

GAUMONT and MANDARIN CINEMA

present

A HAPPY EVENT

A film by **Rémi BEZANÇON**

Based on the novel by **Eliette ABECASSIS**
UN HEUREUX EVENEMENT - Editions ALBIN MICHEL

With

Louise BOURGOIN Pio MARMAÏ
Josiane BALASKO Thierry FREMONT Gabrielle LAZURE
and the participation of Firmine RICHARD

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SYNOPSIS

She drove me into a corner, then forced me to go beyond my limits. She made me confront the absolute: love, sacrifice, tenderness, abandonment. She dislocated me, transformed me. Why didn't anyone warn me? Why doesn't anyone ever talk about this?"

A Happy Event, or an intimate view of motherhood, sincere and with no taboos.

An interview with Rémi Bezançon Vanessa Portal & Éliette Abécassis

I was editing my last film, when my producer Isabelle Grellat called to tell me about a book she had just acquired the rights to: "A Happy Event" by Éliette Abecassis. She asked me to read it to get my opinion, with, as they say, 'no ulterior motives', since she was looking for a director who was already a mother to adapt it. I read it and called her back that very night to say that it wasn't a female director with a child she needed, it was a male director without one yet. But who would very much like to. I live with a woman who, like me, is a writer. Back when the screenplay for "The First Day of the Rest of Your Life" was still a work in progress, Vanessa was working on another project but, whenever I experienced writer's block with a scene, I couldn't help using the pretence of a coffee break to get her advice. It was pleasant, in fact, no longer feeling alone with my writing, being able to discuss my ideas, to get her point of view. It was stimulating. So it seemed obvious to me to ask her to co-write "A Happy Event" with me.

RB: I must have a lucky star, because you both said yes. Éliette, you immediately agreed to let me adapt your book and you, Vanessa, didn't have to think long before agreeing to write the screenplay with me.

VP: Hmm... A few seconds, in any event. We both know very well that when you adapt something, you risk betraying it.

EA: I'll let myself be betrayed by you two whenever you like. In fact, I experienced the adaptation process as a journey into the past. It was a strange feeling.

RB: We knew that this was a very personal novel, so the job was very delicate.

VP: You can tell us now, Éliette: Barbara is you, isn't she?

A PERSONAL STORY

EA: True, I feel very close to Barbara. When I became a mother, I was surprised at the difference between what people usually say about motherhood and what I myself was feeling.

It was as if no one had ever told me the truth, as if they had been hiding from me what really happens when you have a child. Because there's that picture-book image of the blessed event: when you're pregnant, you imagine a tiny baby in a pink bassinet, parents going gaga over the cradle, etc. And in fact, that did happen, but that wasn't all of it. A woman undergoes a real revolution when she becomes a mother: her body undergoes a revolution, her identity is disjointed, and her relations with her partner are called into question. Everything needs to be redefined, relationships change, and issues are no longer the same. But at the same time, you're being transported by the extraordinary adventure and powerful emotions of motherhood. I wanted to show that.

VP: When Rémi and I started working on the screenplay, we did a lot of research. We read a lot about the subject. We visited sites devoted to maternity, forums where women can unburden themselves, and we realised that there are a lot of women who go through what Barbara was going through. They feel that same personal upheaval, and that same upheaval

in their relations with their partner, but they're afraid to talk about it, because they're afraid people will accuse them of being bad mothers.

THAT SECRET UPHEAVAL

EA: It really is a taboo subject today. Motherhood may be one of our society's last taboos. Having a child is supposed to be marvellous, period. It's a primitive fable dedicated to the permanence of the human race, a fable served up to women, with no information about how to deal with the emotional shock it creates in real life. That's why I wanted to tell what happens behind the curtains, in order to lift that taboo. I described in this novel what was happening to me and what I was feeling day by day: passionate love combined with a total loss of bearings. Of course my characters are fictional, but they are also very similar to my own life. So yes, there is a bit of me in Barbara. It's the truth as I see it, in any case. .

