



ON MY WAY

DIRECTED BY EMMANUELLE BERCOT

116 minutes

SCREENING SCHEDULE:

Thursday, February 14	CinemaxX 9 - 21:30 advanced press screening (Daily press only!)
Friday, February 15	CinemaxX 7 - 15:00 Press screening (followed by Press conference at Hotel hyatt)
Friday, February 15	Berlinale Palast - 22:00 Gala Screening
Saturday, February 16	Friedrichstadt-Palast - 12:00 Repetition screening (English subtitles)
Saturday, February 16	Haus der Berliner Festspiele - 14:30 Repetition screening (German subtitles)
Sunday, February 17	Berlinale Palast - 17:45 Repetition screening (German subtitles)

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Press Material in English:

<http://www.berlinale.de/en/presse/presseservice/service.html> (with your Berlinale username & password)

CAST

Catherine Deneuve
Nemo Schiffman
Gérard Garouste
Camille
Claude Gensac
Paul Hamy
Mylène Demongeot
Hafsia Herzi

Bettie
Charly
Alain
Muriel
Annie
Marco
Fanfan
Jeanne

CREW

Directed by
Written by

Director of Photography
Producers

Coproducers

In association with

With the participation of

With the support of

Emmanuelle Bercot
Emmanuelle Bercot
Jérôme Tonnerre
Guillaume Schiffman - AFC
Olivier Delbosc
Marc Missonnier
Wild Bunch
Rhône-Alpes Cinéma
Soficinéma 9
Cofimage 24
Palatine Etoile 10
OCS
La Région Rhône-Alpes
Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée
La Région Bretagne

(Extended credits available upon request)

ON MY WAY

Synopsis

Bettie is in her early sixties. Jilted by her lover, she is left alone to deal with the financial problems facing her family's restaurant. So what should she do with her life now? She gets into her car to go for a drive round the block to get away from it all. But her journey turns out not quite like she had planned: there are chance meetings, an ex-Miss France gala, renewed ties with her estranged daughter, the realisation she has a grandson, and possibly, at the end of the road, love.....opening up new horizons.

Q&A with Emmanuelle BERCOT

Tell us how this film came about.

For a long time, I have wanted to make a film with Catherine Deneuve. Not many actors in France have inspired me to feel that way. Like many people of my generation, Catherine is very much a part of my growing up – there isn't a moment I can think of when I haven't been influenced by one of her films. I honestly wrote 'Elle s'en va' for her. Catherine was my motivation.

'Elle s'en va' is the story of a woman who just drops everything, goes for a drive around the block but never comes home. Where did the idea for what essentially is a road-movie come from? Very few road-movies are made in France, especially with a mature woman in her sixties in the lead role.

When I started writing, I had very few preconceived ideas. I imagined Catherine on the road, driving through places that had rarely been seen in cinema. With this in mind, the screenplay gradually came together like the pieces of a puzzle, with the help of Jerome Tonnerre, my co-writer. The road-movie is a popular genre. But, as far as I am aware, the only other road-movie to use a mature actor in the lead role who then goes off on an adventure is David Lynch in his exemplary film 'The Straight Story' starring Richard Farnsworth.

In my film, we rarely see Catherine's character behind the wheel and we do not see that much of the scenery. This is because we had to cut down on these typical road-movie sequences due to budgetary constraints. I regret that. It is through the encounters that Bettie has along the way that we can see the road-movie genre being played out.

As soon as Bettie, played by Catherine Deneuve, is on the road, new opportunities seem to open up to her and stretch out before her.

I was interested in telling the story of a woman of her age who is presented with new opportunities even though no one would ever have imagined this for her. A more obvious choice would have been to have a nostalgic story, but this film offers a far more optimistic approach. When you're in your thirties or forties it's much easier to change your life around, but when you're sixty it must be much harder. Fewer doors are open to you, less and less opportunities present themselves. Ever since I was a young girl, age has always worried me. At until I started working on this film, I was never very optimistic about it. 'Elle s'en va' addresses the questions of my own anxieties. I probably wrote it just as much to reassure myself as to give hope to others who have little.

And the music reinforces this feeling.

I really wanted to have that incredibly melancholic track by Rufus Wainwright called 'This Love Affair' playing when she drives away. Instinctively, I also wanted some Italian music. I thought that it would suit Catherine, and the light-hearted tone that runs through the film.

You put a lot of emphasis on Bettie's relationship with her mother.

