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CHARLOTTE GAINSBOURG
PETER DOHERTY

**CONFESSION
OF A CHILD
OF THE CENTURY**

A FILM BY
SYLVIE VERHEYDE

wild bunch



Ad Vitam & les Films du Veyrier
present

CONFESSION OF A CHILD OF THE CENTURY

A film by Sylvie Verheyde

starring
Charlotte Gainsbourg
Peter Doherty
August Diehl
Lily Cole

2012 - France – Running time: 120'
Format: DCP 2.35 – Sound: 5.1 / Dolby SR-SRD

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SYNOPSIS

Paris 1830. Betrayed by his mistress, Octave falls into despair and debauchery - "the disease of the century". The death of his father takes him to the country, where he meets Brigitte, a young widow ten years his elder. Octave falls passionately in love, once more. But will he have the courage to believe in it?

INTERVIEW WITH SYLVIE VERHEYDE

Why did you want to adapt de Musset's novel?

I had the idea for this film after I finished STELLA. STELLA was very autobiographical and I needed a change. I came to cinema through literature: I love Balzac, and the 19th century particularly. I wasn't that fond of cinema and thought film buffs had no life! (laughs) I built my culture around books. I felt that I was learning more about myself this way. I had read de Musset's novel and it came back to mind, probably because it gave me inspiration for a male lead character.

De Musset is a key figure of French romanticism. He talks about the end of illusions and the end of love as an attempted response to disenchantment, even if feelings can be subversive. Through Octave, he talks about a time when no one knows what tomorrow will be but is certain that yesterday is dead. A historical malaise turns into metaphysical angst, melancholia, the disease of the century. It struck a contemporary chord: we are discovering today that progress doesn't necessarily lead to a better life, that it is the end of ideals... And I had never filmed a love story.

When did you establish a link between literature and cinema?

It's quite strange but in fact it happened through music. I used to write songs when I was younger, I used to sing, and the first thing I ever filmed was a music clip. Then I wrote a first short film, I got an advance for it and so I filmed it. Without ever having gone to film school or meant to go into cinema. It was Scorsese who made me want to follow this path. I find this very Balzacian! One could think my way of filming draws inspiration from literature and is based on words, but it isn't. I write my screenplays but as I shoot them, I "adapt" them, I don't follow them to the letter. The words I write call for images, and if I can find a visual equivalent for them, it's better.

Did the novel constrain you somehow and make you more dependant on dialogues than in your previous films?

I insisted on staying as close to the novel as possible, and it's true that most of the dialogues are de Musset's. I love the beauty of his language and wanted to share it.

I most identify with Octave. He's not unlike the characters in my other films... You could think of Romanticism as sickly, but it actually depicts great violence, suffering, an intimate struggle between good and evil, all that beneath a sophisticated veneer. I wanted to keep the preciousness and the elegance of the lines while exploring the subtext.

We feel you have perfectly integrated etiquette in the story, without being totally fascinated by it...

I wanted to make a period film whereas everyone thought it should be modernized, particularly because of Peter Doherty. But I wasn't interested in filming "his life" today: adapting de Musset enabled me to go deeper into the malaise. My filmmaking moves through the actors, filming a chest of drawers isn't my passion! (laughs). It was complicated to defend the film on the financing front, because it was outside the norm, particularly adapting de Musset in English, when he is part of the national heritage. I am delighted because the English are going to publish "The Confession of a Child of the Century" for the first time, with a preface by Peter: thanks to the film, French culture will travel abroad!

To return to the question of "the norm", period films are usually destined for an adult audience, a Merchant Ivory audience. Regarding Peter, either the financiers didn't know him, or the banks didn't want him, or everything had to be modernized and end up like some kind of rock sitcom for a young audience!

Was Peter Doherty the mainspring of the film, rather than de Musset?

No, de Musset was the source. Then a friend told me Peter wanted to act. I said: "I don't want to hear about this, knowing myself I'm going to go for it and it'll be a disaster!" (laughs). After PRINCESSES and two films for

television I worked for two years on SCORPION for Joey Starr: it didn't go according to plan, at the last minute they decided they didn't want Joey and I ended up having to drop the project.

