

THE BRIDESMAID

(LA DEMOISELLE D'HONNEUR)

A FILM BY CLAUDE CHABROL

2004; 110 min; Color, 1.66, DTS Digital or Dolby SRD
In French with English Subtitles



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Screenplay and dialogue by Pierre Leccia and Claude Chabrol adapted from the novel by Ruth Rendell
Aurore Clément, with the participation of Bernard Le Coq and Michel Duchaussoy, Suzanne Flon, Solène
Bouton, Anna Mihalcea, Eric Seigne, Pierre-Francois Dumeniaud, Philippe Duclos, Thomas Chabrol
Produced by Patrick Godeau - Antonio Passalia - Alfred Hürmer A French-German co-production
ALICELEO - CANAL DIFFUSION - FRANCE 2 CINEMA - INTEGRAL FILM

SYNOPSIS

Handsome young Philippe, still living at home with his mother and two sisters, has a promising career ahead of him. At the wedding of his sister Sophie he meets her stunning but strangely aloof bridesmaid, Senta, and it is love at first sight. But Senta's life and past is shrouded in mystery, and she tells him stories about herself that seem unbelievable. Then she declares that as proof of their love to each other, each of them should kill a total stranger. But is this just another of Senta's wild stories? And how far is Philippe willing to go, even as his love for her seems to know no limits?

CAST

BENOIT MAGIMEL Philippe
LAURA SMET Senta
AUORE CLEMENT Christine
BERNARD LE COQ Gérard
SOLENE BOUTON Sophie
ANNA MIHALCEA Patricia
MICHEL DUCHAUSSOY The Tramp
SUZANNE FLON Mrs. Crespin
ERIC SEIGNE Jacky
PIERRE-FRANCOIS DUMENIAUD Nadeau
PHILIPPE DUCLOS Captain
THOMAS CHABROL Lieutenant Laval

CREW

A FILM BY Claude Chabrol
SCREENPLAY & DIALOGUE Pierre Leccia and Claude Chabrol
FROM THE NOVEL BY Ruth Rendell
ORIGINAL SCORE Matthieu Chabrol
Orchestra conducted by Laurent Petitgirard
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY Eduardo Serra (AFC-ASC)
CAMERA OPERATOR Michel Thiriet
FILM EDITOR Monique Fardoulis
SOUND Pierre Lenoir, Thierry Lebon
PRODUCTION DESIGNER Françoise Benoît-Fresco
COSTUME DESIGNER Mic Cheminal
SCRIPT SUPERVISOR Aurore Chabrol
1ST ASSISTANT DIRECTOR Cécile Maistre
PRODUCTION MANAGER Michel Jullien
LINE PRODUCER Françoise Galfrè
PRODUCERS Antonio Passalia, Patrick Godeau, Alfred Hürmer

A French-German coproduction ALICELEO – CANAL DIFFUSION – FRANCE 2 CINEMA – INTEGRAL FILM in association with COFIMAGE 15 with the support of the Région des Pays de Loire and of the Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication (CNC) with the participation of FilmFernsehFond Bayern, Filmförderungsanstalt, Titania Produzioni and Janus International and with the participation of CANAL+ and CINECINEMA
Running time: 110' / 1.66 – DTS Digital – Colour

CLAUDECHABROL

For a director whose 1958 debut, *Le Beau Serge*, is universally recognized as launching the French New Wave a year before Truffaut's *The 400 Blows* took Cannes by storm, Claude Chabrol is an exquisitely understated filmmaker. Whether exploring a convoluted ménage à trios in *Les Biches* (1968) or having a vengeful postmistress and an illiterate servant blow away a bourgeois family in *A Judgment in Stone* (1995), he never takes the audience for granted. Instead, he concentrates on perfectly pitched plots and an unparalleled sense of human psychology to rivet spectators to their seats, refusing to let go until he has inexorably squeezed the last drop of blood or passion from the on-screen situations he consummately choreographs. Chabrol's mastery of the thriller genre, as well as his rotund physique, has led to inevitable comparisons with Alfred Hitchcock. It is a comparison that the director insists, "is neither entirely fair, nor entirely false". But unlike Hitch, and very much like the fine wines he tastes with undiluted pleasure, Chabrol improves with age. After his critically and commercially acclaimed early years, and his wilderness decade in the 1980s, Chabrol burst back onto the scene with a string of hits in the last ten years - *Madame Bovary*, *Betty*, *Hell*, *A Judgment in Stone*, *Nightcap* - that brought awards at festivals and packed houses in theatres. The common thread of those pictures was a number of strong, alluring roles for some of France's best actresses, Emmanuelle Béart, Sandrine Bonnaire and Isabelle Huppert. Now with *The Bridesmaid*, adapted from Ruth Rendell's novel, the director has brought together two brilliant young actors, Benoît Magimel and Laura Smet, to tell a tangled, edgy tale of twisted passion reminiscent of his most accomplished films noirs.