RB: In this book, you propose a truly singular treatment of a theme that inspires me greatly: the family. I had already spoken about the family in my last movie, but that was an ensemble film with five different heroes. I wanted to try a story in the first person again, like my first film "Love Is in the Air". When reading "A Happy Event", I immediately fell in love with Barbara. She was the kind of modern heroine I wanted to film. And then the form itself of your book was perfectly suited to adaptation, at least as I conceive of it: it's at one and the same time short, which means I didn't have to cut too much out of the story, and rich, with a great deal of background and philosophical reflection, with a tragicomic tone very similar to my own. And there was enough room for me to sneak in some of my own universe: the seduction scene between Barbara and Nicolas, and its use of DVD covers, for example, or the nightmare when her water breaks...

VP: It was an ideal situation for us because your novel is primarily literary introspection, and so that left us free to embroider around it, to create events and situations to bring our Barbara to life.

RB: That's why I asked you to co-write the screenplay with me, Vanessa, because I needed a woman's point of view. I thought it was very important for you to accompany me on my plunge into the heart of the feminine universe.

VP: But you had already approached that universe with the characters of Marie-Jeanne and Fleur (played by Zabou Breitman and Déborah François) in your previous film.

PORTRAIT OF A WOMAN

RB: But here the challenge was greater. To sketch a portrait of this heroine, I had to penetrate her most intimate thoughts, from beginning to end. I had to get under her skin. I myself had to become Barbara.

EA: Perhaps men speak about women best, at least those who are able to do so. Like Maupassant in "Une vie", Henry James or Tolstoy.

RB: Ultimately, what I understood is that the gender of a character is not that important. If you want to give a character flesh and blood, first you have to understand his or her issues and the narrative line. And even if motherhood is obviously a feminine subject, I am also talking about parenthood, about a couple becoming a family. Besides, that comes across

very well in the screenplay, where we have given a much more important role to the male character, Barbara's partner, Nicolas.

VP: When we decided to adapt your book together, we needed to find our own angle. It was a deliberate choice on our part to highlight this double reaction to the arrival of a child.

EA: And it's an interesting, double look at the couple, isn't it?

RB: For me who usually writes solo, working as a duo was fascinating. We know each other very well, and that made things easier. But it's true that for this collaboration, the private and professional spheres did more than blend. It was mind-blowing. We looked into our most private aspirations, we projected ourselves as eventual parents. We used our deepest desires, but our deepest fears as well.

VERTIGO IN THE COUPLE

VP: Looking around us, we realised that many couples break up shortly after becoming parents. It's a true social phenomenon that people are just beginning to talk about, but that has never yet been dealt with in the movies. The French research group INSEE reports that about 25% of couples who separate do so soon after the birth of their first child. I find those figures mindboggling. The book does talk about that, the implosion of a couple after the arrival of their first child: "baby clash" as it is called today. Of course, it is not the simple fact of having a baby that puts the couple at risk. It is because they were not expecting the changes it implies. A whole new balance has to be struck.

EA: Yes, people still do believe that having a baby tightens the bonds between a couple, but that's not true. On the contrary, if there already were problems, resentments, twilight zones, they risk becoming even more serious. If there already were cracks in the relationship, they may grow into chasms. Raising a child demands a lot of energy, and so you obviously have less time for your partner. You need to realize that and prepare for it, instead of imagining that having a baby will solve all your problems. In any event, it's not the child's place to straighten those things out.

A METAMORPHOSIS

RB: It's that violent clash between what we imagine and what really happens that interested me too. Barbara is a young woman who has been living in a kind of bubble, abstractedly, in the higher spheres of metaphysics. She theorizes about everything, but is cruelly lacking in practical experience. After her baby's arrival, she will have to drop some of her philosophical certitudes and rub shoulders with a reality that was never explained in her books.

VP: She reconnects with her animal side, becomes a female of the species. She will be dragged down into the vortex of life and change by the force of events, by the force of this specific event.

