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Rebecca HALL
Alan RICKMAN
Richard MADDEN

A Promise

Directed By Patrice LECONTE



MOSTRA INTERNAZIONALE
D'ARTE CINEMATOGRAFICA
la Biennale di Venezia 2013
Venezia 70 - Out of Competition

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OFFICIAL SELECTION 2013

Adapted from Stefan ZWEIG's novella
Journey Into the Past

wild bunch

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OFFICIAL SELECTION 2013

A Promise
(UNE PROMESSE)

a film by

PATRICE LECONTE

starring

REBECCA HALL, ALAN RICKMAN and RICHARD MADDEN

FRANCE • 2013 • 1H35MINS • COLOUR • 2.40

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High definition pictures and press kit
can be downloaded from

www.wildbunch.biz

SYNOPSIS

Germany, 1912. A graduate of humble origins takes up a clerical post in a steel factory. Impressed by his work the elderly owner takes him on as his private secretary. His health declining, the owner is confined to his home, where the young man moves to continue his work. There he meets the owner's wife, a much younger woman, beautiful and reserved.

As time passes the young man falls passionately in love but does not dare reveal his feelings. A romantic intrigue develops in this stifling bourgeois home, all looks and silences, without a single word or gesture of love.

When the owner announces he is sending his secretary to oversee his mines in Mexico, the wife's stricken reaction reveals to the young man that she too has fallen secretly in love - a love she cannot express in the presence of her sick husband. She makes him a promise - when he returns in two years time, she will be his.

Separated by an ocean, they exchange passionate letters while awaiting the day that will reunite them. Then, on the verge of his return to Germany, World War 1 erupts. All maritime travel between South America and Europe is suspended. His beloved pines, awaiting his return.

Eight years later, with millions dead and Europe in ruins, the exile returns, to his homeland and to the woman he hopes has been waiting for him. But has their love survived the brutal passage of time?

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

A PROMISE is a haunting, intense, sensual film.

Haunting, because more than ever, the lighting, the sets, the way of filming, the script, the rhythm, all of it will be finely wrought to best convey the vertiginous sensations of the story. I have in mind a precise, polished, heedful, but never dry object: the troubling charm of a film comes from its *mise en scène*.

Intense, because Stefan Zweig's novella is a marvel of concision, as if the author had taken to heart a determination to rid it of anything that did not directly feed the story and the feeling that it conveys. The adaptation, written with Jérôme Tonnerre, respects this desire to stick to the essential, so that each scene vibrates with something secret, unspoken, yet dazzling.

Sensual, because that is what it's all about: the lover's desire. To love without knowing if there's any chance of being loved in return. To dream without being able to express that dream. To keep it secret - but to live off a glance, off the slightest of touches, the forbidden brushing of skin against skin. To film the skin, the desire to caress... For Zweig's novella asks a magnificent question: does a lover's desire withstand time?

As I approach this new film, I know how much my attention will at every moment be mobilized towards expressing those "little nothings that transport us", being closer to the characters, their torments, the high emotional stakes that Zweig describes so well.

One last, important thing: the choice of English.

It would have been stupid to shoot the film in French, entrenched as it is in the German reality of a highly specific historical context (the eve of WWI). For a while, out of respect for the spirit of Zweig and what he wrote, I considered shooting in German. But for one thing, I don't speak the language, and for another, wouldn't it be absurd for a French filmmaker to go to Germany and shoot in German a film adapted from Stefan Zweig?

So, on the advice of the producers, we opted for English, the international quality of which is indisputable, a language that allows Antony to say "I love you" to Cleopatra and Freud to greet Jung with "How are you?", leaving no one surprised.

- Patrice Leconte

AN INTERVIEW WITH PATRICE LECONTE

Why did you want to adapt Stefan Zweig's novella?

Jérôme Tonnerre, my friend and regular co-writer, recommended *Journey into the Past* to me because he thought certain of the subjects it deals with would interest me. Several days after I finished reading it I realized the story had stuck in my head. In fact I was deeply touched by the emotions, the feelings that it conveyed. I called Jérôme to tell him his recommendation had hit home and that I thought we should adapt it together with a view to making a film.

