

AURORA FILMS
PRESENTS

 70th Internationale
Filmfestspiele
Berlin
Panorama

IF IT WERE LOVE

A DOCUMENTARY BY PATRIC CHIHA

Based On Gisèle Vienne's Dance Piece 'Crowd'

IF IT WERE LOVE

A DOCUMENTARY BY PATRIC CHIHA

82min - France - 2020 - Color - 1.85:1 - Dolby 5.1
English, French, Swedish

An Aurora Films Production

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SCREENINGS IN BERLINALE

SAT. 22, 3:15 PM @ CINEMAXX 19 (MARKET)

SAT. 22, 10:00 PM @ ZOO PALAST 2 (WORLD PREMIERE)

SUN. 23, 11:00 AM @ CINEMAXX 6

TUE. 25, 10.00 AM @ CUBIX 7

WED. 26, 8.30 PM @ CUBIX 5

SUN. 1, 8.00 PM @ CUBIX 5

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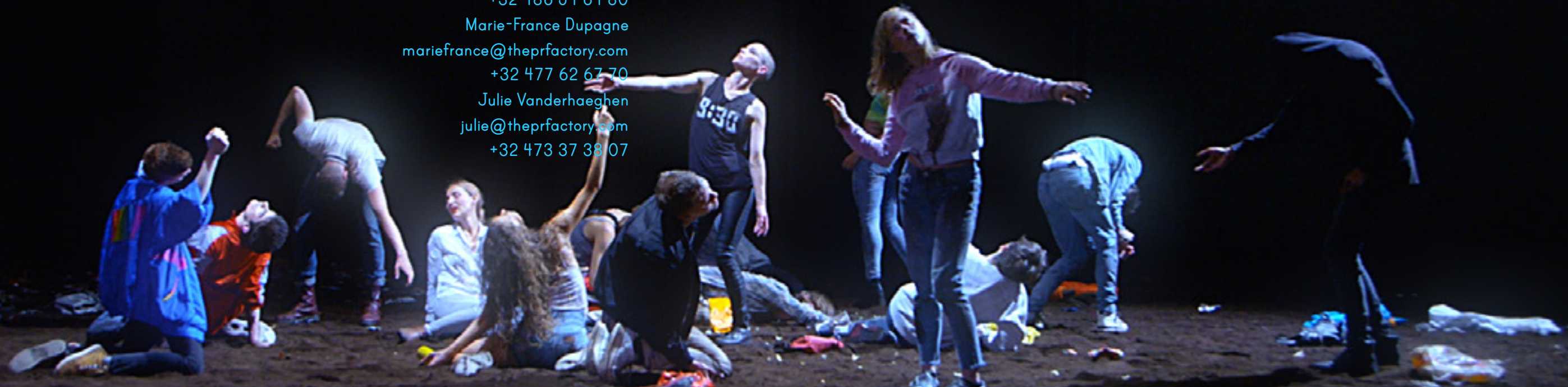
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SYNOPSIS

Fifteen young dancers of different origins and horizons are on tour with 'Crowd', Gisèle Vienne's epic dance piece exploring the 90's rave scene. From theatre to theatre, the work mutates into strange, intimate relationships. Is the stage contaminating real life – or the opposite? A disturbing journey exploring our nights, our parties, our loves.



INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

Why this film? And why choose this particular play, Crowd, amongst Gisèle Vienne's work?

When you direct a documentary, the first question one usually asks is about the subject. What is the film about? Most of the time, I answer that it is about nothing or everything. It is obviously an overstatement but I think it can apply to all the films I love: they transcend their subject. Not because they have cleverly managed to bury it under some sophisticated form or some eccentricity but because most of all they trust faces, movements, places, light or sound... Then, the real subject appears. I feel that it is even more true when you capture dance on film: you cannot start from what it means, from the sense of it all, you start from movement- such as the Lumière brothers when they shot a train coming into a station- and then, you just wait patiently for the meaning to appear.

"Crowd", Gisèle Vienne's play, is at the center of the film, it questions in a magnificent way the act of partying, love and how our emotions transform our perception of time. Gisèle and I met in school, when we were sixteen. We spent a lot of time together in clubs, raves, just dancing... Even though what we create is very different, there are some connections between her plays and my films, some more secret than others. I don't know... Austrian forests, a more or less numb violence, clubs, Robert Walser, emotion being the core of our creations but also a total mystery...



More specifically, Gisèle and how she works, particularly with the dancers, taught me a great deal about my relation towards my own craft: her way of making meaning emerge from the body when you decide to surrender yourself, to forget yourself, how it allows for the unexpected to appear but also for life to be seen. In movies, we direct actors but isn't it the opposite? Don't we make movies precisely because we are missing something? Something that cannot be translated into words? For that matter, isn't it the same with the audience? Aren't we all looking to lose ourselves rather than to feel confirmed into something?