EA: Bringing a child into the world changes your life, but those changes begin to occur as early as pregnancy: at the physical level, but also at the psychic level because of the hormonal upset. You are already different. I'm a vegetarian, but I remember that while I was pregnant, my one and only obsession was to eat meat! You use that in the film by the way, and it's very funny. But in the real world, it's also disturbing. You don't recognize yourself

anymore. A radical transformation, a genuine metamorphosis is going on inside of you. The book, like the film, begins with a parody of Franz Kafka's "Metamorphosis".

VP: Metamorphosis is ultimately a very stimulating theme, since all the narrative elements from the beginning of the film need to be overturned and made different by the end of the film. That's why the film is constructed as a kind of diptych.

A MIRROR EFFECT

RB: Yes, there really are two distinct halves to the film: before and after delivery, the fantasy and the reality of the blessed event, with an airlock between the two, a passage between the two, the delivery itself. The first part of the movie is quite dream-like, as we enter into Barbara's subjective world: what she feels, what she imagines, her dreams of perfect maternal love, her idealized view of motherhood. My direction is therefore more poised, more aesthetically elaborate, with fluid camera movements and flamboyant colours. When the baby arrives, the veil of fantasy is suddenly ripped aside. Life and chaos take the upper hand. Barbara passes through various phases: apprehension at first, the fatigue of sleepless nights, then passionate, symbiotic love, a kind of ecstasy she never expected. She feels totally lost. Life always has surprises in store for us. The treatment of the second part therefore looks more realistic. The light becomes harsher, the colours fade. The camera is hand-held and therefore livelier, always on the lookout and in perpetual motion. The shots are tighter and the direction more intimate.

VP: That sense of duality is introduced at the very beginning of the film, with Barbara looking into her bedroom mirror. She is almost due, and her stomach is so heavy that she has a hard time moving. She seems to be wondering how this all happened to her. She begins to realize that her fantasies were perhaps nothing more than a deformed reflection of life, and that she is soon going to pass over to the other side of the mirror. We really played a lot with that idea while constructing the screenplay.

Many of the scenes of the first half are then mirrored in the second half. Details pop up again, but this time transformed. An evolution has taken place, in fact a revolution. And you pushed that process to its limits in your direction.

RB: My director of photography, Antoine Monod, and I also decided to change the emulsion of the film stock we used in the two halves: film that saturates colors at first, then much more sensitive film stock that attenuates contrasts, to look paler, whiter and, in fact, more realistic. As if we were going from Gauguin to Caillebotte, for example. I mean the audience may not necessarily notice our aesthetic decision, but I hope they will at least sense it.

CARNAL AESTHETICS

EA: What you also feel is the carnal aspect of the film. You often show bodies making love, coming together, separating. In the iconography of the woman-as-mother, I think we are still very much influenced by the image of the Virgin Mary, i.e. the image of an untouchable woman, a mother protected by an aura of virginity and asexuality. As if a mother could not be a woman as well. You turned that iconography on its head, with sensual, aesthetic bodies, and an explosion of the senses. Because a pregnant woman is quintessentially sexual, otherwise she would never have become a mother. Her body exists even more forcefully, her stomach and breasts are swollen and she has an unbelievable appetite. She has become a super-sensual, super-feminine woman. And Louise embodied that magnificently.

Interview with Louise Bourgoin

To play Barbara, I needed an actress who would accept being stripped bare, both literally and figuratively, as the role implies. So when I met Louise Bourgoin, I told her: we are going to have to trust each other. "Trust is the invisible cement that leads a team forward". I didn't say that, it was Bud Wilkinson, an American football legend. Anyway, she said she would trust me, and that was enough for me.

RB: Louise, what were your thoughts when you first read the screenplay?

LB: I thought it was a project I couldn't let get away. It's a real role, a portrait of a woman, so few of which exist in movies today. Barbara is not a static character: she evolves, she is transformed, she undergoes a genuine metamorphosis. By becoming a mother, this other-worldly intellectual is forced to change her outlook on life, she goes from metaphysics to materialism. She becomes more pragmatic and more responsible. The experience of motherhood will force her out of her habitual comfort zone and away from her philosophical concepts to confront the naked truth of life. And it will also make her aware of her own mortality.

