

GÉRARD
DEPARDIEU

JACQUELINE
BISSET

DO YOU KNOW WHO I AM?

WELCOME
TO NEW YORK

A FILM BY
ABEL FERRARA

wild bunch

WILD BUNCH AND FORBES
PRESENT
IN ASSOCIATION WITH
BELLADONNA PRODUCTIONS

WELCOME TO NEW YORK

DIRECTED BY
ABEL FERRARA

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This film was inspired by a court case, the public stages of which have been filmed, broadcast, reported and commented on throughout the media worldwide.

Nonetheless, the characters portrayed in the film and all sequences depicting their private lives remain entirely fictional, no one being able to claim the ability to recreate the complex truth of the lives of the protagonists and witnesses in this case, about which everyone has his or her own point-of-view.



SYNOPSIS

Mr. Devereaux is a powerful man. A man who handles billions of dollars every day. A man who controls the economic fate of nations. A man driven by a frenzied and unbridled sexual hunger. A man who dreams of saving the world and who cannot save himself. A terrified man. A lost man.

Watch him fall.

*"Abel and I have decided that this film concerns all French people.
Not only those who live near a cinema.
Not only those who are willing to wait several months, when in some other countries
anyone can have access to it.
We want this film available for all and at home,
on your television set or computer.
And above all... at the same time as its screening in Cannes!
It's never been done before and that's why we like it!"*

- Gérard Depardieu



A CONVERSATION WITH ABEL FERRARA

You explore the dark side of the human soul. Is that why you were interested in making this film?

I did my films about redemption. In *BAD LIEUTENANT*, there's no arc in that character. He died as high and crazy as he started. For *Devereaux*, it's the same story. The last speech he gives, he's blaspheming God: "The good thing in not believing in God is that you don't have to kiss his ass for eternity in Heaven". It's a pretty good line by Chris Zois. It's God's fault, his wife's fault, his mother's fault... But he's standing there, ranting to sky... This guy is not gonna look at what's in the mirror. He's not gonna face where all this could be coming from.

Was it important to shoot in the real locations rather than on the set?

Listen, if you had to do it on the set, you could do it on the set. We did *GO GO TALES* because we knew go go clubs in and out, so I knew that character, I knew the feel of downtown New York. We were able to do that in Cinecittà. But I needed to go to the real places, to be where he was, that's that little extra something, like going the extra mile and doing all the research. You're getting the vibe, the feel, you're there. This stuff is there, ghosts exist in that kind of stuff.

You've called Gérard Depardieu the most powerful man in France. Why?

His talent, man, his spirit. His sense of freedom. He became much more than an actor. Depardieu is no longer just French, he's loved everywhere, he's got something that makes you feel an empathy, you feel like he's representing you. It's not just his "outsider" side. I don't know if it's "charisma" or something else.

You met him for the first time for *WELCOME TO NEW YORK*? How did it happen?

He knew some of my films, which he liked. And I obviously respected him a lot. I don't know if we sent him a script to begin with. We just talked... the script was secondary. He understood what we were trying to do perfectly, the main thing was our collaboration.

Did he bring ideas for the character of Devereaux?

For Depardieu the idea of the real character wasn't so important. Researching the news story and the character, that's my job as an artist, as a director, as a filmmaker. For Gérard, he's in another dimension, a whole other ballpark. He understands him better than anyone. He lived the guy. He fucked the chicks, he knows that fucking world... He could be that guy; he was that guy for 12 minutes. The film is about the actor, it's not about that character. There's a fine line between the actor and the character. We're making a movie, not a documentary on a news story. I'm not doing a police investigation. My research was just the basis for a movie, which is a fiction. You have the actor, you have the writer, you have the director, you know, and each one is part of the journey.

The sex scenes are particularly unsettling. What did you ask him to do?

We didn't rehearse those scenes. The girls dug him. They dug him just because he was there. What you see in the film - the relationship between him and those girls - that's what really happened. This guy has lived a life. This guy's been to jail. He's had people die on him. He's lived a fucking life, dude. You sense that power. Everything in those scenes, the sexuality, the power, his aphrodisiac force... is him. I don't think those girls were acting; they were getting into it. I know, because I talked to them. They all knew who he was and they were all dying to do the scenes with him. What's the difference between a prostitute and an actor?

You get very close to your actors, Willem Defoe for instance. Is the relationship with Depardieu also like that?

With Depardieu, it's instant. A guy like him, he's either down with you or not. He really revitalized my love for the work. He just loves being there. He's the first on the set, he's the last to leave. He's not a guy who hides in his dressing room. He's there because he digs it: the process of making films, it hasn't worn him down. He re-energized my love for the gig, to see it as a celebration, as an act of love. Once you start looking at this shit like work, you better quit. He made me remember what it is... going to the set, being with the guys, making a movie. And not worrying about what the fuck it's going to be and the money and the bullshit. It's just the magic of the process, of 'we're doing it, man'. And with guys like Depardieu, there's no separation, it doesn't stop. When he's on, he's on.