At the premiere of "Crowd" (Paris Autumn Festival 2017), I was sitting in the front row. I discovered the dancers, their fascinating presence, euphoric and tragic at the same time, fiction slowly appearing through dancing, stories and characters emerging...and those bodies in slow motion, so slow that we could have stood-up and touched them- and be gone with them. I was sitting so close that I was not able to see everything. I gazed at the stage, fixated on some scenes and missing others, I adapted the play or should I say I split and edited it in my own way by doing close-ups. It is actually how the play works; you go from the group to individual stories. One scene really struck me: when Oskar, with his shaved head, gets up close to young Vincent. He touches him, hesitates, comes back, wants to kiss him. Vincent doesn't move. Oskar tries to get inside him. But it is impossible, he is inaccessible, impenetrable. There is a sentence from Paul Valéry that I find beautiful, it helps me understand my actions when I am filming: « the most profound thing in a Man is his skin ». In this gesture from Oskar to Vincent, lies something of the essence of love, of desire, but also of cinema itself, something words cannot express, but that I wanted to put into images, with the tools provided by cinema. The gesture, the act of love, as the act of cinema, is all about going toward the impenetrable. It's accepting confusion, the risk of losing oneself, unrequited love...



Did you have a specific plan in mind when you started the film? Filming dancers can be tricky, as well as integrating the intimacy of a company... How did that go?

When we decided to do this film with Gisèle and my producer, Charlotte Vincent, I understood very early on that I would not tackle this film as a documentary on a particular subject but as an adaptation, in the same way you would adapt (freely) a novel. During several months, with a small team, we followed Crowd's tour. Even though I had written grant applications, I had no real idea of how we were actually going to proceed. The goal was not to disrupt people at work, nor to explain something that cannot be explained by doing classic interviews. I am always suspicious of predefined measures, which act as a sort of formal grid that we apply on anything and everything. At first I panicked- silently. But my producer managed to reassure me by reminding me of my own motto: it's precisely when you are looking for something that you can't find it, and it's when you let go that perhaps something will appear. These sorts of films require a lot of patience. We first filmed warm-ups, rehearsals, dressing rooms... We did not shoot the play but we entirely edited it, piece by piece by filming directly on stage, getting as close to the faces as we could. Gisèle completely trusted us, she knew I was going to deconstruct and rework a lot of elements and she was excited about it. I think she was not looking for any confirmation, she wanted to be surprised. At first, the dancers were a bit suspicious but step-by-step they learned to love working that way, with a camera following them so close, it even affected their acting, it became deeper. And then, they started to « play » with us, to open up... They had very long and full days on tour, so we had very little time to shoot, only in the mornings or late at night.





We would agree on a place to meet (a hotel room, the theater hall...) and spend one or two hours together. We would wait for something to happen, just floating. It was very gentle. Our cinematographer, Jordane Chouzenoux, would light the room with colors reminiscent of the 90's and little by little, a situation would arise, a dialogue begin, something would happen. Sometimes, it was more on the documentary side, dancers questioning their work, their feelings, and sometimes it was more fictional, in the continuity of the characters they played on stage. But the border between the two very quickly disappeared.

The film is far from being a simple filmed version of the play, it is a reflection on what defines a dancer, an actor, a company. Did you think of that from the start or did it become clear during the editing phase?

The themes appeared later, during the shooting and mainly during the editing: the company, the work, the faces, the partying, the subjective perception of time... But at one point, I felt that the most important theme would be acting, how to create a character and its mystery.

"Crowd" is a danced play, with no words, but each dancer wrote – in collaboration with Gisèle and the writer Dennis Cooper – a story, a script, a past, a journey, to help him build his character... It's an unusual and rare approach to dancing: it questions in a fascinating way the creative process. How do we create a fictional character? What are the tools? Where is the truth and where is the acting? Moreover, is there a clear limit between the two? By questioning acting, we were not trying to reveal or explain something that neither the dancers nor we could totally analyze but we wanted to show this blurry state, very close to a trance, that appears between reality, dream and fantasy.

Strangely, these questions about acting echo what we feel in nightclubs, when we dance and observe people. Nightclubs are made of fiction, they are out of reality, out of time. It is a space for the absolute now, that is what makes it so exhilarating and melancholic at the same time- each movement, each look, each music is the promise of a story, a possible fiction that fades into the night.