Are you particularly attracted to Zweig's work?

Even though I love his work, he's not a writer I keep by my bed, and I'd have never thought that I'd adapt one of his stories for the screen. Deciding to adapt a book is like half-opening a door: you see a possibility. And as with everything that's happened during my career, my encounter with this book was both fortuitous and crucial - it echoed feelings that touched me particularly at the time.

What particularly interested you in this story?

It wasn't so much a matter of knowing whether love can withstand the passing of time but rather whether desire can last beyond the years. There was something dizzying about this notion of declaring one's love but swearing to belong to each other later. I found the fact that these characters experienced strong desire without telling each other very moving indeed.

Do you think holding back this way was linked to the period?

No, and anyway, I didn't approach this subject like an historian. I projected myself as a man, I identified myself with the characters, I felt the emotion physically.

The film is set in Germany and begins in 1912, but we don't perceive the tensions of the times so strongly. Was that deliberate?

Absolutely. Even though the film is set at a precise time in a precise place, I didn't want World War I, which was brewing in 1912, to take over what seemed to me more important: the feelings that unite these two characters. They evolve in an emotional bubble that appears to anaesthetize them against outside events. But I didn't invent anything since Zweig doesn't depict any more of the beginnings of the war in his story than we do here.

Is your adaptation generally faithful to the novella?

Zweig's spirit is there and the emotional issues are the same as in the book. But to adapt a work is to adopt it. You need to project yourself into it; you need to invent. Beyond the narrative ideas we had, the only remarkable adaptation we made was the ending. Zweig, being both a writer and a deeply pessimistic man (as his suicide proved), gave the novella an extremely disillusioned ending. In the book, when Charlotte and Friedrich meet again, they are like strangers. It's winter, desire has faded away and their love has frozen. For the cinema, without wanting to have a happy end, we had to give their reunion a little bit of blue sky, a glimmer of hope for later.

What are the pleasures and the constraints of making a period film?

I didn't have any problem with making a period film; while I like to remain precise, I always concentrate on the characters' feelings, without allowing myself to be overwhelmed by too many details. What very quickly became clear to me was that in 1912 (and all the more so in Germany) women's fashion was quite sad and not at all becoming. Their clothes covered their bodies entirely. To see a wrist, the nape of a neck, shoulders, not to mention a forearm or ankle - it was mission impossible! Yet since desire was the subject I both wanted and needed to see skin. But Pascaline Chavanne, the costume designer, quickly reassured me, telling me we could allow ourselves some freedom with the era without falling into anachronism or incongruous frills and flounces.

At first you wanted to shoot in Germany and in German. What made you change your mind?

At the very beginning I thought that a German language German co-production was the only way to adapt this book honorably. But I quickly realized that shooting in a language I didn't speak at all was simply bizarre. Since shooting in French would have been absurd, my producers (Fidélité) suggested that I shoot in English with an Anglo-Saxon cast. The idea was very appealing; this universal language allows the story to be set in Germany while the characters speak English, without any problems.

How did you go about the casting?

Since my knowledge of British actors is not encyclopedic, I needed the help of a British casting director. I met a wonderful woman, Suzy Figgis, who works with Tim Burton, and with whom I really hit it off. She quickly suggested Rebecca Hall for the lead. I had only seen her in Woody Allen's VICKY CRISTINA BARCELONA. When I met her the first time I thought she was a bit 'girl next door' and wasn't sure she

could be my Charlotte. But as always, the idea found its path. We saw each other again, she did some tests, and something magical happened. It was remarkable to see how this cheerful modern woman, who showed up on set in jogging pants, could transform herself. In costume, her hair done, and made-up, she became the character, with an intense sensitivity.

Richard Madden is a very young actor who has become famous through the successful series GAME OF THRONES. There's something a bit wild about his character in the series; he has a beard. I kept asking myself if, once shaved, he would keep his appeal, if he would be able to portray this poor, young opportunist, crazy with love but extremely reserved, a Balzacian character utterly unlike what he has always done. But his enthusiasm and intense immersion in his work won me over.

