

Haut et Court presents

BACKSTAGE

an **Emmanuelle Bercot** film



venezia 62
concorso

TORONTO
INTERNATIONAL
FILM FESTIVAL®
OFFICIAL SELECTION
2005

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International Press

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French Distribution: Haut et Court Distribution

Synopsis

Adolescent Lucie worships the celebrated singer Lauren Waks, an enigmatic and inaccessible artist whose photos cover her bedroom walls. It's how she escapes from the reality of stifling small-town life with her mother and kid brother. Until the day when an unforeseen opportunity will allow the young fan to enter her idol's private world. Innocently, she dives into a passionate relationship with the star of her dreams. But, determined to ensure Lauren's happiness despite her, Lucie concocts a crazy and self-destructive plan.

Cast and Crew

Lauren: Emmanuelle Seigner

Lucie: Isild le Besco

Juliette: Noémie Lvovsky

Seymour: Valéry Zeitoun

Daniel: Samuel Benchetrit

Marie Line: Edith Le Merdy

Jean-Claude: Jean-Paul Walle Wa Wana

Nanou: Mar Sodupe

Director: Emmanuelle Bercot

with the artistic collaboration of Guillaume Schiffman

Screenplay: Emmanuelle Bercot

and Jérôme Tonnerre

Music: Laurent Marimbert (music),

Marine Bercot (lyrics), Emmanuelle Seigner (vocals)

Casting: Antoinette Boulat

DP: Agnès Godard

Sound: Pierre André and Gaël Nicolas

Editor: Julien Leloup

Mix: Jean-Pierre Laforce and Stéphane Thiebaut

Set design: Eric Barboza

Wardrobe: Gil Lesage and Jean-Marc Mireté

Make-up: Michelle Quelin Quentel

1st Assistant Director: Sébastien Matuchet

Production Manager: Pascal Bonnet

Producers: Caroline Benjo and Carole Scotta

Associate producers: Simon Arnal-Szlovak and

Barbara Letellier

Co-producers: Christoph Meyer-Wiel and

Lillian Birnbaum

An Haut et Court, CMW Film Company GmbH, Arte France Cinéma and StudioCanal coproduction. With the participation of Canal +, Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication, Centre National de la Cinématographie, Cinécinéma and Filmförderungsanstalt. In association with the Sofica Soficinéma. With the support of Eurimages and the Région Ile de France. Developed with the support of the MEDIA Programme of the European Union, Centre National de la Cinématographie, Procirep and Région Centre, with help from the atelier de production - Centre Val de Loire.

International sales: Wild Bunch.

French distribution : Haut et Court.

Original soundtrack released by AZ-UNIVERSAL.

Interview with Emmanuelle Bercot

How did the project BACKSTAGE originate?

I have been intrigued, even fascinated, by the phenomenon of fans for a long time: their irrational behaviour, their desperate passion, the burden of fantastical desire they carry, most often alongside an overwhelming emotional fragility and above all a profound suffering. The most extreme among them ingest their idol like a real drug and defer their lives to that phantom presence which nonetheless fills them entirely. I wanted to describe this process, to try and get close to it.

There is an unbridgeable gulf between a star and her fans...

Everything is meticulously arranged to preserve it. There's a game of mystery and frustration. The mirage must be maintained at all costs. The distance between fan and star is marked out by windows, barriers, bodyguards... so many boundaries erected between these two irremediably opposed yet intertwined worlds. Sometimes the encounter takes place, but when it does, the seconds are already ticking furiously away. BACKSTAGE began with this question: what would happen if these fleeting seconds were extended? What would happen if this chimeric coming together between fan and star were to take place - really take place, physically - long enough for one to be discovered by the other?

Here, in one of the film's opening scenes, the encounter is violent. Thanks to a 'Stars at Home' type show, Lucie is put right right beside her idol: she sees her right in front of her, in her home... but it demolishes her.

She is simultaneously surprised and trapped. It's a situation as rewarding as it is devastating. The star of her dreams appears in her life, in her living room, but it lasts only a few minutes. Teenagers who live out this sort of experience for the purposes of a tv broadcast are ravaged by emotion. Some are on the edge of fainting, convulsed. Afterwards, nothing remains but the sensation of a great abyss, a void. At this moment, Lucie is like a rabbit in the headlights, just before being run over, crushed by a system that dwarfs her. And if her destiny goes off the rails, it's because her mother, by wanting to make her happy, will destroy her life...