CLAUDECHABROL Filmography

2004 *La demoiselle d'honneur* - The Bridesmaid - La damigella d'onore
2003 *La fleur du mal* - The Flower of Evil - Il fiore del male
1999 *Merci pour le chocolat* - Nightcap - Grazie per la cioccolata
1998 *La couleur du mensonge* - The Colour of Lies - Il colore della menzogna
1996 *Rien ne va plus* - The Swindle
1995 *La cérémonie* - A Judgement in Stone - Il buio nella mente
1994 *L'enfer* - Hell - L'inferno
1993 *L'œil de Vichy* - The Eye of Vichy
1992 *Betty*
1991 *Madame Bovary*
1990 *Docteur M*
Jours tranquilles à Clichy - Quiet Days in Clichy - Giorni felici a Clichy
1988 *Une affaire de femmes* - Story of Women - Un affare di donne
1987 *Le cri du hibou* - The Cry of the Owl - Il grido del gufo
1986 *Masques* - Masks - Volto segreto
1985 *L'inspecteur Lavardin* - Inspector Lavardin - L'ispettore Lavardin
1984 *Poulet au vinaigre* - Cop au Vin - Una morte di troppo
1983 *Le sang des autres* - The Blood of Others - Il sangue degli altri
1982 *Les fantômes du chapelier* - The Hatter's Ghosts - I fantasmi del cappellaio
1980 *Le cheval d'orgueil* - The Horse of Pride
1977 *Violette Nozière* - Violette
1976 *Alice ou la dernière fugue* - Alice
1975 *Folies bourgeoises* - The Twist - Pazzi borghesi

Les magiciens - Death Rite - Profezia di un delitto
1974 Les innocents aux mains sales
 Innocents with Dirty Hands - Gli innocenti dalle mani sporche
Une partie de plaisir - Piece of Pleasure - Una gita di piacere
1973 Nada - The Nada Gang - Sterminate "Gruppo Zero"
1972 Les noces rouges - Wedding in Blood - L'amico di famiglia - Le nozze rosse
Docteur Popaul - Dr Popaul - Trappola per un lupo
1971 La décade prodigieuse - Ten Days Wonder - Dieci incredibili giorni
1970 Juste avant la nuit - Just Before Nightfall - Sul far della notte
La rupture - The Break-Up - All'ombra del delitto
1969 Le boucher - The Butcher - Il tagliagole
Que la bête meure - The Beast Must Die - Ucciderò un uomo
1968 La femme infidèle - The Unfaithful Wife - Stéphane, una moglie infedele
1967 Les biches - Bad Girls - Le cerbiate
La route de Corinthe - The Road to Corinth - Criminal Story
1966 Le scandale - The Champagne Murders - Lo scandalo
La ligne de démarcation - Line of Demarcation - La linea di demarcazione
1965 Le tigre se parfume à la dynamite
 An Orchid for the Tiger - La tigre profumata alla dinamite
Marie-Chantal contre le docteur Kha
 Marie-Chantal vs Doctor Kha - Marie-Chantal contro il dottor Kha
1964 Le tigre aime la chair fraîche
 The Tiger Likes Fresh Blood - La tigre ama la carne fresca
1963 Les plus belles escroqueries du siècle
 The Beautiful Swindlers - Le più belle truffe del mondo
1962 Landru - Bluebeard
1961 Ophélie - Ofelia
Les sept péchés capitaux - The Seven Capital Sins - I sette peccati capitali
1960 Les godelureaux - Wise Guys - I bellimbusti
1959 Les bonnes femmes - The Good Girls - Le donne facili
A double tour - Web of Passion - A doppia mandata
1958 Les cousins - The Cousins - I cugini
Le beau Serge - Handsome Serge

An Interview with **CLAUDE CHABROL**

Your thrillers are always totally distinctive. How do you explain that?