People rarely talk about mother-daughter relationships in later life. When people do, it is more often than not to show how someone copes with the growing dependency of an elderly parent. In Bettie's case, it's still her mother who is in control. Her mother's behaviour is controlling and intrusive. Bettie must free herself from her mother. I liked the idea that at the age of sixty, Bettie went back home to live with her mother, and so in some ways was still under her rule.

At the beginning of the film, we see Bettie walking through her mother's bedroom to get to the bathroom. This scene says a lot about Bettie's character. She is someone who has allowed herself to be confined. She is stuck in a little provincial town and her love life is somewhat insipid. She could have had a completely different life but in many ways life has passed her by. She has resigned herself to this kind of existence and is by no means bitter about it. She has a kind nature. That's what I like about her. The break-up of her relationship provides the impetus she needs to finally move forward in her life. And so the story becomes one of a new start and not the story of missed opportunities.

Ever since 'Les Vacances' and 'La Puce', and continuing through to 'Backstage' and 'Mes Chères Etudes', your films have all been about teenagers. But not this time.

That's right. But this wasn't grounds for me to feel out of my depth. There is something strangely teenage-like about Bettie. She's almost quite childish. And then there's her daughter Muriel, played by Camille, whose rebelliousness echoes characters in other films I have made. What is a complete change from the films I have made before is the overall light-hearted and optimistic mood. Which even goes as far as a sort of happy ending. Like a 'feel good' movie.

Yet Bettie runs a restaurant. She runs a company. Her child-like side isn't the first thing that strikes you about her.

Bettie is a strong woman who is both calm and energetic. It is clear that she can handle her employees. But, she is a woman in love and this is one area in her life where she is clearly vulnerable. It is love that guides her and is the reason why I wanted her to have this love story later in life. Like a lot of women of her age, she can be quite selfish. The people closest to her come second and she's not particularly bothered about placating them. Her daughter's behaviour may upset her, but it doesn't make her feel in any way guilty. That is what makes her such a strong person and at the end of the day makes her so free.

Why did you decide to turn her into an ex-beauty queen?

The idea came to me as I was writing; there was no real reason behind it except perhaps when I asked myself the question, how come such a beautiful woman didn't manage to have an exceptional life? The entire script is made up of these kinds of snippets of information that enabled me to take her far from home. For example, she starts smoking again. So it makes sense that she needs to go out to buy cigarettes. And this search becomes the central theme for a good first part of the film – a bit like a documentary.

From the moment she has a purpose - to find her grandson - the film takes on a more traditional narrative. One thing leads to another. But in the end, it is just the story of a woman who goes out for a drive and repeatedly finds reasons not to go back home.

In 'Elle s'en va' there is an incredible array of characters: the amazing old man who rolls Bettie a cigarette, the group of women who drown their sorrows by drinking at the local nightclub, the security guard who takes her inside the furniture store he's guarding...

That's one of the challenges when writing a road-movie, to find a way to avoid the clichés without falling into stereotypes. You often see that in this kind of film: the hero stops at a petrol station, and the pump attendant is a three-armed dwarf. I wanted to avoid that sort of scenario at all costs. All the characters in this film are ordinary people, in the most noble sense of the word. Even though I do sometimes push things to the limit because you only have a very short space of time to bring each character to life.

You tell the story of lesser-known parts of France.

That was one of the starting points for this film – a detailed study of rural France. I sometimes travel alone and I always come across the strangest places, the seediest cafés, places just like the ranch. You can't invent places like this and I know what it feels like to find yourself alone somewhere like that. As long as you are a tiny bit open-minded, or a tiny bit inquisitive, or just naïve like Bettie, something is bound to happen. Maybe some people think that Bettie's encounters are all exaggerated. These are all 'real people' as I call them; I went to find them in the sort of places where Bettie meets them. None of them were actors.

Marco, the guy Bettie meets at the ranch, who spends the night with her, has an amazing screen presence. Was he not an actor either?

No, he is a 'real person' too, but I didn't find him in Brittany where that scene takes place. I had a lot of trouble finding someone for that part, and in the end Antoinette Boulat (Casting director) found him. Paul Hamy, the guy who plays Marco, has this imaginativeness, this fun side, which interacted well with Catherine. The scene in the hotel room was very risky. But it is so subtle, so natural, that it's touching.

In the dialogue, you make Marco say some very harsh things about getting older. He tells Bettie that he imagines her when she is young whilst they make love. He assumes that she is old enough to have retired...

It's harsh, but it's what a lot of men like him think! There is absolutely no cruelty intended in my portrayal of being a woman of that age. That's part of what the film is about and even though I didn't want to stigmatise her age, I wasn't going to avoid the subject either. Besides, Marco's unsophisticated approach set against Catherine's elegance gives the scene a comic edge.

