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PRESENT



SEMAINE
DE LA CRITIQUE
CANNES 2011

WALK AWAY RENEE

**Written and Directed by
JONATHAN CAOUILLE
"TARNATION"**

2011 · FRANCE · RUNNING TIME 90 MIN · DCP · COLOUR

PRESS CONTACT DURING CANNES FF:

**All Suites Garden Studio,
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(Between Miramar and Martinez Hotel)

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SYNOPSIS

Filmmaker Jonathan Caouette embarks on a road trip to move his mentally ill mother Renée across the country. As they encounter roadblocks in the present, we begin to flash back to moments from the past, giving us insight into this anything-but-ordinary mother/son relationship. Through musical montage, psychedelic sequences and real and imagined circumstance, WALK AWAY RENEE raises questions about love, sacrifice, and the reality in which we live.

DIRECTORS STATEMENT

I was born and raised in Houston, Texas, where I grew up mostly with my grandparents, while my mother Renée was in and out of hospitals dealing with schizo-affected psychosis. I also spent time in the foster care system where I experienced a great deal of neglect and abuse. Filmmaking and storytelling became a means of disassociation and escape from life.

By picking up a camera when I was a kid and using it as a weapon, a shield and a way to illuminate how I was feeling about everything, I found a way to survive my life. Filming things was a way of talking to myself.

As a teen, my first attempts at films were coarse, violent, gruesome and moody misadventures that I tried to fill with a particular hallucinatory quality. I also tried to make them funny, since I feel humor is one of the ways people get through intense adversity in their lives. My work is as inspired

by soul singers like Mavis Staples and comedians like Richard Pryor as it is by filmmakers like John Cassavetes, Lars Von Trier and Alejandro Jodorowsky.

These various obsessions inadvertently led me as an artist to a greater appreciation of and influence by European art films.

I incorporated jagged yet harmonious compositions with a neo-realist mise-en-scene and humor. These early works were based on urban folk tales, slasher movies, my nightmares and day-mares...

My work is about wanting my films to go to a mysterious place and bring it to life for audiences. I consider all my films, both fiction and documentary, to be in a sense "true" stories of dreams. My goal is to make films that are also happenings, encounters, conversations and, I hope, beacons of emotional uplift.

INTERVIEW WITH JONATHAN CAOQUETTE

With WALK AWAY RENEE, why did you feel the need to return to your story and to your mother, which were at the heart of TARNATION?

I felt the need to go back because, in a way, TARNATION was a film exuding a lot of dense information very quickly, very stylistically, at machine-gun speed. There was so much going on. I see WALK AWAY RENEE as a way to deal with the same subject, but from a different point of view and above all with more space to breathe. And I also felt it was a good transitional film for me personally, from making documentaries to making more narrative things. There is more fiction in WALK AWAY RENEE, even if the fiction is a metaphor for the truth. It's an ongoing conversation with truth.

Before WALK AWAY RENEE, you made the short fiction film ALL FLOWERS IN TIME. Why a return to documentary?

For years after TARNATION, I made a vow never to make another personal documentary. I was very adamant about never going back to this. But I decided last year to take a trip with my mother and document it, just as an experiment for myself. To see what would happen. And I felt pretty strongly about this material shot on the road so I decided to juxtapose it with other things from the past, things that we heard in TARNATION, but with aspects we've never seen before. It's a different film. After watching the footage from the road trip, I felt very inspired by John

Cassavetes and told a friend: "I think I made something that feels like a post-modern A WOMAN UNDER THE INFLUENCE on acid." I say that with all respect to my mother and Cassavetes. In both cases, the story is about a victim of the mental health system, a system that literally enslaves you if you make one wrong move.

You said in interviews that, after TARNATION, you felt somehow lost and didn't know how to get back to filmmaking...