Generally, in thrillers, it's the plot that keeps things moving. In my films, that's not the case. It's more what we learn about the characters. In the final analysis, the plot is not terribly significant. I try to get it out of the way in the first reel.

Nonetheless, there's still a resolution at the end.

Of course, but my hope is that the audience will forget everything they hear about a girl going missing in the next fifteen minutes of the movie. I really want to get the audience involved, get them to identify with Benoit's character so that, when he makes his decision at the end—and it's a truly crazy decision—the audience isn't shocked. So that they might think, "hey, after all, why not?" When in fact what he decides is absolutely inconceivable.

What interested you particularly in the psychology of the characters of Ruth Rendell's novel?

Very often, when you are dealing with the relationship between passion and reason, it's passion that wins out but you regret it, thinking: "Oh, poor so-and-so, he's really being taken for a ride." Here, I don't want that to happen. The film ends with Philippe's irrevocable decision to plunge into the abyss and I'd like audiences to say, "If that were me, maybe I'd do the same..."

Was it a deliberate choice to film a more passionate, sensual story than your more recent movies?

You can't always deal with the same issues. Like it or not, passion expresses itself through sex, for a time at least. We need to show the attraction Philippe feels, 80% of which is down to sex and only 20% the result

of the need to fill a yawning gap in his life, an absence of dreams. If the girl had no sex-appeal, it wouldn't work. He'd think it through. In this instance, he puts his mind on hold.

How did you describe the character to Benoît Magimel?

If the actor needs me to explain what I want and what it all means, it probably means I chose the wrong actor! I sent Benoît the script and asked him if he was interested. He replied that he liked it a lot and he talked about it very intelligently. Then, we had to put back shooting a couple of times and each time Benoît made sure he was available.

Why did you choose him to play Philippe?

There are few actors who are — as opposed to those who can act or pretend to be — uptight and awaiting release at the same time, like being locked up with the door wide open. Benoît's like that in real life. I give him his head for a couple of rehearsals to see what he comes up with, what he draws out of himself because it's quite close to him. I found him terrifically convincing in Michael Haneke's *The Piano Teacher*, but then he was very convincing in a lot of other films as well. After *The Piano Teacher*, when I told her that I wanted to make a film with Benoît, Isabelle Huppert said to me "Yes, he's amazing, nothing like other young actors." I have a lot of faith in Isabelle's opinion on that score.

Like your films, Ruth Rendell's novels place more emphasis on psychology than mystery and suspense...

Definitely. She knows what goes through people's minds. At the same time, what's pretty unusual is that she captures the impact of their social background, the way they earn a living, where they live and so on. All that can be totally fascinating, but there are very few thriller writers who are aware of it.

What appeals to you most in the genre?

There has to be a corpse. It grabs people's attention. They like a good corpse. There are some tremendous books where there isn't a corpse, but I always think after the first fifty pages, "Is this going to interest me?" When I read a book and there's a corpse, I always think that, whatever happens, it won't have been a complete waste of time.

How did you set about adapting the novel?

I worked on the script with Pierre Leccia, who had done an excellent job of adapting another of Ruth Rendell's books. Usually, when I write, I'm the one who keeps the plot nice and tight and I let my co-writers concentrate on the psychological subtleties. In this instance, the plot was already nice and tight so I could just have fun picking up on the little things, which I don't usually get the chance to do.

Did you make any significant changes?

Yes, there was an idea that came to me at the last minute. It was very gratifying because I sent the script to Ruth Rendell and she replied that she was very pleased with it. I hope she wasn't just being polite! She especially liked the idea I had, which was for the Bridesmaid's dress to be cleaned and returned to Senta, who uses it for a purpose

I can't tell you about without letting the whole thing out of the bag, but it was a genuinely good idea.

How did you come to cast Laura Smet to play Senta?

I had done some screen tests with her for a part in my previous movie and she was just as good as Melanie Doutey but Melanie was more what I was looking for physically. I said to myself back then, "As soon as I get the chance, I'm going to work with Laura". So, this time I didn't even do any tests. I knew she would be terrific.

What do you like about her?

First of all, she's spot-on in everything she does. At the same time, there's this kind of off-the-wall touch that Laura has quite naturally, that you can't act. When she says, "Take me to the sea," it's very unsettling. But it's natural. I like it when actors aren't too different from the character they are playing.

Senta has a very special, unnerving presence...