In terms of acting, it was a challenge I couldn't help but accept. And the role was a real character study for me!

RB: The fact that you don't yet have a child was an advantage for me. Writing the screenplay, I used Éliette Abécassis' own experiences, and what she tells in her book was sufficiently rich. I don't think we needed another account. We may have even run the risk of a collision between the two. I don't have a child yet either, and I liked the fact that I could fantasize about it, rather than having to use my own experience. And then this is supposed to be Barbara's first child, so she too has no experience as a mother. Everything she experiences with her baby is for the first time. That's what you had to play: the fear of the unknown.

LB: I was never pregnant, and so it's true, I wanted to play the part, but I was afraid to play it too. That fear never let up during the whole shoot.

RB : Fear can sometimes work as a motor. It was interesting to see how you used it to shape your character.

LB: I had so many doubts because of my lack of experience, that every time I ran into a pregnant woman, I harassed her with questions. I must have driven Sandrine (the make up artist, seven months pregnant during the shoot) completely crazy! The stomach pads were a big help too. The more I'm disguised, the better I can shape a character that is very different from me. That much is obvious. And the time it took to get into those phony stomachs was that much more time I could devote wholly and concretely to getting into character. I got up at dawn so they could glue the prostheses onto my pelvis and chest, and paint them to give them that real-looking flesh color. I had to stand five hours straight, because if I sat down, I might crease the latex. So I started out the day already tired, and a bit high on all those weird solvents they use in special effects make up. But that fit in well with the real state of a pregnant woman, exhausted by all those hormone changes and the heavy stomach she's lugging around. It was perfect.

RB: You also told me that you had had very little to do with newborns in your life. You thought that might be a handicap for the role, whereas in fact it was a real advantage: it was important for the world of babies to be a totally new discovery for Barbara.

ADAPTING TO BABIES

LB: I was as overwhelmed as my character. At first, I thought we'd never manage. It was hard to let myself go, when the baby in my arms was slapping me in the face, or telling me its problems in onomatopoeia. But we gradually domesticated each other. I would stay with the babies between scenes to get them used to me. I'd play with them, calm them... I even spent some Sundays with them at their parents' houses.

RB: Yes, you're right, we had to adapt to the babies. They were our priority. It was funny to see a crew of fifty working to a schedule designed around naps and bottle times.

LB: There were some magical moments. Like the breastfeeding scenes. I could feel the baby sucking on my breast. I didn't need to act then, I was trembling with emotion.

RB: When you're writing a screenplay, you don't immediately realize the impact your words can have. And when writing those two: "Barbara breastfeeds", I didn't realize how touchy that was going to be, especially if I wanted something that looked very realistic for both the breastfeeding scenes and the childbirth scenes. The special effects crew worked miracles.

LB: Childbirth is always risky in a film. It can easily become grotesque. Here it was THE scene. If we got that wrong, we got the whole film wrong, because it would no longer be credible.

THE DEMANDS OF REALISM

RB: We were very much aware of what was at stake, so we prepared as much as we could before the shoot. With my director of photography, we filmed some real deliveries with the parents' prior authorization. We wanted to submerge ourselves in reality. We wanted to check the emotions, to work on the framing. It was very impressive and it was a big help when we filmed our own childbirth scene. By the way, you too prepared for this scene way in advance.

LB: Yes, I took childbirth classes with pregnant women to learn how to breathe during the contractions. I also followed a midwife around a Paris clinic. She let me watch about ten deliveries. It was very compelling, the blood, the secretions, the placenta... We live in a sterilized society, we're not used to seeing things like that, even though it's only natural. Anyway, I wonder whether I wouldn't prefer to have my baby without my partner present. I'd be too afraid he'd stay disgusted with me for the rest of his life! I remember that in her book, Éliette described Nicolas: "he was as horrified as if he had just come out of a horror film, with the lead role played by... his wife".

RB: The fact that the midwife was present on set as a consultant, and that the role of the obstetrician was played by a real obstetrician, must have helped too...