The freer we are during the shooting, the more difficult is the editing. With Anna Riche, the editor, we got lost on a regular basis. Between the documentary on Gisèle's work, the hypnotic dance slow motions, the stories between fiction and documentary, the rave, the history of techno... One morning, I had an intuition: we put a working title in the opening credits, it is the question Cyd Charisse asks Fred Astaire in *The Band Wagon* directed by Vincente Minnelli: "Can we really dance together?". Suddenly, everything was clear. Here was the central question that would allow us to link all the levels of the films, to make them alive and make them resonate. Can we dance together?

Oskar's last monologue is magnificent. He gave it to me... just like that. Unannounced. He says regarding Vincent- and we do not know anymore whether he is talking about the play or about his own desires and feelings- that he would like to "see the dust from his close fly in the air when he moves". What a beautiful sentence! Love totally changes our relation to time and space: it becomes purely subjective. Or more concretely, the feeling of love changes the world around us, it does not feel the same anymore, the rhythm is different... Watch the dust fly in the air. Cinema can show that.

At the end of the film, you show archive footage of Le Palace nightclub, a particular time in the history of Parisian nights. Why is that?

The further you get into the film, the more blurred are the borders. Are we talking about a character, a person, a real emotion, a fake one? These shifts are not fabricated but appear to be at the center of what we do in films, plays, and parties... And these shifts are at the core of love, of desire. So in the end, everything blends: Gisèle's soft face (whom we have not seen for a long time in the film), the dancers disappearing into smoke, the incredible images shot by Arnaud Pasquier at Le Palace in 1988, during one of the first Techno parties in Paris. Present and past, life and art, reality and dream, love and death... no more borders, everything is part of everything.

BIOGRAPHY PATRIC CHIHA

Patric Chiha is an Austrian director with Hungarian and Lebanese origins. He was born in 1975 in Vienna. After studying fashion design at ESAA Duperré (Paris) and editing à INSAS (Brussels), he directs several short and medium length films as well as documentaries (HOME, WHERE IS THE HEAD OF THE PRISON? THE GENTLEMEN) selected in many film festivals. In 2009, he directs his first feature film, DOMAIN, with Béatrice Dalle, it is selected at the Venice International Film Festival. He continues with BOYS LIKE US (2014) and two documentaries: BROTHERS OF THE NIGHT (2016) and IF IT WERE LOVE (2019), both selected at the Berlinale. He is now working on his new fiction film: THE BEAST IN THE JUNGLE.

FILMOGRAPHY

In Preparation – THE BEAST IN THE JUNGLE – Feature – Fiction
2019 – IF IT WERE LOVE – Feature – Documentary
2016 – BROTHERS OF THE NIGHT – Feature – Documentary
2014 – BOYS LIKE US – Feature – Fiction
2009 – DOMAIN – Feature – Fiction
2007 – WHERE IS THE HEAD OF THE PRISON? – Short – Fiction
2006 – HOME – Short – Fiction
2005 – THE GENTLEMEN – Short – Documentary
2004 – CASA UGALDE – Short – Fiction



AURORA FILMS

Over the past few years, Paris based Aurora Films has specialized in French and international co-productions, producing about 50 films (shorts, documentaries and feature films). Out of the 7 feature films produced, 5 world premiered in Cannes Film Festival.

Recent films include "Exotica, Erotica, Etc." by Evangelia Kranioti, which premiered in the Forum Section of Berlin Film Festival 2015, "Heaven Sent" ("Tombé du ciel") by Wissam Charaf selected by ACID in Cannes 2016 as well as "Diamond Island" by Davy Chou, which was awarded the Prix SACD 2016 at the Critic's Week in Cannes 2016.

New films by Axelle Ropert, Patric Chiha, Davy Chou, Blandine Lenoir and Wissam Charaf are currently in production. Its last production "If It Were Love" by Patric Chiha is set to premiere in the Panorama section of Berlin Film Festival 2020.

CAST & CREW

Director : Patric Chiha

DOP : Jordane Chouzenoux

Editing : Anna Riche

Sound : Pierre Bompy

Sound editing & Mixing : Mikaël Barre

Color grading : Gadiel Bendelac

Administration : Yann Pichot

Line producer : Katia Khazak

Producer: Charlotte Vincent - Aurora Films

Based on CROWD by Gisèle Vienne

With Philip Berlin, Marine Chesnais, Kerstin Daley-Baradel, Sylvain Decloitre, Sophie Demeyer, Vincent Dupuy, Massimo Fusco, Nuria Guiu Sagarra, Rehin Hollant, Antoine Horde, Georges Labbat, Oskar Landström, Theo Livesey, Louise Perming, Katia Petrowick, Richard Pierre, Anja Röttgerkamp, Jonathan Schatz, Gisèle Vienne, Henrietta Wallberg, Tyra Wigg



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