Is it this dark in reality?

I think it can be... Usually, bashful fans are only shown anecdotally, with laughter and condescension. But some of them experience this situation very cruelly. My co-writer Jérôme Tonnerre and I preferred to develop the story as we would have done a news item, to get as close as possible to the cruelty and violence of the subject, to be rigorously realistic and plausible.

Was your choice of actors part of this approach?

For the part of the singer, it was vital to find an actress who would first of all be credible as a star, without risking

caricature. And an actress whose status, even in the cinema, would not interfere with the character. Amongst many other qualities, Emmanuelle Seigner held that trump card. In addition to her charisma, her 'glamorous physique', and a blend of mystery, tough distance and disarming fragility, she offers, because of her undefined status (she is known as an actress but also for appearing in the pages of lifestyle magazines, on covers or as the face of a famous perfume), a fame sufficiently broad to make her credible as an iconic pop star.

And Isild le Besco?

She is at the source of the project, given that I wrote the role for her. With a physical appearance different to that she has had to date, Isild brings her strangeness, a raw presence, combining a child's gentleness with the disturbing qualities of madness.

An entire, strong, entourage and a sort of documentary verisimilitude surround these two women.

Isild and Emmanuelle are in real life very different from their characters; they had to construct them without leaning on their own references, so I confronted them with several non-professional actors whose roles were directly linked to their real lives. For example, the bodyguard is a real bodyguard... It's a strategy I repeat from one film to another, as the confrontation pushes actors to rid themselves of their mannerisms. I want them to find something very instinctive in their performances. When Valéry Zeitoun, the manager, appears, he brings with him his own authenticity, and thus certainly contributes to the film's credibility. Firstly, because he is known by the public for his charismatic performance on the TV programme 'Popstars', and because he is in fact label manager of AZ at Universal, and moves every day in the world depicted in the film. 'Real life' enters the world of 'fiction', allowing us to approach what I see as a form of truth.

How did you go about the direction?

Every situation, every scene, calls for its own style. I wasn't worried about going from very fixed, 'painterly' shots to raw movements which accompany the actors - to whom I like to allow a lot of freedom - as closely as possible. What was new for me was to start from a very wordy script, with numerous characters. I was concerned that the ensemble scenes should not seem static, so I tried to keep the mis-en-scene always moving, allowing sentences to get lost offscreen, characters to come and go, or disappear from one room into another. For the most intimate scenes, I looked for a direction oscillating between lyricism and realism.

You also shift from the point of view of Lucie, the young fan, to Lauren, the star...

Yes, because Lauren also has her own story. The drifting love life she endures, the crushing burden of her fans' love and the fact that she becomes, little by little, the real victim - finally, the most deserving of sympathy - push certain scenes

Interview with Emmanuelle Bercot

into her point of view. What does she perceive of the danger Lucie represents? How does she look at Lucie and the monstrosity of her act? We have to become aware of the violence of all this, for Lauren as well.

You are a very 'physical' director...

I like to work through an exploration of bodies, faces, matter. My constant desire is to make a carnal portrait of people and places. I am always less interested in telling stories than in wanting to describe states of being, to heighten perceptions. I like to privilege matter over meaning; to film the feelings of characters in their most physical, elemental aspect. Hence the use of sequence shots, to avoid fragmenting emotions, to favour accidents, to allow a dazzling truth to appear. When you get there by a process of abandonment with the performers, you run to earth the very texture of life.

Music plays an essential role.

We had to create an entire repertoire, capable of touching the widest possible audience, of seducing and bewitching adolescents. We knew that a certain type of melancholy song has a very strong resonance with this audience. So again, it was a constant concern for plausibility that drove our work, the songs being conductors of credibility and vital authenticity. With the composer Laurent Marimbert and lyricist Marine Bercot, we developed an album of eight songs, inspired by the fictional personality of Lauren Waks. Each title corresponded to a stage in her career, which we envisaged as covering some 15 years. Then Emmanuelle Seigner recorded the album, in conditions very similar to those enjoyed by big time entertainers. That in itself would have been a real challenge, even before tackling the film. And for Emmanuelle as well as for me, a vital stage in the incarnation of her character.