LB: Yes, their advice, their gestures and the way they looked were reassuring. What was important for me was to know how to scream, how to breathe in and out, how to suffer. Because you suffer differently, depending on how much your cervix has dilated. Shooting the

childbirth took two days. Two truly intense days, lying on the delivery table, with my feet in stirrups, strapped into the prosthesis, hooked up to the tensiometer and to my mike, with a false IV in my arm, projectors in my face, the closed ambiance of the studio with all those people around me... I was hot. I was suffocating and, with all those hours of heavy breathing, I ended up in a state of hyperventilation and finally did actually pass out.

BIRTHING AN EMOTION

RB: I left that shot in the film. You looked white as a sheet and said: I'm going to pass out... and so you did, you really did pass out. You made me feel like a sadist that day.

LB: No! I want to reassure everyone: no actors were mistreated during the shoot. In fact, you are the very opposite of a sadist, you're a gentle, trusting director. You didn't overwhelm me with direction, you never said: you should play it this way or that, you talked about other things, about something that touched me and let me arrive at the required emotion at just the right moment. With a phrase, or just a single word. It was inspiring. And all those women who gave birth as I watched inspired me too. Watching them allowed me later to act out certain things I wouldn't have dared otherwise. Everything seemed to transpire in their eyes because, despite the pain, they all conserved a kind of dignity in front of the medical team, people they didn't know. I used that in my acting. I also thought of them when they put the baby on my chest after delivery. I expected them to be overcome with emotion, but not at all. First of all, they were exhausted, and their eyes worked more like radar trained on their baby. They checked to see if it looked healthy, if it had all its ten fingers. I played it as I had seen it. I thought that was more interesting than screaming and trotting out all the big emotions.

RB: But there was a moment when you actually did shed a tear. Do you remember?

LB: Yes, when I turned to Pio and saw him weeping, I lost it immediately. I was really moved. I thought it was so beautiful.

RB: We also suggested that Pio watch some deliveries, but he didn't want to. He preferred to keep his innocence. He wanted it to look like he was seeing it for the first time.

TRICKS OF THE TRADE

LB: Pio is an instinctive, physical actor, with great control over space, his body and his acting. He's very athletic, he's very healthy, solid and reassuring. He taught me lots of the tricks of the trade. For example, the scene in which I'm supposed to be completely drunk... just before shooting it, he made me spin around until I couldn't walk straight anymore. .

RB: That's why you walked into the wall when I said 'action'?

LB: Uhh... yes. I did look completely drunk, you're right.

RB: Yes, you were very credible.

LB: He taught me lots of things like that. I'm very grateful. When we found out we were going to work together, we got together a lot before the shoot to rehearse, to practice with babies and to get to know each other. We were going to be doing some pretty intimate

scenes together, kissing, making love, having sex. So we prepared for that intimacy. We became very close. And today Pio is like a brother to me.

Interview with Pio Marmai

I loved working with Pio Marmai on my previous film. He's wonderful. I wanted to continue working with him, so it seemed obvious to offer him the role of Nicolas in this film. I never write with an actor in mind. It would have too much influence on my dialogues and characters, but I must admit that in this case, I thought of him pretty early on.

RB: So Pio, why did you accept this role?

PM: Idiot, you told me you had written it for me!

RB: Yes, but you could have refused...

PM: Well no, I really didn't have a choice. I owe you my first role in the movies... You're fishing for compliments here, aren't you? Ok. I owe you everything, man. You pulled me out of the gutter. There, I've said it. No, seriously, when you talked to me about this project, I was intrigued by how you were going to treat the subject. We have a pretty naïve way of looking at motherhood in the movies, and more generally in our society. Everything is lovely, everything is wonderful, expecting a baby is a wonderful event, the ultimate desire of any couple. But like all fairy tales, you never really see what happens afterwards, once the baby is born. Your take on the subject is pretty unique, and that's what made me want to be a part of the project.

RB: Has it made you want to have children too?