In a way yes, but at the same time, I had to take care of my family. For me, in my world, family is the most important. In America and other countries, people don't care as much about parents when they grow old as I do. I invited my family into my home for a number of years until my grandfather unfortunately passed away. The circumstances became extreme and I couldn't be with my mum anymore: now she's in a very good assisted living facility and I see her twice a week. As creepy as it sounds, the umbilical cord is still attached, but the role of parent and child has been reversed. I do feel my mother is like my child.

It's become very common to find on YouTube these slices of personal footage: home movies shown to the entire world. How do you place WALK AWAY RENEE in relation to this?

Ok, you do see things on YouTube like slideshows, images and texts with music, like I do. Maybe it was inevitable that the world would evolve this way and I could have been part of it if YouTube had appeared when I

started. But I think what I do is much more difficult to achieve and much more cinematic.

How have you evolved as a filmmaker?

For WALK AWAY RENEE, I made it the “right way” with a small but professional crew. It was much more planned and methodical. Preproduction was the biggest feat. We ended up digitizing all the footage we acquired. We shot the road trip and two months with my mother and me. I just knew I wanted to have one layer of the film with her and me that was completely objective, not so much from my point of view. In the end, it took a lot of mental energy to put it together, but I was helped by the crew and many friends

How do you find working with your mother?

It's a mixed emotion, a yin-yang thing. There's a lot of pain for me but I don't think I put her in pain. She enjoys being filmed. It's like an opulent version of “Pinch me, this isn't happening!” and I want use the medium of film to express that. My mother and I went through so many unorthodox things that I want to share it. When I'm around people, it's difficult to have conversations about life: that's why I make films. My mother loves knowing that her story is being told by her son. She doesn't feel exploited and I don't feel that way either. Exploitation comes from outside: for me I feel that, because it's a part of my life and fabric, I have a license to do it.

One idea running throughout WALK AWAY RENEE is the existence of parallel universes. Can you tell us more about that?

I've been fascinated with the idea of parallel universes for about seven years. For me, it's a metaphor for a better life. It's the idea there's more than what's going on here, whether it is an afterlife or an alternate universe. It's an existential question that seems to go around. I don't know if it's because everybody's asking: “Where are we going in the world?” but there are a lot of apocalyptic things in people's consciousness and conversations. Well at least in New York! (laughing) I noticed that a lot of films are dealing with that: RABBIT HOLE, ANOTHER EARTH, even MELANCHOLIA and THE TREE OF LIFE. And there's this TV series: LOST. Parallel universes are also a metaphor for inevitability: because even if there is an alternate reality, what is happening is happening. That means that, even in the afterlife, I may still be taking care of my mum on some level.

Anyway, this idea shows that you're more than ready to make science-fiction films!

I'm more than ready! As I told you, WALK AWAY RENEE is transitional. My idea of sci-fi would be to make it with a twist. It should take place here, in a domestic household. I'm not a fan of sci-fi that takes place in space. I don't like to see people in spaceships but I do like the idea of something bigger and weirder affecting people. I'm certainly ready to develop my filmmaking. I would like to take unknown people or actors and put them in extreme circumstances - a wonderful example

of this is Steven Soderbergh's BUBBLE, which is a masterpiece. It's about having them play themselves, allowing them to bring their own sensibility and past and synthesizing it with something fictitious. That would come from my documentary streak. But I'm also a huge TWILIGHT ZONE fan. I'm interested in making films that emulate dream landscapes - especially that state when you're half-asleep and half-awake, with a song rushing through your mind. I tried to do that in WALK AWAY RENEE.

What is the meaning of the title WALK AWAY RENEE?

It's a song from the sixties, one of my mother's favorite songs. It's about love lost and someone not being able to reach out to his loved one. The title may have negative connotations, like telling someone to walk away. For me, it's first and foremost the image of my mother walking away without really being able to leave us.

