

LES FILMS PELLÉAS AND IRIS PRODUCTIONS
PRESENT

ISABELLE
HUPPERT

FRANÇOIS
DAMIENS

SANDRINE
KIBERLAIN

TipTop

A FILM BY
SERGE BOZON



QUINZE
DIRECTORS' FORTNIGHT
CANNES 2013

KAROLE ROCHER AYMEN SAIDI SAIDA BEKKOUCHE ELIE LISON ALAIN NARON FRANÇOIS NEGRET SAMY NACERI YOUSSEF TIBERKANINE

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PRESENT

TipTop

A FILM BY
SERGE BOZON

STARRING

**ISABELLE
HUPPERT**

**FRANÇOIS
DAMIENS**

**SANDRINE
KIBERLAIN**

WRITTEN BY
AXELLE ROPERT AND **SERGE BOZON**
IN COLLABORATION WITH **ODILE BARSKI**
BASED ON THE NOVEL BY **BILL JAMES**

LENGTH 106' / 1.66 / 5.1

WORLD SALES



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SYNOPSIS

Two Internal Affairs detectives, both women, land in a provincial police precinct to investigate the death of an Algerian informer. One hits hard, the other ogles, tip top.

SLAPPING OR SLIPPING?

SERGE BOZON INTERVIEWS JEAN DOUCHET

SB: What genre does TIP TOP belong to (thriller, comedy, etc.)?

JD: I have an idea. In your previous movies, you showed a liking for sudden changes in tone, such as the dancing parts in MODS or the singing parts in LA FRANCE. Here, those changes are not occasional anymore, they have become the very basis of the movie. With each new scene come a new setting, new characters, a new tone, new everything. So that the audience never knows where to stand. Burlesque has something to do with breaks and changes since a burlesque gag always takes place through sudden breaks. Whether it's banana peel or cream pie, it's always a case of slipping or slapping. I would refer to TIP TOP as being 'modern burlesque'. This is the genre it belongs to.

SB: What is 'modern burlesque'?

JD: Kiberlain has something of Laurel. As for Huppert, you can't really say she has something of Hardy, but allow me to slip: it seems that you've tried, with her character, to get away from the thriller routine (cops, crooks, investigation, honor code...) to focus only on what things really are. I mean, if you look at things from an abstract point of view, one of the police functions is to watch closely, keep under surveillance, etc. This is Sally's part (Kiberlain). Another police function is to command, order, hit, manhandle, etc. This is Esther's part (Huppert). There is nothing unusual about those two women, who work for Internal Affairs, expressing during their nocturnal life what worries them during their diurnal life (watching/hitting). There is nothing arbitrary in it. Their behaviour in private life doesn't go against the police ethics system, as stated many times during the movie, but is, paradoxically, in accordance with it.

SB: I had never thought about it until Siryne Zoughlami, the girl who painted Benamar's portraits, told me something similar after she had read the script. So we added a gag about this during filming, in Rozyński's office, with a cop hitting and a cop ogling. We came up with quite a few things like that, at the last minute.

JD: I am not finished. 'Modern burlesque' is the idea of carrying this (sexual intercourse with work) to nonsense, in a logical way. For instance, Esther likes hitting because it is one of the police functions, but she also likes hitting because she likes blood since blood is the substance that drips when people get hit, but she likes blood because she likes drinking it since blood is a fluid, etc.

SB: But then, how do you include Mendès (Damien) in all this?

JD: Mendès is the third method of the police: neither surveillance, nor orders, but perversity.

SB: What makes you think Mendès is a pervert? And what makes perversity a method of the police?

JD: His whole way of being: a way of being asking for perversity, always trying to create a sense of unease. To break someone down, after they've been watched (Sally) or manhandled (Esther), the best technique to use might be to make them feel ill at ease, Mendès-style! Let's say that Mendès is the perverted dimension of the police function required for interrogations.

SB: François Damien brings something worrying to his character in a very unusual way. We never know where he is or what he wants. That's the way he really is. And he improvised in a fair few scenes. What I found exciting regarding the actors was playing on contrasts that are as huge as simple: a Nordic trio with freckles, fair hair and green eyes (Huppert, Kiberlain, Damien), facing a dark-haired, olive-skinned widow (Karole Rocher), pros facing amateurs, French people facing Algerian people, very small people (Negret or Saïdi) facing very tall people (Naron or Damien), etc. I like the fact that there are as many acting ranges as there are actors. Then those contrasts must contribute to what you call 'Modern Burlesque', but a lot of scenes rest on something else: lyrical, delicate or nocturnal scenes.