You insisted that Emmanuelle Seigner should sing the songs herself?

Absolutely; Lauren was created entirely from scratch: her look, her musical style, her lyrics, her posters, her photos, her videos, her CD and DVD sleeves. For Emmanuelle to become Lauren, her investment had to be 100%. She had to become the character, body and voice.

Do you feel close to your two heroines?

Close, no. But deeply touched by them. During the writing of the script, in the course of my research, I had access to a lot of fan mail written to famous singers, and emerged from my reading very shaken. Shaken by the despair, the anorexic and suicidal tendencies on display, the complete lack of horizon, of the least hope of happiness or rebirth, devotion bordering on madness, expressed in some of these letters. To the point of the fans making a morbid sacrifice of their existence for someone they didn't know, whom they understood was unattainable, but where only the vain hope that one day they might touch them kept them alive. I was overwhelmed by these fans, and also by the burden carried

by the objects of their devotions - the artists - despite themselves. It was at that point I realised the gravity of my subject and of the direction I wanted to take: to try and make as fair and as sincere a film as possible. One which gazes not with pity or compassion, but with understanding.

There seems a direct link between BACKSTAGE and your earlier films, LA PUCE and CLÉMENT.

You're right. I like to explore the pathways of adolescence, its revolts, the search for identity, the importance of 'the first time', the relationships of strength and passion between two people who are attracted to each other but whose fortunes are not equal, and to see how two very different types can nonetheless unite and make their way together. In that respect, my films resemble each other. But I don't think I have before dealt with such a powerful subject as that of BACKSTAGE, resting on such suffering, a real state of survival, a total loss of direction.

More than a film about fandom, it's a film about passionate love, a recurrent theme of yours.

If, as you say, it's a recurrent theme in my work, that's less to do with the stories I'm telling than with the nature of my characters: they go the whole way; extreme temperaments. So, whether it's fan worship or passionate love, there is the same desire to lose oneself in the other. The object of adoration becomes the centre of everything. Everything converges towards her, or him, but here the process of alienation is even more radical: Lucie wants happiness for Lauren, in spite of her, and she will go to very great lengths to prove it to her... as far as the complete negation of herself.

You like to pursue things to breaking point.

What interests me is to deal with exceptional relationships, outside the norm. In CLÉMENT, a 30-year-old woman falls in love with a 13-year-old boy, and the film depicts how this passionate love finds precisely, in the very singular nature of this relationship, its full expression: fervent, burning, obsessive. This passion is all the more difficult to channel as it doesn't fit into a defined frame (the couple, the family). They are in a 'beyond': just two beings hurled one towards the other, and it's this exacerbation that I want to film. It's a moment where the truth - of people and things - has no choice but to leap into view because there is no longer anything that can contain it.

And in BACKSTAGE?

The relationship between Lucie and Lauren is more mystical than anything else. Lucie is possessed by a force which overcomes her, which pushes her ineluctably towards Lauren, while exacerbating all her sensations to a dangerous point of no return, a frenzied and delirious interpretation of reality and the desire of the other. I believe that, until now, I have fundamentally always been telling stories about impossible love. And rather than talk about 'passionate love', I'd rather say: love without limits.

Emmanuelle Bercot

Cinema (as Actress)

- 2004 CAMPING SAUVAGE - Christophe Ali and Nicolas Bonilauri
2003 À TOUT DE SUITE - Benoît Jacquot
2001 CLÉMENT - Emmanuelle Bercot
1999 UNE POUR TOUTES...TOUTES POUR UNE - Claude Lelouch
1998 CA COMMENCE AUJOURD'HUI - Bertrand Tavernier
1997 LA CLASSE DE NEIGE - Claude Miller
1996 LA DIVINE POURSUITE - Michel Deville
1993 ÉTAT DES LIEUX - Jean-François Richet
1990 RAGAZZI - Mama Keita

Cinema (as Director)