PM: Uh no. Well one day probably, but not right away. The idea sounds nice, but it's also a source of anxiety, because life is no longer the same after the birth of a baby. My character, Nicolas, will have to change jobs, become more stable and accept certain sacrifices. But to reassure himself and to convince himself that he's not become too old, he also at times acts like a retarded teenager. It's paradoxical, because you might think that paternity can't help but trigger the passage to adulthood, but at the same time it also causes some inevitable regression.

BECOMING A FATHER

RB: Yes, that was probably to strike a balance, to make the change easier to get through. But the character wasn't all that mature from the start...

PM: True, Nicolas' great ambition is to carry on a conversation using nothing but dialogue from 'Back to the Future'... by Jove!

RB: What do you feel the father's real role is?

PM: There was a scene in the movie in which a pediatrician explained to Barbara, who is living in total osmosis with her daughter, that a couple's equilibrium is threatened when a child arrives. Their roles evolve and each needs to find his and her new place. I think he concludes that the role of the father is to act as a buffer zone between mother and child. I think I agree with that... but the scene was cut during the edit.

RB: I thought it sounded too explanatory. I prefer suggesting things rather than explaining them.

PM: It's the same for an actor: it's no use overacting. Overacting is a lack of confidence in the audience.

RB: Especially in the movies, where a raised eyebrow can take on enormous proportions. I've had this same conversation with Sinclair about music, which should never take precedence over the image. Violins over an emotional scene, even when playing magnificently, can ruin everything.

PM: In the end, it's all a matter of the right dose.

PREPARING FOR THE ROLE

RB: You once told me that to prepare for this role you spent six months before the shoot working in a video club. You can now admit that was pure bullshit!

PM: Well... yes. But I did prepare for my role in a different way. Louise and I spent a lot of time rehearsing together, because above and beyond our own individual roles, we needed to incarnate a couple. We had to bring to life their shifting relationship, we had to show them in their everyday lives, with their complicity, their little manias, the memories they share, etc. It's pretty hard to cheat with things like that. So it was important to see each other in advance, to spend time together, have some fun, get to know each other. And some of our friends were sometimes kind enough to lend us their babies in the afternoon. We took care of them together, we took out for walks in the park. It was nice. Our only fear was that the paparazzi find us. They might have drawn some hasty conclusions!

RB: It's true. You did seem to feel rather comfortable with babies during the shoot.

PM: I can look at a baby for hours on end, it empties my head, it sends me to another planet. On the other hand, a baby is a partner who doesn't act. So if it feels like laughing, it laughs. If it feels like vomiting, it vomits, and if it wants to whimper, it'll whimper for two hours. And so suddenly you've got 50 people being held up and doing everything they can to calm him.

RB: Yes, what worked best was calling in the boom man.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A BABY AND A MOTORCYCLE

PM: Yes, the babies did like grabbing for the boom! In fact, we were no longer at the service of the camera, as they say, but at the service of the babies. You didn't yell for silence when we were about to shoot, you did it when the baby was arriving on the set, so everything would be calm and Zen-like. Because if the baby sensed agitation, it got upset. It might start shrieking at the top of its little lungs, and when that gets loud, it's worse than a sputtering motorcycle without a muffler.

RB: I never thought I'd hear you compare a baby to a motorcycle... I know that you're really into customizing motorcycles, and that you can't help going on and on about them, but well, that has nothing to do with us here.

PM: Well, if you want to stop a motorcycle, you stop it. With a baby, you can't. You're right, they have nothing to do with each other.

RB: Yes, but even if you did lose some of your hearing, I hope you enjoyed the shoot. Because I was delighted to work with you.

PM: I was too. You and I are really getting to know each other. We've already made two movies together. That's a nice beginning. And it has its advantages: I get the feeling I understand right away what you want from me. I like the fact that you always leave me some room for improvisation. That's a sign of confidence. No, sincerely, working with you and your crew, that I'm already so used to, is super cool. Well, other than for the time I had to change the baby's diapers...

RB: ...and you did it so well, we had to redo the scene. You looked like too perfect a father, when we wanted you to look like you were going through an ordeal.