The scene when they get drunk together is fabulous.

In this scene, we see the old cliché of the woman who has had too much to drink and wakes up the next morning in bed with a man. It's a cliché that I really wanted to take on. But Catherine, because she is so incredibly natural, made this scene magical. And the chemistry between the two actors made it clinch it.

You often state that you like 'filming moments'

I like being in the moment and seeing what happens from the minute we start shooting. I'm not interested in the psychology of it all. If a scene takes off in another direction from that which was written in the script. I don't care. I find capturing these moments, and if possible any unforeseen things, far more interesting. When it comes down to it, the individuals I am filming fascinate me more than the characters they are portraying.

Does that mean you improvise a lot?

Not enough, sadly. I would like to improvise more. But that would have required more time, which was something we didn't have the luxury of.

Tell us about the shoot.

We had an incredibly tight filming schedule that neither Catherine nor the crew had ever had to deal with before. As well as this we had issues with ever-changing scenery – 65 changes in all; there were issues

linked to working with non-actors who had no points of reference. Their involvement in the film meant we had to take specific measures. For example, there was no way we could do any sequence shots! Everything was such a rush that sometimes we didn't even have time to rehearse with Catherine. She'd ask me 'Aren't we going to rehearse?' and I'd shout 'No! Stand over there! We have to shoot it now!'

The mix of non-actors and Catherine Deneuve must have been interesting....

Yes, they found themselves sharing scenes with Catherine Deneuve who they had only ever seen on screen before. Their reaction was fabulous. And very moving to watch.

Claude Gensac, Hafsia Herzi and Mylene Demongeot are the only real actresses in the film...

I did this on purpose. Their characters all belong to Bettie's youth, her life before she 'ran away'. When she leaves home her outlook changes colour.

This is the first time the singer Camille has ever been in a film....

Again, playing with the idea that the members of Bettie's family should be played by real actresses, I originally wanted an actress to play Murielle. But I didn't want a real actress to be in the film when Bettie was on the road. Anyway, I didn't find the idiosyncrasies in the actresses I met that I had envisaged for this part. So I came up with the idea of Camille. She has an incredible sense of rhythm, and has the pace and delivery that I was looking for (necessary for her long garble during her phone call to Bettie). She agreed to do a screen test and I was sure she was right for the part there and then. For me, she is one of the greatest artists of the moment.

This is also the first ever cinema role for a certain Nemo Schiffman, your son.

He was kind of the starting point for the character of the grandson. Nemo has a real thing about Catherine. When he found out that I was writing a film for her, he asked me, 'Can I come to the set? I want to give Catherine Deneuve a hug.' Initially, I thought about writing a short scene for him, where he would just hug her, but gradually the character of the grandson became a character in its own right within the screenplay. I liked the idea of putting a child in Catherine's hands and seeing what happened. But he still had to do a screen test, like everyone else, and it was based on his screen test that I chose him for the part.

Earlier on you mentioned some of the difficulties you were faced with when making this film on top of the very tight filming schedule. What kind of director are you when it comes to editing?

I love editing. I'm obsessed about rushes; I can watch the same 10 second edit a hundred and fifty times over just to make sure nothing is missing from the actor's performance. The editing process was complicated on 'Elle s'en va'. Even though it was relatively easy to tell the story because the scenes didn't have to all follow a narrative – with this film there was no need to know where the character found the key to open the safe!! - it was hard to find the right pace. The film is held together by a certain charm. It was hard to find the right balance. We didn't cut many scenes, however, we really worked hard on the pace of each one of them. We tried to find movement in the film in the beat of Catherine's heart and in her character.

Beyond being simply a road-movie, 'Elle s'en va' is also a fantastic tribute to Catherine Deneuve's filmography. It is packed with references to François Truffaut, André Techiné, François Dupeyron...

I can see that now, but it was in no way planned that way. But it goes without saying that my subconscious must have been influenced by my image of her from her previous films. When filming 'Elle s'en va' I hope I managed to include some of her less well known personality traits that I was surprised to discover: her incredible energy, her natural inquisitiveness, her joie-de-vivre and her amazing sense of humour. And a touch of melancholy that we all associate with her.

Above and beyond the actress that I deeply admire, there is also the person, the woman, that she is who I adore. And it was as much this admiration that made me so want to film her. Saying that, I still can't believe that I have made a film with Catherine Deneuve! To have had such an opportunity. For me, working with Catherine was a powerful experience.

Q&A with Catherine DENEUVE

How did you and Emmanuelle Bercot first meet?

