rey
Ken Yasumoto
Didier Lozahic
Didier Hoarau
Ludovic Bernard

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