PM: It's just that the baby was teething, and it was screaming so much, all I wanted to do was make it stop. So I applied myself. I dug through my memories and thought about the time I put a Harley 1000 Fonte back together again with my eyes blindfolded.

RB: Motorcycles again...

PM: Don't try and change the subject. So I changed the baby and, normally, you would put a little bit of egg yolk and avocado on the diaper. Except this time, you left real, fresh stuff. And of course you didn't warn me...

RB: It looked more realistic!

PM: Very funny.

Interview with Josiane Balasko

Josiane Balasko is in my opinion one of the greatest actresses we have in France. Just look at her filmography. But she is also very much respected for her dramatic roles. She can do very subtle emotions. That combination is very rare in an actress. Since she is also herself a director, directing her was disarmingly simple. We always understood each other immediately.

THE OUZO CONNECTION

RB: Josiane, do you remember how we first met?

JB: Yes, it was in Athens, at a festival where we were both showing a film. Yours was “The First Day of the Rest of Your Life”, and mine “A French Gigolo”. Except that I had never seen your film, or you mine. So we talked about other things. And drank ouzo!

RB: Hmm... Yes. But the next day, despite my headache, I did go to see your film...

JB: And I saw yours. We talked about our respective films, and then we met again at another festival, the Colcoa in Los Angeles, where we continued talking quite a lot. And that’s how things were until you sent me your new screenplay.

RB: I was afraid you would turn it down because the role wasn’t important enough.

JB: It is in fact harder to work on a film occasionally, being on set one day here, one day there. Having to get back into character every time is harder than when you’re on set day after day, and you can build up your character over the long run. But I wanted to work with you. I found your screenplay very interesting. You treat all the themes that have to do with maternity in a very honest way. No one in general talks about that. Maternity is looked on as a pleasure, as a great adventure: the big adventure in the life of a woman. Or otherwise it’s treated very dramatically, if the child is unwanted, for example. But here you show a normal couple who wants this baby. And so what does really happen once a woman is pregnant, once she delivers the baby, once the baby is there and the couple has to change and become a family? Women talk among themselves, of course, about the little problems and worries they may have with their partner during the pregnancy, or once the child is born, but that is hardly ever seen in the movies. So I was interested to see how you would tell this story, and especially in a comic way, tenderly but without pathos, with a light touch, but still very true to life.

A ROCK’N ROLL FAMILY

RB: Were you able to recognize yourself in your character Claire? We talked about it quite a lot before shooting, but I never did ask you what attracted you to her?

JB: I like her frankness. There’s has a hard-nosed, rough and ready side to her. She’s a mother who raised two daughters alone, which is no small thing. She’s very protective, which makes her say some awkward things in front of Barbara. Their relations are rather conflicted, but that’s just a logical development of the totally symbiotic relations she had with her daughters and that you let us see toward the end of the film. I think she is a good depiction of the difficulties the parents of a mono-parental family can have. But before being a mother, Claire is a woman, and a rather rock’n roll one at that. That’s the side, the “rock’n

roll family" side that I liked. She was part of the counter culture, she lived through May 68, with all the aspirations and ideals of that period, she travelled to Nepal, she must have had some experiences with drugs, with joints, etc. Even her relations with her husband are a bit rock'n roll, because at a certain moment she tosses an iron at him!

RB: Yes, but frankly, giving her an iron for Christmas was looking for trouble. After all, she's a woman who must have been thoroughly into Women's Lib!

JB : For sure ! Besides, it isn't that easy to fling an iron the right way, without hurting anyone.

RB: Yes, there were no deaths that day, just a lot of takes.

JB: Which is to say that the iron had to be thrown properly, and that's easier said than done, because it's a heavy, oblong object, and you have to take into account the dynamics of its trajectory... a word of advice to iron throwers: it's all in the aim! It's a lot more complicated than burning your bra.

THE NEW WOMEN'S LIB: EQUILIBRIUM

RB: Do you believe that Claire burned her bra in 68, or is that just another urban legend?