The first time we met when she was working on a script adaptation, which in the end Emmanuelle actually decided to abandon. A few months later Emmanuelle came back to me with this film proposal, which I loved. I already knew and liked her films. And as I got to know her I discovered a very hardworking woman, which I liked. It's very reassuring for an actress to be with a director who works hard. Because the luxury of time is what is most lacking in filmmaking these days – time for writing, time for preparation, time for location hunting. Even before things were all in place, Emmanuelle single-handedly managed to prepare everything for the film. The shooting schedule was very intense, but it was a pleasure because of all the work Emmanuelle had done in advance.

Emmanuelle Bercot has spoken about a very full-on filming schedule.

At the beginning I was rather frightened by it. I had previously experienced filming in difficult conditions, but never over such a long period of time, and never with me having to act in every scene. In the first week I thought to myself 'Maybe I should have prepared myself better physically for this.'

Tell us about Bettie.

I love her inquisitiveness. She lived for so much of her life bound by routine. She took on her parent's restaurant because that's what was expected of her. It's a restaurant with a certain reputation to maintain, the food is good and it must continue to do well because the family have to make a living from it. And then one day, out of the blue, she decides enough is enough. Working in the kitchen, she suddenly stops dead in her tracks saying, 'I'll be right back' and leaves. Really leaves.... 'Elle S'en Va'. From then on, it is as if she is on a permanent holiday. Her child-like frivolity come to the surface as she stops to pick some flowers and realises she is free.

She is a daughter, a mother and a grandmother. It's rare to come across such a rounded female character.

And she's also a woman who can see a man for what he is. She is still full of vitality, in every sense of the word.

The scene where she is looking for a packet of cigarettes is hilarious.

Yes. You get the feeling that she will do anything to get hold of a cigarette. I don't think the anti-smoking lobby will like it that much. She really sings the praises of cigarettes!

This film is a tribute to you as an actress. It's hard not to find references to films you have made with Francois Truffaut, Andre Techine and Francois Dupeyron. And at the same time it is a tribute to you as a woman.

Yes, it does make you think of Francois Dupeyron's film 'Strange Place for an Encounter'. And there is a certain naturalism in 'Elle s'en va' that is reminiscent of the films of Truffaut and Techine. But I hadn't really thought about it until now. Emmanuelle doesn't really know me that well. She hasn't seen how I live, she hasn't seen me with my friends, but she knows my films. 'Elle s'en va' is undoubtedly the coming together of all that. See, Emmanuelle imagined me in this story, and the result is something that hits the right note, is endearing, original and very lively and also very energetic.

On this film you worked with people who were not real actors, something that you have never done before.

I had done it before, but only in very short scenes. Never for a whole film. It was very exciting.

Weren't you not afraid to put yourself in that situation?

No. I was ready for the challenge.

Did you improvise a lot?

Apart from the scene with the old man rolling a cigarette and the scene with the farmer when I ask him for directions, I didn't really improvise that much. The dialogue was all written in advance and Emmanuelle wanted us to stick to the script. She wanted us to work in that way, for the actors to speak her words, to immerse themselves in the character. It is thanks to this rigour that Emmanuelle was able to add in a little improvisation. A little luxury.

The scene with the old man is classic.

Originally, it was supposed to be a different man. But then, at the last minute, he wasn't able to be in the film so Emmanuelle had to quickly find someone else. This brought with it all the problems that come when working with someone who is not a professional actor – understanding the scene, knowing when to stop at the right moment... This old man didn't understand the whole process, but as soon as he began speaking, it was very moving. Emmanuelle had told me the story about his fiancée who had died very young from tuberculosis and who had made him promise never to get married. So I asked him a couple of questions about his life and he started talking. During the scene, he doesn't look at me. He's elsewhere, reliving the past. His hands are so arthritic that he can barely roll his cigarette. His fingers are all numb. It's an incredible scene, something I will never forget.

I wanted to go and see where he lived. It was unbelievable. It was a farm that had not changed for the last two hundred years. It had a dirt floor. Once he must have owned a lot of land and had a lot of people working for him. But now there was no one left, he was all alone.

Another very powerful scene is the scene between your character and Marco, the guy she meets at the ranch.

Emmanuelle and I talked a lot about that scene. That kind of scene either works or it doesn't. There was no question of getting it wrong. We had to find someone who felt easy with the dialogue and who was both cheeky and amusing, like the character – not someone too inhibited. They tried out a lot of people for the part. And unlike the other actors who were found in the regions where the film was shot, the person who played Marco came from Paris. He was fantastic.