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

SHORT FILMS

- 1987: The Ankle Slasher
1988: The Techniques And Sciences Of
Eva Pig Nymph
1990 : The Hospital
2010: All Flowers In Time (with Chloé
Sevigny)

FEATURE-LENGTH DOCUMENTARY

- 2009 : All Tomorrow's Parties

FEATURE FILMS

- 2004 : Tarnation – Selected at the
Sundance & Cannes film festivals

BIOGRAPHY

A truly iconoclastic visionary, Jonathan Caouette has been acting and making films since he was eight years old. In 2004 he starred in, directed and edited TARNATION, his feature debut. Executive produced by Gus Van Sant and John Cameron Mitchell, the film was widely heralded as a cinematic revolution. Part documentary, part narrative fiction, part home movie, and part acid trip, Tarnation charts a psychedelic whirlwind of snapshots, super-8 home movies, answering machine messages, video diaries, early short films, snippets of 70s and 80s pop culture and dramatic reenactments to create an epic portrait of an American family travesty.

Premiering at the Sundance and Cannes film festivals, TARNATION won Best Documentary at the Los Angeles IFP/West Film Festival, The National Society of Film Critics award, the Sutherland Trophy at the London Film Festival, and was nominated for an Independent Spirit Award. As a regional theater actor, Caouette portrayed a schizophrenic John the Baptist in SALOME, a queer Judas in JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR, and both John the Baptist and Judas in GODSPELL. He has toured with the European company of the THE ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW and the NYC 30th anniversary production of HAIR, and can be seen in John Cameron Mitchell's SHORTBUS. Caouette directed ALL TOMORROW'S PARTIES, a feature about the cult underground music festival and recently had a short, ALL FLOWERS IN TIME starring Chloe Sevigny at the Sundance Film Festival and many other festivals worldwide.

CAST AND CREW

Written and Directed by
JONATHAN CAOUETTE

Cast

JONATHAN CAOUETTE
RENEE LEBLANC
ADOLPH DAVIS
DAVID SANIN PAZ
JOSHUA CAOUETTE
ROSEMARY DAVIS

DPs

NOAM ROUBAH
ANDRES PEYROT
JASON BANKER
JORGE TORRES

Additional Camera

DAVID BRONSON
ANDRES SANTAMARIA
ZACHARY SANDLER
JOSHUA SANDLER

Editor

BRIAN MCALLISTER

Producers

**GÉRARD LACROIX AND GÉRARD
PONT (MORGANE PRODUCTION)**
PIERRE-PAUL PULJIZ (POLYESTER)
**AGNÈS B., CHRISTOPHE
AUDEGUIS AND CHARLES-MARIE
ANTHONIOZ (LOVE STREAMS
AGNÈS B. PRODUCTIONS)**
**JONATHAN CAOUETTE
(HUMMINGBIRD 72)**

Line Producers

CATHERINE ROUAULT
JASON YAMAS

Head of Production
ALBERTINE FOURNIER

Production Coordinator
BÉRENGÈRE BARRIER

Production Assistants
MAUD BLACHIER
COLINE COMAS
FRANÇOIS XAVIER DUPAS
ADRIEN FELGINES

Post-Production Manager
DORIS YOBA

Post Production Supervisor
& Assistant Editor
NOAM ROUBAH

Story Editor
REBECCA HABER

Special Effects Supervisors
ROBERT MORRIS
BRIAN MCALLISTER

Prosthetics Artist (Teeth)
ELI LIVINGSTON

Media Manager
JARED HUTCHINSON

Sound Editor
DAMIEN GUILLAUME

Sound Designer
BRIAN MCALLISTER

Mix
JÉRÔME WICIAK

Music Supervisor

SIMON RAYMONDE

Post-Production

MIKROS IMAGE PARIS

Post-Production Manager

BÉATRICE BAUWENS

Visual Effects Coordinator

CHRYSTÈLE BARBARAT

Grading

ALEXANDRA POCQUET

Digital Supervisor

MATHIEU LECLERCQ

DCP Report

JEAN-BAPTISTE LE GUEN

Conformation

MAEL COILLARD

PIERRE-OLIVIER GAUMIN

Polyson - Auditorium

PALO ALTO PARIS

Auditorium Assistant

OLIVIER GUILLAUME