JB: I think most bras were burned as part of the American Women's Lib movements. But it is possible that there were some burned in France as well. In any case, if Claire didn't do it, she probably thought about it pretty much. She was in complete agreement with women who burned their bras! She probably wouldn't do it today. Like all those old hippies, she finally settled down. But she must still see herself in movements that work for women's liberation today, as Élisabeth Badinter works, for example, in such a very intelligent way. Because you can't say that women's lib is over, no, it's far from over. Sexism, violence, inequality... there are still a lot of fights to wage.

RB: Feminism has also nudged issues forward that concern maternity too. Before, women had to say that the most beautiful day in their life was the day they brought a child into the world. Since then, they have become able to admit that delivery was a bit difficult, even with an epidural. Back in the 70s, women fought for their independence, for the right to have a career, to have a baby or not to have a baby. They were finally free from having to be the perfect mother at home that the previous generation had to be. For women today, the legacy is rich but contradictory: they have to strike a balance between maternal devotion and complex-free lucidity. They want to work, but they also want to be free to breast feed if they feel like it. They want to conquer the work market, but they also want a successful life as a couple and family. In fact, they want to find their own equilibrium, and I think that is a noble ambition.

JB: Your film is a little feminist then?

RB: Yes, maybe...

CAST

Barbara	Louise BOURGOIN
Nicolas	Pio MARMAÏ
Claire	Josiane BALASKO
Tony	Thierry FRÉMONT
Edith	Gabrielle LAZURE
Midwife	Firmine RICHARD
Daphné	Anaïs CROZE
Katia	Daphné BÜRKI
Camille Rose	Lannick GAUTRY
Dr. Jonathan Malle	Gérard LUBIN
Gynecologist	Nicole VALBERG
Mr. Truffard	Louis-Do de LENCQUESAING

PRODUCTION

Director	Rémi BEZANÇON
Screenplay, adaptation and dialogues	Vanessa PORTAL Rémi BEZANÇON
Based on the novel by	Eliette ABECASSIS UN HEUREUX EVENEMENT – Editions ALBIN MICHEL
Producers	Isabelle GRELLAT Eric ALTMAYER Nicolas ALTMAYER
A Coproduction	MANDARIN CINEMA GAUMONT FRANCE 2 CINEMA SCOPE PICTURES RTBF
With the participation of	CANAL + TPS STAR FRANCE TELEVISIONS
And the support of	Le Tax Shelter du Gouvernement fédéral Belge La REGION WALLONNE L'ANGOIA-AGICOA
Director of Photography	Antoine MONOD (A.F.C)
Editor	Sophie REINE
Sound	Marc ENGELS Olivier WALCZAK Emmanuel CROSET
Music	SINCLAIR
Set design	Maamar ECH-CHEIKH
Costumes	Marie-Laure LASSON
1st Assistant Director	Paul-Henri BELIN
Continuity	Isabelle PERRIN THEVENET
Casting	Maya SERRULA (A.R.D.A) Michaël BIER
Production Manager	Pascal ROUSSEL
Post-Production Manager	Patricia COLOMBAT

FILMOGRAPHY - **RÉMI BEZANÇON**

Director / screenwriter

- 2012 *ZARFA*
Cartoon co-directed with Jean-Christophe Lie
(Prima Linea Productions)
- 2011 *A HAPPY EVENT (aka UN HEUREUX ÉVÉNEMENT)*
With Louise Bourgoïn, Pio Marmaï and Josiane Balasko
(Mandarin Cinéma)
- 2008 *THE FIRST DAY OF THE REST OF YOUR LIFE (aka LE PREMIER JOUR DU RESTE DE TA VIE)*
With Jacques Gamblin, Zabou Breitman, Déborah François, Marc-André Grondin and Pio Marmaï
(Mandarin Cinéma)
- 2005 *LOVE IS IN THE AIR (aka MA VIE EN L'AIR)*
With Vincent Elbaz, Marion Cotillard and Gilles Lellouche
(Mandarin Films)