I didn't want anything like that happening again. My casting director knew Peter so I sent him STELLA, along with the de Musset novel and a letter, in which I wrote: "This is the story of a man who is not made for love but who searches for it despite and against all - against his time, against himself and against other men. I thought of you for the part."

Peter called immediately, we met in London - I speak little English - I studied Latin as my second language (laughs) - and we decided we wanted to make the film together at that first meeting. Beyond the fact that he is a symbol of the sacred and damned poet, like de Musset in his time, I found he moved me deeply. And he's brilliant too. He came to music through literature, he won poetry competitions when he was very young, and I liked that. His commitment was total.

Did you make any changes to your screenplay following this meeting?

None at all. Beside the fact it had to be adapted into English, which was not my intention at the beginning. It was difficult to find a French actor who would be both physical and cerebral. It cannot work if de Musset's lines don't ring true in the actors' eyes. I found Peter perfect for this. He wanted to work in films because he loves cinema: he spends his time watching films; he knows the dialogues of many by heart. And of course, he didn't need to invent a character: even if he isn't Octave, Peter shares a certain sensibility with and certain link to the character. I didn't need to explain the text to him. We understand each other without speaking words, and I think that the fact we don't speak the same language helped us get to the essential...

I'm used to working with actors to whom I feel close, I'm quite faithful and it's all a matter of sharing common worlds. In STELLA, Karole Rocher played my mother without me having to explain anything to her. It comes from feelings. Karole comes from the same working-class background as me; we have similar mothers. With Peter, it was the same thing, an instant understanding; we never brought up the character, or the novel!

How could you be certain that the first impression you had of Peter was right?

After I sent the English screenplay to him, I went to visit him at his house, just outside London. He operates like me, on trust. It's quite a good test, four days in isolation with someone, without a word of English. (laughs). He knew the screenplay by heart - a year before shooting - he has an incredible aptitude. We hit it off. I worked with Peter my way, which is to play all the parts to him. I never have rehearsals with actors: by reading the lines with them I think I can provide more information than if I explained things. We played out the whole screenplay this way and he was just astounding.

From a pure production stand point; was it an advantage to have Peter Doherty in the lead?

Not really. My producer was very courageous to follow the adventure. We had to be very tenacious. It took time, which enabled Peter and me to work on the text, the adaptation, allowing him to become permeated with the part and us our desire to make this film to the test. The fact that Peter gets involved each step of the way, by giving interviews, by doing tests to show he could act, managed to convince everyone. When I had Benjamin Biolay act for the first time, people were just as reluctant. When we got the green light we were ready, and happy.

Shooting should always be a time of pleasure and that was the case: we were like children, enraptured by this recreated world. As a result we didn't feel restricted, but motivated. With Esther, my wardrobe mistress, we worked extremely hard, without having the costumes made for us: we went to get some pieces in Rome, London, in Germany, a great opportunity to have fun with Peter, like a bunch of naughty kids (laughs).

Did you work the same way with Charlotte Gainsbourg?

I wanted to work with Charlotte from the start. She was very hesitant, but I never gave up and she ended up accepting. I played all the parts with her, as I had done with Peter. But the whole approach was different: whereas with Peter it was like children playing, Charlotte had a much more

thoughtful approach, a lot more doubt. I had to reassure her about the text and the intentions...

In the scenes of happiness between Octave and Brigitte, there is an authenticity, the gestures are natural. Which part do choreography and improvisation play in it?

It's a combination of both. There is a strict frame inside which I give the actors freedom. On set, Charlotte and Peter placed themselves in their own space, without camaraderie. They were not accomplices, as can sometimes be the case, they concentrated on their own parts. I discovered that Charlotte always has perfect accuracy and consistency. She is sweet, reserved, but when she has to be violent, she can do it immediately.