Alan Rickman surprised me in a different way. Several people who had worked with him had told me he was a great actor but a complicated man. Nonetheless we understood each other very well and he trusted me. He was incredibly docile on set. His awareness of his character's contradictory feelings allowed him to play him with much emotion and reserve. Watching him act, I had tears in my eyes. A talent that precise and precious is thrilling.

How did you direct them?

As I would French actors. With the same complicity, the same trust. But I did feel the pleasure they experienced being framed by the director. To film the actors myself is very precious in my work but strangely very few directors do their own framing. However actors adore this benevolent European sensitivity. Rebecca Hall - who had just finished shooting IRON MAN 3, a huge American machine where she was needed for five minutes a day to act against a green screen - was delighted. Just like Alan Rickman who admitted to me that after two huge American productions he had slightly lost his taste for acting. When he hugged me at the end of the shoot and told me I had given him his taste for cinema back, it was better than if I had been awarded the Legion of Honor!

Where did you film?

In Belgium. After a lot of location scouting, we found all the spots we needed for the film. The crew included my favorite collaborators but the majority - and far from the least - consisted of Belgians. It was a very pleasant shoot because it was very light-hearted. Everything was harmonious. The British actors were open-minded, available, trusting, focused on their work. I haven't worked with the worst actors in France, far from it, but I've never seen such quality work. The weather was on our side, things went really well, as painters working direct to canvas would say. On this film, we truly enjoyed a little 'state of grace'.

What did you want from the music?

I chose Gabriel Yared early on because I've very much wanted to work with him for some time. The challenge was to illustrate the feelings with much restraint, to be lyrical without falling into sentimentality. Pressing the accelerator and the brake at the same time wasn't easy but it was captivating. His score is remarkable.

Was your recent experience with animation on THE SUICIDE SHOP useful in any way for this film?

If I change genre often it is to avoid taking the risk of falling asleep. But I can't say that that experience helped me for this film, as it was such an entirely different area. What I do know is that it made me realize how much I love to shoot. I very much enjoyed making an animated movie, but I did miss being on set.

Is your wish to retire on hold for the moment?

I don't know. For forty years I have always known what the next film would be, but I believe that this constant forward flight has finally started to make me feel dizzy. For the first time in my life, I've chosen to end a shoot without knowing what I will do next.

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHIES

REBECCA HALL

- 2014 **TRANSCENDENCE** - Wally Pfister
- 2013 **A PROMISE** - Patrice Leconte
CLOSED CIRCUIT - John Crowley
IRON MAN 3 - Shane Black
- 2012 **LAY THE FAVORITE** - Stephen Frears
- 2011 **THE AWAKENING** - Nick Murphy
Independent Spirit Robert Altman Award
Nominated - British Independent Film Award for Best Actress
- 2010 **EVERYTHING MUST GO** - Dan Rush
THE TOWN - Ben Affleck
National Board of Review Award for Best Acting by an Ensemble
PLEASE GIVE - Nicole Holofcener
Nominated - Gotham Award for Best Ensemble Cast
- 2009 **DORIAN GRAY** - Oliver Parker
- 2008 **FROST/NIXON** - Ron Howard
Nominated - Screen Actors Guild Award for Outstanding Performance by a Cast in a Motion Picture
- 2008 **VICKY CRISTINA BARCELONA** - Woody Allen
Gotham Independent Film Award for Best Ensemble Cast
Nominated - Golden Globe Award for Best Actress - Motion Picture Musical or Comedy
Nominated - BAFTA Orange Rising Star Award
Nominated - London Film Critics Circle Award for Best British Actress of the Year
Nominated - Gotham Independent Film Award for Breakthrough Actor
- 2006 **THE PRESTIGE** - Christopher Nolan
Nominated - Empire Award for Best Female Newcomer
Nominated - London Film Critics Circle Award for British Newcomer of the Year
- 2006 **STARTER FOR 10** - Tom Vaughan