JD: I know that, but I'm more interested in the overall originality of the movie. We don't follow a linear story and we are not in a psychological comedy either; you leave both of them out (linearity/psychology) to search into collisions, or even into slaps – odd although irrefutable connections that fall under what I called 'modern burlesque'. And this also concerns the mise-en-scène. Just as you leave linearity and psychology out, you leave depth of field out. What I mean is most scenes are not only head-on scenes but we are facing someone who is in front of a white wall. We are in a series of flat tints, and depth of field only reappears through nocturnal voyeurism (Nadal on his balcony, Sally at her window), hence the logic of Nadal working in TV or suburban tourism to see places where murders have been committed.

SB: I understand what you are saying regarding the lack of linearity and the flat tints effects, but I hope the movie is both broken up on the surface and slightly unified at a deeper level. First, through the relations to the Arab world, which were not depicted at all in Bill James's book. If you pay attention, you'll see that all the characters are obsessed with Arabs. They become gradually united by a sort of obsessive fear that runs quietly through the movie. I believe this is the reason why the movie is far from being fanciful or even 'quirky', to quote a dreadful word that is often placed alongside my name. Strangely, I think this obsessive fear is particularly felt when the camera is on Aurélien, Virginie and Farid's son. While shooting, we added quite a few things about him. I wanted to shoot scenes with him.

JD: I've also noticed that the same words keep recurring in the movie: 'protocol', 'equity', 'Lake Beach'... And, each time they recur, they create further bonds between characters who yet never appear together on screen. Take the word 'protocol': what is the protocol to become an informer, what is the protocol to pay an informer, what is the protocol to protect an informer, what is the protocol at an informer's funeral...? The first question refers to Benamar, the second refers to Rozynski, the third refers to Bontemps and the fourth refers to Virginie. But they never appear together in the same shot. It's not that the film might be coded, with passwords and all the rest, but simply that you have to go with the flow to find out bit by bit what the movie makes light of. It is through the enjoyment of this exploration that bonds gradually develop.

SB: Yes, those are the hidden bonds François Quiquéré and I tried to build through the editing process. Likewise, the same places keep recurring, always shot in the same way (Esther's, Sally's, Mendès's bedrooms, Lake Beach, hillock, etc.), I mean on the same axes and with the same light. Overall, what creates the movie's unity might simply be the *mise-en-scène*. Whichever the scene was, I tried to be as economical as possible. And always follow the straightest path. Hence the nearly complete lack of tracking shots. No airs and graces, no volutes. This has nothing to do with a thirst for starkness, but, quite the opposite, I wanted to go straight to the crux of the matter in order to create scenes that would be as abrupt as complete. The camera movement characterizing the movie is the ultra-sharp panoramic shot, like a small rhythmic slap, such as the one that pans from the violin laid on the bed to Gérald's face covered in blood. The purpose is not to slap the audience but to wake them up constantly, to provide enjoyment without comfort. That's what I was instinctively and slightly blindly excited about.

JD: One possible way to define *mise-en-scène* in cinema is: a director is a traffic agent. Hence the issue of places. How they are assigned and how they are shifted. In your movie, people and places are clearly set from the start. Everyone's place has been allocated. So, we believe, considering the type of investigation, that it will be a case of small arrangements around social order, let's say an investigation into corruption, and we gradually realize it is all about the private disorders in each character's life.

SB: How do we realize that we're moving from social order to private disorders?

JD: Through slipping acts. Behind hierarchies that separate people - by identifying them with their place only (police chief, informer, pilot, referrer...) - hide some slipping acts through which people echo each other. What kind of slipping acts? I don't want to reveal too much but here again, the relations to Arabs is crucial. For instance, if the informer, the referrer and the girl who investigates the referrer all speak Arabic, then something should bring them together; but it will happen through slipping acts since the referrer speaks bad Arabic, and so makes lots of mistakes, when he wants to say 'shame', he says 'vagina', so things will slip. There is no linearity in the movie but there is a lot

of slipping. The movie is entirely based on a game or balance between slaps and slips. Everything, including rhythm, is based on this: slipping or slapping.