There's something a little off-kilter about Charlotte, which probably explains why other directors have seen her as the romantic heroine. The tone of her voice, the way she speaks, imbues the character with her true nature. She has a mechanical precision but doesn't have the same rhythm Peter has. I played on this during the shoot. Charlotte is calm and thoughtful, whereas Peter is more spontaneous, whimsical. Instead of trying to bring them close together, I let them confront each other.

Why did you chose modesty and restrain as a guiding line, including in libertine scenes, rather than exacerbation of feelings?

The central theme is the disease of the century - that is to say melancholia - and Octave's romantic soul, his mood. He is too tormented to be able to let himself go: in the scenes of debauchery, he is there without really being there, as if absent from himself. I didn't want to counteract this with frenzied direction. The film is a melancholic poem, it is not about a Rastignac-like character. Octave is split; he believes in purity, he is an idealist, and doesn't become cynical.

As far as direction goes, there are some striking moments, like the scene of the ball, where we can get the measure of Brigitte's pain, without one word being said...

Most of my directing choices become clear when I start shooting. During the ball scene, I got rid of all dialogue because I let myself be carried by the atmosphere. The images were stronger than the dialogues I had written, which turned out to be too explanatory. I love subtext. I am constantly guided by the desire to see visual images and the unspoken compensating for dialogues, even if I am partial to the beauty of words.

In the party scene, when the singer starts singing, that wasn't planned either. I love being in permanent interaction, particularly during "scenes of life": for example, for the oriental ball, I walked around the set in full period costume! I need the preparation of the film to be very strict so I can escape from it: the unexpected on set doesn't scare me. This freedom I allow myself on set works, as I'm surrounded by an "off road" crew that knows me well.

How did you work on the numerous scenes where Octave is alone before nature?

I thought of the quest for inner peace. Octave doesn't know how to find it, so he confronts himself with nature. It is a very romantic theme: beauty and truth are in nature. It is also something city people can feel when faced with nature - this is where true life is. I didn't want to film these moments with romantic excess, with raging forces of nature... I preferred contemplation and calm. You catch yourself thinking God is not dead, even if he's not quite here. (laughs) There is a metaphysical search characteristic to Romanticism: they turn to heaven, even if they feel, in a confused way, that it doesn't answer the way it used to. This fits with Octave's quest for truth and meaning.

Does the rhythm of the film, in synch with Octave's roller coaster changes of mood, follow de Musset's writing?

There is a different rhythm than in my previous films, due to the era and the social background: we're not dealing with the working class, where violence is direct and people have gut reactions. Here, there is a veneer,

there are codes, hence a more sophisticated rhythm. At the same time, the film adopts Octave's development, his interior turmoil, his comings and goings, his doubts, his fears: is he going to let go, is he going to trust Brigitte? The structure of de Musset's novel is strange, contrary to his plays, which are perfectly structured. Before spending time with Peter, I spent time with de Musset. He wrote the novel shortly after his break-up with George Sand, so he was insincere! If I kept many dialogues from the novel, I chose a different light: de Musset is perverse, because he blames his attitude while accusing the other. He insists on the fact that he was betrayed and can't be held responsible for his acts. Today de Musset would be told to go see a shrink. (laughs).

When you dissect George Sand's letters with the benefit of hindsight you get a better idea of their relationship. De Musset's strength is what makes him a genius; it's through talking about himself that he reaches the Universal. He finds within himself a subject worthy of his poetry. All his life he oscillated between purity and impurity, without ever finding the answer.

The novel and the film possess strong contemporary echoes: disenchantment with society and politics; contamination of trust in the other by this disillusionment...

We could even talk about faith. This is a film that talks about belief, regardless of the object. The problem of our times is that we no longer believe in anything, not God, ideologies, capitalism, Europe...What meaning can we give to life? There are strong links between the sources of emerging Romanticism and our times. The last possible faith, the last worthy refuge, is love. At the same time, we live in a world that consumes love: lots of people don't bother about building a relationship any more, if things don't work out, people split up easily. When you find someone whom you can fully trust, it feels like a miracle. You even wonder even if you haven't gone completely insane (laughs). There also is an infantilization of our whole society, of which you find an echo at the end of the film, when Octave says: "This is a child who thought himself a man." It seems obvious, but adulthood is to believe and to be responsible.