ALAN RICKMAN

- 2013 **CBGB** - Randall Miller
A PROMISE - Patrice Leconte
THE BUTLER - Lee Daniels
- 2012 **GAMBIT** - Michael Hoffmann
- 2011 **HARRY POTTER AND THE DEATHLY HALLOWS: PART TWO** - David Yates
- 2010 **HARRY POTTER AND THE DEATHLY HALLOWS: PART ONE** - David Yates
ALICE IN WONDERLAND - Tim Burton
- 2009 **HARRY POTTER AND THE HALF-BLOOD PRINCE** - David Yates
- 2008 **BOTTLE SHOCK** - Randall Miller
- 2007 **SWEENEY TODD: THE DEMON BARBER OF FLEET STREET** - Tim Burton
HARRY POTTER AND THE ORDER OF THE PHOENIX - David Yates
- 2006 **PERFUME: THE STORY OF A MURDERER** - Tom Tykwer
SNOWCAKE - Marc Evans
- 2005 **HARRY POTTER AND THE GOBLET OF FIRE** - Mike Newell
THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY - Garth Jennings
- 2004 **HARRY POTTER AND THE PRISONER OF AZKABAN** - Alfonso Cuarón
- 2003 **LOVE ACTUALLY** - Richard Curtis
- 2002 **HARRY POTTER AND THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS** - Chris Columbus
- 2001 **HARRY POTTER AND THE SORCERER'S STONE** - Chris Columbus
- 1999 **GALAXY QUEST** – Dean Parisot
DOGMA - Kevin Smith
- 1996 **MICHAEL COLLINS** - Neil Jordan
Nominated - BAFTA Award for Best Actor in a Supporting Role
- 1995 **SENSE AND SENSIBILITY** - Ang Lee
Nominated - BAFTA Award for Best Actor in a Supporting Role
AN AWFULLY BIG ADVENTURE - Mike Newell
- 1994 **MESMER** - Roger Spottiswoode
- 1992 **BOB ROBERTS** - Tim Robbins
- 1991 **CLOSE MY EYES** - Stephen Poliakoff
Evening Standard British Film Award for Best Actor
ROBIN HOOD: PRINCE OF THIEVES - Kevin Reynolds
BAFTA Award for Best Actor in a Supporting Role
CLOSET LAND - Radha Bharadwaj
- 1990 **TRULY, MADLY, DEEPLY** - Anthony Minghella
Nominated - BAFTA Award for Best Actor in a Leading Role
- 1989 **THE JANUARY MAN** - Pat O'Connor
- 1988 **DIE HARD** - John McTiernan

RICHARD MADDEN

FILM

- 2015 **CINDERELLA** - Kenneth Branagh
- 2013 **A PROMISE** - Patrice Leconte
- 2010 **CHATROOM** - Hideo Nakata
- 2000 **COMPLICITY** - Gavin Millar

TELEVISION

- 2014 **KLONDIKE** - Simon Cellan Jones
- 2012 **BIRDSONG** - Phillip Martin
- 2011 **SIRENS** - Victor Buhler
- 2011 **GAME OF THRONES Series 1, 2 and 3**

CAST

REBECCA HALL - *Lotte Hoffmeister*

ALAN RICKMAN - *Karl Hoffmeister*

RICHARD MADDEN - *Friedrich Zeitz*

TOBY MURRAY - *Otto Hoffmeister*

MAGGIE STEED - *Frau Hermann*

SHANNON TARBET - *Anna*

CREW

Directed by

PATRICE LECONTE

Screenplay

JEROME TONNERRE and PATRICE LECONTE

Based on the novel *Journey into the Past* by

STEFAN ZWEIG

DP

EDUARDO SERRA AFC.ASC

Editing

JOELLE HACHE

Sound

PAUL LAINE

Sound Editing

JEAN GOUDIER

Rerecording

THOMAS GAUDER

Production Designer

IVAN MAUSSION

Costume Design

PASCALINE CHAVANNE

Casting

SUSIE FIGGIS

Production Manager

PIERRE WALLON

Postproduction Supervisor

SUSANA ANTUNES

Original Music

GABRIEL YARED

Executive Producer

CHRISTINE DE JEKEL

Producers

OLIVIER DELBOSC

MARC MISSONNIER

Production

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WALLONIE