She skews reality. Reality is still there but it is skewed. That's the founding principle of witchcraft. I like it when the horror creeps up on you. To that extent, the sets contribute to an understanding of the character. If a character's very square, they'll live in a house that's very square not wild and crazy. The same goes for Senta. What is unnerving is that there is a sense of decay about her apartment but we don't know, yet, where it comes from.

Would you say that killing is the ultimate anarchy?

The trouble is that killing is a bit more serious than anarchy. That's a real problem. There is no more anarchy because it's true that killing someone now is the only means of rebellion but it is an inexcusable rebellion. It would be good for people to rebel more but they need to find other ways.

You said once that you're not pessimistic about people but about their lives.

Yes, I find that they're sailing by the wrong landmarks. People attach great importance to things that have none or less than they think. I was particularly struck by the onslaught there was recently on happiness. Several books came out proclaiming happiness to be total crap. That made me laugh because you can always find people who think that but

they don't all write books at the same time. Anyway, there were debates and discussions and people eventually said, "Actually, happiness isn't total crap after all."

Do you think of the audience when you are shooting?

I try not to make things any harder for them. There are some terrifying films, which propose empty or idiotic solutions to people's problems. All the Schwarzenegger-type solutions are bad ones. I'm not talking about the Schwarzy the governor but Schwarzy the actor. It's very, very wrong. It leads to guys like Bush, who don't have a single rational thought in their heads. Their thoughts seem rational but they're out of touch with reality.

The film opens with what seems like a united family going out together and ends with the whole family being questioned at the police station.

At the beginning of the movie, all the members of the family, except for Philippe who doesn't realize it, are trying to escape or flee in one way or another. Even Christine, the mother, wants to go off and live with her boyfriend. Philippe's little sister is obsessed with getting away from home and his other sister marries an unlikely fireman. It's scary, a regular family scattered to the winds ahead of its time.

You never project a particularly attractive image of family life.

The family is one of the biggest frauds ever invented. As much as it is a tremendous concept, when it becomes an obligatory social structure, it's atrocious. Right now, things are very interesting because people talk a lot about the breakdown of the nuclear family but instead of using real feelings as a starting point, they use a kind of charter of

obligations. The traditional idea of the family is an abomination. The family tree is a monstrous invention. People boasting of one of their ancestors being the Pope's official mustard-supplier! It's pathetic!

At the end of the film, with police sirens wailing all around outside, do you intend for there to be an element of ambiguity, for the audience to be unsure what has happened?

We know. We know full well but we don't want to admit it. That's what I like because it reaches the point where audiences ask themselves if they would be strong enough, or crazy enough, to reject their whole mental make-up. If they come out asking themselves that, I will be very happy.

Is it possible to rein in one's craziness?

There is a great temptation to know what a certain form of perversity is like. It's very devious, but it was there in the book. Senta's list of "must-do's" is very sneaky. Making love with somebody of the same sex is what seems the most shocking, except for killing a complete stranger, of course. In fact, the idea that you must kill a complete stranger to prove your love makes the whole thing more palatable, a kind of joke. Planting a tree is a hard one...

You are often compared to Hitchcock. Did you think of Psycho when you were writing the movie?

I can see it now. Depending on people's tastes, it's going to be "brings to mind Psycho" or "nowhere near as good as Psycho". One or the other.

Does the comparison irritate you?

It doesn't irritate me and it doesn't please me. It's not entirely true, nor is it entirely false, but it's not true in the sense that most people think. There is an inaccurate analysis of the situation. Even so, I prefer people to say that it reminds them of Hitchcock but that it's not as good than for them to say that it reminds them of a film by Alan Smithee.

An Interview with **BENOIT MAGIMEL**

How would you describe your character in *The Bridesmaid*?

Philippe is a guy with a major sense of responsibility, who carries a big burden on his shoulders. Within the family, he's the son, brother, husband and he plays the paternal role as well. He has a fairly ambiguous relationship with his mother, as often happens in single-parent families. He accepts his life without rebelling. He has given up on all his ambitions, desires and ideals because he never really had the choice.

And then he meets Senta...

It's not love at first sight. It's more like something that was meant to be. When they meet, it's as if they've known each other forever even though they're so different. She's mysterious and intriguing, and I think it amuses Philippe that she should be everything he isn't. He comes out of his shell thanks to her and he discovers love, which is fabulous. The first time they make love, it's as if it's so natural. There's no frantic fumbling or mawkish romanticism. It's very understated and enigmatic. Philippe is unsettled by her wild side, by the way she constantly idealizes their relationship. The amazing thing is that you get the impression that she's lying the whole time when in fact she's telling the truth. But he only realizes that at the end. He thinks she's crazy but he's in love with her.