SB: After slipping towards Esther who slaps Gérald, Sally will end up slapping Ahmed...

JD: Yes, what gives some rhythm to the movie, overall, is this mimicking relationship between the two women, which works as the movie's hidden hourglass. Sally tries to copy Esther. She slips towards her. When this mimicking relationship reaches its term - which happens when Sally is able to copy Esther not only during the day (work), but also at night time (sex) - the movie can and must stop, even though the investigation has not been concluded. Once Sally has slipped towards slaps, the movie is over.

SB: Yes. I love abrupt endings in cinema (*SEVEN WOMEN, THE BRIDE WORE BLACK, SHIPWRECKED ON ROUTE D17...*). *TIP TOP* crashes before landing but there was nothing crucial left to show. We know who the 'bad guys' are (Bontemps and Belkacem), we know Esther is tracking them down, so it's only a question of time before they get arrested.

JD: To me, this game of resemblance between Esther and Sally is connected to the representation of love in the movie. Everybody loves each other, all couples are happy, as stated many times, but deep down, it doesn't work, except between Esther and Sally who are not a love couple. Why is that? Because love requires situations when two people can become one. Truly one. Those very situations when any differences between two persons are lifted. Yet, all couples' relationships in the movie are built on difference and not on resemblance. The movie is entirely based on this. Take Esther and Gérald, Sally and Ahmed, Virginie and Farid. Hence the significance of truly concrete matters, such as different skin colours, different mother tongues... which shows, once again, how important the Arab world is. They want to be like each other but distinctive identities remain. This is the meaning of Belkacem's last words to Esther: you can learn our language, you will never be like us. The actress (Saïda Bekkouche) shows real anger when saying that. When you see the movie and the way the subject is dealt with, there is a sort of globalization of the whole Algerian issue through it. You could say it starts in 1952 and ends in 2011.

SB: It all started with an article from *Libération* Axelle Ropert passed on to me, about Algerian cops who became informers in France after fleeing their country in the 90s because of islamists.

JD: I think Farid Benamar is slightly like the soldier Victor in *LA FRANCE* or like Edouard, the bedridden guru in *MODS*, namely an off-camera character who magnetizes everything. He died before the story begins but his figure becomes more and more important as does, through him, the relation to Algeria.

SB: In any case, I don't know why but the relation to Arabs is something I've wanted to make a film about for ages. The initial plan for *LA FRANCE* was to set the story during the Algerian

war with a FLN woman, disguised as a man, setting off to find her husband who fought against France. For production-related reasons, it didn't happen that way. In the end, both films are very different from each other. I didn't have any theoretical wish to contrast them with each other but I believe TIP TOP is not as literary, melancholic and contemplative as is LA FRANCE, it is more uneven, dynamic, aggressive, crude, fragile, maybe political. There is more money in it but the movie is more risky, less 'blending in'! Light, as well, is less pictorial, which doesn't mean less intricate. It's more like it hasn't been fully polished up. With Céline Bozon, we tried to achieve a graphic picture that wouldn't be pictorial, something slightly similar to the flat tints you see in the hotel in 2000 MANIACS (H. Gordon Lewis). And I kept to 35mm for that reason. Same thing for the sound, we've always preferred using booms rather than HF microphones. During mixing with Laurent Gabiot (the sound engineer), we tried to come up with contrasts, with a sound very loud at times and very low at other times, but stripped in both cases, with no effect or no sound based on low registers, as opposed to most movies you see today. And everything is mixed at the centre, with nothing in the background or on the sides. I wanted to keep a raw and bare sound.

JD: In the sense of 'unfinished'.

SB: Yes, in the sense of unfinished, precarious if you want.

JD: At all levels, besides, since, as mentioned before, the investigation is also at an 'unfinished' stage at the end of the movie. And the same applies to the actors' performances. It's that unsmooth it's unfinished. Huppert can receive orders from a totally non-professional actor. The opposite of the all-star cast. Or Esther can be very tough and then look slightly lost the next minute. You very rarely see Huppert like that. It's also true for the characters. Someone like Younès, there's an unfinished side to him: he doesn't know if he wants to go to Algiers or stay in France, walk or dance, be a man or a child, etc. It might be a distinctive feature in informers. They're caught between two stools. It's all the more moving that the less 'finished' character end up being the one who is sacrificed in the most violent way.

