Tip Top
A film by Serge Bozon

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LES FILMS PELLEARS AND IRIS PRODUCTIONS
PRESENT

TIPTOP
A FILM BY
SERGE BOZON

STARRING

ISABELLE HUÆPERT

FRANÇOIS DAMIENS

SANDRAINE 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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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.
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: Kiberlain and Huppert are two very different people, very small people (Negret or Saidi) facing very tall people, very small people (Negret or Saidi) facing tall people (Naron or Damiens). 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 the thriller routine (cops, crooks, investigation, honor code...) 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.

SB: François Damiens 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, Damiens), facing a dark-haired, olive-skinned widow (Karole Rocher), pros facing amateurs, French people facing Algerian people, very small people (Negret or Saidi) facing very tall people (Naron or Damiens), 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.

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

**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
Sally Marinelli
Robert Mendes
Virginie Bénamar
Younès
Rachida Belkacem
Rozynski
Bontemps
Nadal
Aurélien
Guest appearance by

Isabelle Huppert
Sandrine Kiberlain
François Damiens
Karole Rocher
Aymen Saïdi
Saida Bekkouche
Elie Lison
Alain Naron
François Negret
Youssef Tiberkanine
Samy Naceri
CREW

Script
In collaboration with
Based on the novel of
Directed by
Artistic Advisor
DOP
Sound
Editing
First Assistant Director
Casting
Set Designer
Costume Designers
Choreography
Production Manager
Production Supervisor
Post-production Coordinator
Assistant Director
Music
Produced by
Co-produced by
In collaboration with
Supported by
In association with
Co-produced by
Supported by
International Sales

Axelle Ropert and Serge Bozon
Odile Barski
Bill James
Serge Bozon
Pascale Bodet
Céline Bozon (AFC)
Laurent Gabiot
Valène Leroy
Angelo Dos Santos
François Quiqueré
Julie Gouet
Stéphane Baust
Doriane Flamand
Régine Constant
Florence Scholtès
Christophe Piétre
Julie Desprairies
Solveig Harper
Hélène Bastide
Juliette Mallon
Christophe Vincent
Roland Wiltgen
David Thion and Philippe Martin – Les Films Pelléas
Nicolás Steil – Iris Productions
Jesus Gonzalez – Iris Films
Canal + and Ciné +
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EU Media Program
Rezo

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