What appealed to you when you read the script?

In Claude's movies, women have the strongest roles. The men are often victims. The women decide. There were so many levels to it that I had to re-read the script several times to grasp everything. There's the family element. There are dark secrets. The characters get drawn in, even if they refuse to face the truth. From the moment Philippe decides to play on Senta's terms, he is flirting with danger. He is attracted to her and becomes an accomplice, to some extent, in what she does. But that doesn't stop him going for it and I think that's wonderful. The last scene is very beautiful in that respect.

Would you say it's a typical Chabrol movie?

There are a lot of love scenes, which is a change from his more recent movies. A lot of the themes are the same but they're impregnated with love and sensuality. There's a special something that is linked to Chabrol's world view. His films always come at you from a different angle. Even before Philippe meets Senta there's something eerie, something not quite right. You might even think that Philippe is a potential killer. There's a hint of craziness under the surface. When you read one of Claude's scripts, everything seems very normal but then you get to act it out and all these tiny details build a strange sense of mystery.

You seem to like working several times with the same director.

It's easier working with someone for the second time. It all comes down to a question of trust. Claude goes straight to the point. Every scene serves a precise purpose. There's no need to underscore things to bring out hidden meanings, everything is already there. He doesn't like talking about the characters for hours. It all becomes clear as soon as you get on set. Even so, I found that he was more present on this film. Probably because it's less of a showcase movie. It's more intimate, closer to him. Chabrol is like a guy with a big bunch of keys. When you can't find the solution, he comes over and gives you the key that unlocks the door.

Philippe is reminiscent of Walther Klemmer, the young lover in Haneke's *The Piano Teacher*, for which you won Best Actor at Cannes.

I think that the two characters are very much alike in their sincerity and emotional honesty. Philippe honestly loves Senta. The fact that he becomes her accomplice is a huge proof of his love. Like Walther, he's not a calculating guy. There's something very wholesome in the way he loves her and gives himself up to her body and soul.

After that movie, you received offers of work from all over the world, including Hollywood. Were you tempted?

I realized that for me the most important thing is the director. If the director is right, the story and the characters soon fit into place. Sometimes you'll read a good script and want to do it even if you sense the director's not right for the film. It's vital for an actor to venture beyond his own little world but the director and the part have to be right.

You started out in movies at the age of 12. Did you ever doubt that it was what you wanted to do?

When you've had a taste of the cinema, you never want to try anything else. After that first experience on a movie set, it's difficult to give it up. The cinema is magical.

BENOIT MAGIMEL Selected Filmography

2004 Selon Charlie by/di Nicole Garcia

Les chevaliers du ciel by/di Gérard Pirès

La demoiselle d'honneur - The Bridesmaid - La damigella d'onore by/di Claude Chabrol

2003 Trouble by/di Harry Cleven

Les rivières pourpres 2 : les anges de l'apocalypse

Crimson Rivers 2: Angels of the Apocalypse - I fiumi di porpora 2: gli angeli dell'Apocalisse by/di Olivier Dahan

2002 Effroyables jardins - Strange Gardens by/di Jean Becker

La fleur du mal - The Flower of Evil - Il fiore del male by/di Claude Chabrol

2001 Nid de guêpes - The Nest - Nido di vespe by/di Florent Emilio Siri

2000 La pianiste - The Piano Teacher - La pianista by/di Michael Haneke

1998 Les enfants du siècle - The Children of the Century by/di Diane Kurys

1997 Déjà mort - Already Dead by/di Olivier Dahan

1995 Les voleurs - The Thieves by/di André Téchiné

1994 La haine - Hate - L'odio by/di Mathieu Kassovitz

1991 Toutes peines confondues by/di Michel Deville

1987 La vie est un long fleuve tranquille - Life Is A Long Quiet River - La vita è un lungo fiume tranquillo by/di Etienne Chatilliez

LAURA S M E T Filmography

2004 La demoiselle d'honneur - The Bridesmaid - La damigella d'onore by/di Claude Chabrol

2003 La femme de Gilles by/di Frédéric Fonteyne

2002 Les corps impatientes - Eager Bodies - Corpi impazienti by/di Xavier Giannoli