SERGE BOZON

BIOGRAPHY

Serge Bozon directs, writes about and stars in films.

DIRECTOR

TIP TOP (feature film, 106'), 2013

Directors' Fortnight - Cannes Festival 2013

LA FRANCE (feature film, 102'), 2007

Jean Vigo Award 2007

Best Director Award at the Mexico International Film Festival (FICCO 2008)

Best Picture Award at the Santiago International Film Festival (CINE UC 2009)

70 international festivals including:

Directors' Fortnight – Cannes Festival 2007

Vancouver IFF 2007, Chicago IFF 2007, Sao Paulo IFF 2007, Gijon IFF 2007, Pusan IFF 2007, FCMM (Montreal) 2007, Viennale (Vienna IFF) 2007, Ljubljana IFF 2007, La Semaine des Cahiers du Cinéma in Tokyo 2007, Göteborg IFF 2008, New York - New Directors New Films IFF 2008, Rotterdam IFF 2008, Mexico IFF (FICCO) 2008, San Francisco IFF 2008, Buenos Aires IFF (BAFICI) 2008, Lisbon IFF (Indie Lisboa) 2008, Seattle IFF 2008, Perth IFF (Revelation Film Festival) 2008, Melbourne IFF 2008, La Semaine des Cahiers du Cinéma in Moscow and in Saint Petersburg 2008, Hong Kong IFF 2008, Singapore IFF 2008, Prague French Film Fest. 2008, San Sebastian IFF 2009, Jakarta French Film Festival 2010 (Indonesia), 'Free Radicals: Serge Bozon and the New French Cinema' (New York, 2011)

MODS (medium-length, 59'), 2002

Léo Sheer Award (Belfort 2002)

Press Award & Youth Jury's Special Award (Pantin 2003)

30 international festivals including:

Locarno International Film Festival

Belfort Film Festival (Entrevues – France), Viennale (Austria), Pantin Film Festival, Côté court (France), Cannes Acid Programming 2003, Curtas Vila do Conde (Portugal), FCMM (Montreal), Sao Paulo International Film Festival, Revelation International Film Festival Perth (Australia), Rio de Janeiro Film Festival (Brazil)

L'AMITIÉ (feature film, 85'), 1998

Georges and Ruta Sadoul Festival (1996)

Cannes Film Festival 1997 (Acid)

Young European Cinema Days (1997)

CAST

Esther Lafarge	Isabelle Huppert
Sally Marinelli	Sandrine Kiberlain
Robert Mendes	François Damiens
Virginie Bénomar	Karole Rocher
Younès	Aymen Saïdi
Rachida Belkacem	Saïda Bekkouche
Rozynski	Elie Lison
Bontemps	Alain Naron
Nadal	François Negret
Aurélien	Youssef Tiberkanine
Guest appearance by	Samy Naceri

CREW

Script	Axelle Ropert and Serge Bozon
In collaboration with	Odile Barski
Based on the novel of	Bill James
Directed by	Serge Bozon
Artistic Advisor	Pascale Bodet
DOP	Céline Bozon (AFC)
Sound	Laurent Gabiot
	Valène Leroy
	Angelo Dos Santos
Editing	François Quiqueré
First Assistant Director	Julie Gouet
Casting	Stéphane Batut
	Doriane Flamand
Set Designer	Régine Constant
Costume Designers	Florence Scholtès
	Christophe Pidre
Choreography	Julie Desprairies
Production Manager	Solveig Harper
Production Supervisor	Hélène Bastide
Post-production Coordinator	Juliette Mallon
Assistant Director	Christophe Vincent
Music	Roland Wiltgen
Produced by	David Thion and Philippe Martin – Les Films Pelléas
	Nicolas Steil – Iris Productions
Co-produced by	Jesus Gonzalez – Iris Films
In collaboration with	Canal + and Ciné +
	Fonds national de soutien à la production audiovisuelle du Grand-Duché du Luxembourg
Supported by	Tax Shelter Films Funding
	Tax Shelter of the Belgian Federal Government
In association with	Soficinéma 8 and Cinémage 7
Co-produced by	Artemis Productions and Hérodiade Films
Supported by	EU Media Program
International Sales	Rezo