Do you share this disenchantment, as an auteur and filmmaker?

Yes, but you want to believe, or else you couldn't make films. Like Peter, I'm not someone who trusts easily, it has to be built. Together, we thought we had accomplished a film about faith: we believed in it and it worked. It was not easy for Peter to be on set every morning. I did set some rules, you can't work with film the way you do with rock n' roll. To exchange and collaborate for a period of time, to invent a world of truth, is an antidote to disenchantment. It is for me... And I believe it is for him too.

Was it ever envisaged that Peter would write the music for the film?

I didn't want that, because I preferred him to focus exclusively on his work as an actor. But I did suggest that he would write a song for the end of the film. He put the pressure on himself; he wanted to write the most beautiful song in the world! (laughs). In the end, one of the lyrics he wrote says that love saves from celebrity. Peter was able to put into words what de Musset sensed without expressing: celebrity is a love sickness.

The lyrical and contemporary score was composed by "NousDeux the Band", who worked on STELLA, amongst many other projects.

What have you gained from this long adventure, on a human and personal level?

When you throw yourself into an adaptation, you don't have the anguish of writer's block but that of legitimacy. When the language is so beautiful, you want the images to match. Today I feel that I have achieved the film I wanted without having betrayed de Musset, Peter Doherty, or myself.

SYLVIE VERHEYDE

Filmography

STELLA

Feature film - 1h43 - Colour - 2008

with Léora Barbara, Karole Rocher, Benjamin Biolay, Guillaume Depardieu

- Césars 2009: Benjamin Biolay nominated for Best Supporting Actor
- Venice 2008, VENICE DAYS: Lina Mangiacarpe Award, Smithers Award
- Ghent Film Festival - Award for Best Screenplay
Award for Best Supporting Actress for Karole Rocher
- Gijon Film Festival - Award for Best Screenplay

SANG FROID

TV - 1h30 - Colour - 2007

with Benjamin Biolay, Laura Smet, Stomy Bugsy

- La Rochelle Film Festival - Award for Best Direction

UN AMOUR DE FEMME (A Woman's Love)

TV - 1h30 - Colour - 2001

with Hélène Fillières, Raffaella Anderson, Antony Delon

- Frameline San Francisco Festival - Official Selection
- Inside Out Toronto Festival - Official Selection
- Outfest Los Angeles Festival - Official Selection
- Out In South Africa Festival - Official Selection

PRINCESSES

Co-written with Alexis Galmot

Feature film - 1h38 - Scope - Colour - 1999

with Emma de Caunes, Jean-Hugues Anglade, Karole Rocher

- Namur Film Festival - In Competition
- Tokyo Film Festival - Official Selection

UN FRÈRE

Fiction - 1h35 - Colour - 1997

with Jeannick Gravelines, Emma De Caunes, Nils Tavernier

- «Cyril Collard» Award 1998 ARTE
- Belfort Film Festival 1998 - Jury Prize and Gérard Frot-Coutaz Award
- Césars 1998 : Most Promising Young Actress - Emma De Caunes
- Paris Film Festival 1997 - Best Leading Actress Award
- Sundance Film Festival - Official Selection
- Montréal Film Festival - Official Selection
- Toronto International Film Festival - Official Selection
- Thessaloniki Film festival - In Competition
- Melbourne Film Festival - Official Selection.

PETER DOHERTY

(Octave)

Peter Doherty was born in Hexham, Northumberland, in 1979.

The youngest of three children, he left his hometown at a very early age, and found himself living in Germany, Dorset, Coventry, Liverpool, Birmingham and Cyprus due to his father's career in the military. A brilliant student, particularly in literature, Peter Doherty worshipped poetry: from an early age he wrote poems and won a poetry competition organised by the British Council at the age of 15.

In the late 90s Peter Doherty formed a punk rock band with Carl Barat – The Libertines. In January 2003, "Time for Heroes", from their first album "Up the Bracket" reached number 20 in the UK charts. A month later, The Libertines were nominated Best New Group at the prestigious NME awards. Their second album, "The Libertines" was released in June 2004.