- 2005 BACKSTAGE written with Jérôme Tonnerre.
2004 À POIL ! (short)
2002 QUELQU'UN VOUS AIME (short)
2001 CLEMENT Official Selection « Un Certain Regard » Cannes 2001
1999 LA FAUTE AU VENT (short)
1998 LE CHOIX D'ELODIE - TVM 90mn.
LA PUCE moyen-metrage
1997 LES VACANCES (short)
1996 TRUE ROMANÈS documentary

Theatre (as Actress)

- 1993 JÉSUS ETAIT SON NOM - Robert Hossein.
1992/1993 LE CHAMPIGNON MAGIQUE - Y. Guerrand.
1990 /1989 DANS LA NUIT, LA LIBERTÉ - Frédéric Dard.
Directed by Robert Hossein.
L'AIGLON - Edmond Rostand Directed by Jean-Luc Tardieu.
1988 LA SECONDE SURPRISE DE L'AMOUR - Marivaux. Directed by Jean Macqueron.

Isild Le Besco

Cinema

- 2005 BACKSTAGE - Emmanuelle Bercot
2004 CAMPING SAUVAGE - Christophe Ali et Nicolas Bonilauri
2004 LA RAVISSEUSE - Antoine Santana
2003 À TOUT DE SUITE - Benoît Jacquot
2002 LE COÛT DE LA VIE - Philippe Le Guay
2002 QUELQU'UN VOUS AIME - Emmanuelle Bercot (short)
2002 FORÊT NOIRE - Joséphine Flasseur (short)
2002 WHAT THE WITNESS SAW - Florian Von Donnersmark (short)
2002 ADOLPHE - Benoît Jacquot
2001 LA REPENTIE - Laetitia Masson

- 2001 UN MOMENT DE BONHEUR - Antoine Santana
2000 ROBERTO SUCCO - Cédric Kahn
1999 LES FILLES NE SAVENT PAS NAGER - Anne-Sophie Birot
1999 SADE - Benoît Jacquot
1999 ADIEU BABYLONE - Raphaël Frydman
1998 LA PUCE - Emmanuelle Bercot (moyen metrage)
1998 MILLE MORCEAUX - Frédéric Benzaquen (short)
1997 KUB VALIUM - Marine Le Du (short)
1997 COQUILLETES - Joséphine Flasseur (short)
1997 LES VACANCES - Emmanuelle Bercot (short)
1990 LACENAIRE - Francis Girod
1989 CINEMATON 994 - Gérard Courant
1987 LE REFLET PERDU DU MIROIR - Catherine Belkhodja

Television

- 2003 PRINCESSE MARIE - Benoît Jacquot
2002 LA MAISON DU CANAL - Alain Berliner
1999 LE BAHUT - Arnaud Selignac
1998 LE CHOIX D'ÉLODIE - Emmanuelle Bercot

as Director

- 2004 DEMI TARIF

Emmanuelle Seigner

Cinema

- 2005 FOUR LAST SONGS - Francesca Joseph
2005 BACKSTAGE - Emmanuelle Bercot
2003 ILS SE MARIÈRENT ET EURENT BEAUCOUP D'ENFANTS - Yvan Attal
2002 LES IMMORTELS - Antonio-Pedro Vasconcelos
2002 CORPS A CORPS - François Hanss
2001 LAGUNA - Dennis Berry
2001 STREGHE VERSO NORD - Giovanni Veronesi
1999 BUDDY BOY - Marc Hanlon
1998 LA NEUVIEME PORTE - Roman Polanski
1997 PLACE VENDOME - Nicole Garcia
1996 NIRVANA - Gabriele Salvatores
1996 RPM - Robert Young
1996 LA DIVINE POURSUITE - Michel Deville
1995 POURVU QUE ÇA DURE - Michel Thibaud
1993 LE SOURIRE - Claude Miller
1991 BITTER MOON - Roman Polanski
1989 IL MALE OSCURO - Mario Monicelli
1987 FRANTIC - Roman Polanski
1986 COURS PRIVE - Pierre Granier-Deferre
1985 DETECTIVE - Jean-Luc Godard

Theatre

- 2003 HEDDA GABLER - Henrik Ibsen
2000 FERNANDO KRAPP M'A ÉCRIT CETTE LETTRE - Tankred Dorst