It always seems like you are prepared to challenge the image people have of you.

I never really understand this whole thing about image. What is an image? The pictures they show of you in magazines when a film is released? Because that is not the image I have of myself in cinema.

Let's say then you are extremely curious. You have always given young directors a chance.

There are some people who think that I have made some bold choices. For me, it feels perfectly natural. That's part of my make-up. It's true that it has always been curiosity that has pushed me to do things. In life too. Whenever I go somewhere, whether to make a film, or for a trip or a holiday, I always have to visit the place I am in, to go to the old quarters, or to a café, or to a market. It's how I am. It's what drives me. I love new things, new ideas, new faces. It's true, I have acted in some rather unusual projects, slightly outside the traditional parameters. For example, the film I did in Lebanon 'I Want to See' by Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige with whom I have just recently finished filming 'The Lebanese Rocket

Society', another film about the war in Lebanon. People think that I am very open. But if the truth be told, I am actually very selfish; I follow my instinct and my own desires.

Let's go back to Emmanuelle Bercot's film and the touching relationship between your character, Bettie, and her new-found grandson.

Nemo is Emmanuelle's and Guillaume Schiffman's (the DP - director of photography) son. It was very special for him to be on the set of 'Elle s'en va'. Nemo is passionate about cinema and musicals. He actually goes to a school where he has singing and dancing lessons on top of the normal curriculum. He is wonderful in this film, and we had lots of fun together.

Bettie is very matter of fact with Nemo; the same goes for her relationship with her daughter, even though this relationship is sometimes more volatile.

Yes. Everyone in the film lives their own lives and says things to each other. But, in the end, it's the own will of each character that wins out, removing any feelings of guilt. It's liberating.

From the moment she sets off, Bettie wears basically the same clothes throughout the film.

Emmanuelle and I discussed Bettie's hairstyle and her clothes at length. In cinema, we often cheat with costumes – in France we have a tendency to lose sight of realism – I liked the idea that we didn't do so with this film. When Bettie leaves, she is in her kitchen; that had to be made clear from the start. She doesn't pre-plan her decision to leave, she just walks out of her workplace and goes. It's not the same. She hardly has anything with her. So we had to be quite clever. Bettie is a busy woman, so it made sense that she should have a bag in her car with a couple of things in it. And as the film is set in Brittany, it seemed credible that she'd carry a raincoat and a pair of Wellington boots in the boot of her car. But, we had to give the impression that she had left with nothing and tried to respect this concept throughout.

The car is really a character in itself.

We had to be sure to choose the right model. It's the car Bettie uses for work. She uses it to buy all the food and supplies for the restaurant. It needed to be big but not too comfortable or too smart. More like the reliable old car that you can imagine has been in the family for a good 20 years or so. Emmanuelle actually had the car repainted to dull down the paintwork.

The car also serves to support your character

Yes, it gives her a certain physical presence, Bettie doesn't drive a dinky Renault Twingo. When we started shooting, Emmanuelle was quite worried about the scenes where I would have to drive and act at the same time...But I was able to reassure her, I am quite a good driver.

It was your idea to ask Gerard Garouste to play the part of the grandfather.

Initially, they were looking for a writer or a musician to play this part. But then I came up with the idea of Gerard Garouste, who is a friend of mine. He had never acted in a film before and the grandfather character was nothing like him in real life. But he said yes. He found the idea amusing.

You appear to get very involved in the films you are in.

'Elle s'en va' is quite an unusual film, given that there were hardly any professional actors in it. But, it's true, I enjoy being able to talk about a film with a director before and during filming. Thirty years ago, I might not have dared to but that didn't stop me from wanting to.

I see it as a collaboration. An actor has an alternative viewpoint, he is on the other side of the camera, so sometimes he sees things differently. But I never think I'm a director, ever. Saying this, some directors are open to ideas, others less. Recently, I've been very lucky.

What kind of director is Emmanuelle Bercot on set?

She is very motivating and very focused. She really concentrates on each moment and gets right to the heart of the scene. You can feel her eyes on you during filming. Emmanuelle is someone who gives out something very physical. In fact, her film was very physical too. Each scene demanded a complete upheaval. Everything had to be changed. There was no saying, 'We've been filming for three hours, let's have a break'. She would be like, 'No, no, no, come on, let's continue.' It is often this energy that is lacking in French films. I always say that Americans speak too loudly in real life, but in their films you can feel real energy. We needed that kind of energy for 'Elle s'en va'. As I get older, I believe more and more in the importance of a driving energy in filmmaking.

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