After the breakup of The Libertines, Peter formed Babyshambles and released two albums, "Down in Albion", in 2005 and "Shotter's Nation" in 2007. Following these two ventures, Peter Doherty released a solo album, "Grace/Wasteland". Met with great critical acclaim, it is widely considered to be the most accomplished of his work since his second album with The Libertines.

Despite a somewhat chaotic lifestyle the singer, who has contributed to the comeback of rock n' roll in the new millennium, is considered one of the most gifted musicians of his generation and is often presented as the last true "rock star". Peter is also involved in the world of fashion and became for a season the face of Roberto Cavalli. He was also the subject of a book by Hedi Slimane: "London Birth of a Cult".

CHARLOTTE GAINSBOURG

(Brigitte)

Best Actress Award at Cannes for ANTICHRIST by Lars Von Trier (2009). Charlotte Gainsbourg played her first part at the age of 13 in PAROLES ET MUSIQUE by Élie Chouraqui. Claude Miller gave her her first great rôles, beginning with L'EFFRONTÉE, for which she won the César for Most Promising Actress in 1986, and following with THE LITTLE THIEF in 1988. Since, Charlotte Gainsbourg has pursued a national and international career, encompassing comedies and tragedies, period as well as contemporary films, with some of the world's most talented directors.

Notable credits include ANNA OZ by Eric Rochant, LOVER by Jacques Doillon, MERCI LA VIE by Bertrand Blier, 21 GRAMS by Alejandro Gonzales Inarritu, I'M NOT THERE by Todd Haines, THE SCIENCE OF SLEEP by Michel Gondry, LA BÛCHE by Danielle Thompson (for which she won the César for Best Supporting Actress in 2000), MA FEMME EST UNE ACTRICE by Yvan Attal, I DO by Eric Lartigau, PERSECUTION by Patrice Chéreau, and of course Lars Von Trier's MELANCHOLIA.

In addition to her film work, Charlotte Gainsbourg is a singer. Her third and most recent album, IRM, was released in 2009, and took her to stages throughout the world.

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY OF CHARLOTTE GAINSBOURG

- 2010 MELANCHOLIA by Lars VON TRIER
- 2009 THE TREE by Julie BERTUCCELLI
- 2008 PERSÉCUTION by Patrice CHÉREAU
ANTICHRIST by Lars VON TRIER
Award for Best Actress at Cannes Film Festival 2009
- 2007 GOLDEN DOOR by Emmanuele CRIALESE
Silver Lion - Venice Film Festival 2006
I'M NOT THERE by Todd HAYNES
- 2006 THE SCIENCE OF SLEEP by Michel GONDRY
I DO by Eric LARTIGAU
- 2004 AND THEY LIVED HAPPILY EVER AFTER by Yvan ATTAL
21 GRAMS by Alejandro GONZALEZ INARRITU
L'UN RESTE, L'AUTRE PART by Claude BERRI
LEMMING by Dominik MOLL
- 2000 FELIX ET LOLA by Patrice LECONTE
MA FEMME EST UNE ACTRICE by Yvan ATTAL
- 1999 THE INTRUDER by David BAILEY
LA BÛCHE by Danièle THOMPSON
César for Best Supporting Actress.

CAST:

Charlotte Gainsbourg: Brigitte
Peter Doherty: Octave
August Diehl : Desgenais
Lily Cole: Elise
Volker Bruch: Smith
Guillaume Gallienne: Mercanson
Karole Rocher: Marco
Rhian Rees: Elise's friend

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France: Herodiade, Touscoprod

CREW:

Written and Directed by Sylvie Verheyde
adapted from Alfred de Musset's novel
"The Confession of a Child of the Century"
DP: Nicolas Gaurin
Original Music: NousDeux the Band
Costume Designer: Esther Waltz
Production Designer: Thomas Grézaud
Editor: Christel Dewynter
Sound: Dimitri Haulet, Raphaël Sohier, Olivier Dô Hùu