In WELCOME TO NEW YORK, Depardieu recalls Harvey Keitel in BAD LIEUTENANT.

They're a lot alike, I think. They're forces of nature. When you're with them you know the bar's going to be set really high, that you're going to have to be at the top of your game. You can't limit guys like that to a country. Keitel's not American, Depardieu's not French. They don't even belong to cinema, they belong to the world.

Is Depardieu the new Brando?

They come from the same place. There's a spirit of creativity... of culture, of power, of beauty. They've got it all going on. They're graceful, they're smart. They know the deal. They understand the process.

In the film, he appears alongside non-professionals in certain situations (the orgy with the girls, in custody with criminals). Why?

In the jail scene, for example, where Depardieu had to be face-to-face with real criminals, he was as natural as the non-professionals because he's a non-actor himself. He's just right there. I even wanted to have him arrested for real in the middle of the night and follow him around with cameras. That's how I would have made the movie - and he would have gone along with it. If we'd done the scene where the cops arrest him and handcuff him without warning him, you'd get the same deal. There'd be no difference. When you shoot with the greats like him, it's easy to hit the jackpot. There's not a lot to do.

Jacqueline Bisset plays the wife in this very tense, enclosed marriage. How did you prepare her?

I don't know what their relationship was in the past but they definitely know each other. I didn't ask for the details, but it's obvious. They speak French together, they don't need any preparation, they just have to fucking attack it. I had that camera running all the time. We shot everything. The film could have been four hours long.

I heard you did an enormous amount of research.

And none of it's in the movie! (laughs) It took me two years to gather all the information and to understand what happened. There's a certain aspect that is very French which I'll never know and he (Depardieu) knows, and that's why it works in the film. And that's why you can do things like this. I'm doing my Pasolini movie now and it's the same fucking deal. If I left my research out of WELCOME TO NEW YORK it's because you can't film research. I'm doing the same thing with Pasolini. Am I going to interview everybody? Yeah. Am I going to go to all the places? Yeah. Am I going to see everything that happened? Yeah, because it's part of my education. But it's not necessarily part of the movie. I'm not making a movie about the head of the IMF, and in the end I'm not making a film about Pasolini either.

So you're not doing an Oliver Stone with JFK? Going beyond fiction to get at the truth...

In the end, it's the same thing. We're doing what he did with JFK, which is trying to get to the truth. I'm a big fan of JFK. It's a great film.

There is a clip of Truffaut's BED AND BOARD in the film. Why?

It's kind of obvious. It's like we put different things in there, it just seemed to fit right in. I think it was kind of working that theme of cheating on your old lady, because that's what the fucking movie really comes down to. What do you say to your old lady when she catches you in a situation like that? Are you going to walk away from it? What are you going to do? I remembered that scene, and we put it in. It was a pretty strong thing.

Did you learn anything more about the character who inspired the film from Depardieu's performance?

That's the purpose of doing these movies. You're going on a journey. I need to go from point A to point B in my life. Power. Money. Obsession. Whether it's drugs or sex. Or whatever. Henry Kissinger said that power is the ultimate aphrodisiac.

And how was it, shooting with Depardieu?

He's a force of nature, a beautiful guy. He's a big dude. We basically put the camera up and shot the fucking shit. We're not trying to stylize the fucking events. He's one of those guys capable of playing the craziest things. With Gérard, it's all the time, talking about the role he's going to play, sitting in a room with the electricians and the crew, laughing and eating... doing it all. The guy's a revelation, he's the truth. It's not something you have to discover, it's no secret. The guy is alive and he's living and he's going through the pain and suffering, the exhilaration of fucking being alive.

Could you have confronted a character like this, a character you don't like, with an actor other than Depardieu?

Yeah, but that would be something completely different. If Chris Walken had played the role, it'd be a whole different deal. This movie can only exist because it's Gérard.



A CONVERSATION WITH GÉRARD DEPARDIEU

Abel Ferrara said this film couldn't have been made without you. Why?

I think it could have been made without me perfectly well! Perhaps because I don't give a shit about cinema anymore? Well, no, that's not it. It was easier because with me, it goes quickly, I don't ask questions. I go for it. I'm almost a porn star! (laughs). These days I want to shoot quickly, particularly for subjects like this one: a news story that everyone has read about and already has an opinion about. Never mind the people being gossiped about, those who are involved in the affair. For me the news item is in itself interesting enough to show the abuse of power, money, sex. It's all connected.

In his films Abel Ferrara explores the dark side of the human soul. Is that what interests you in his cinema in general and in WELCOME TO NEW YORK in particular?

No, what I like about Abel is that he goes to the end of things. He knows exactly what he wants. He is lucky to have a really good team with whom he has had numerous experiences in numerous states... He came out of all that and what has remained is an extremely creative material, always interesting. I'm like him.

Aren't you and Ferrara the *enfants terribles* of cinema?

There are no *enfants terribles*! Cinema isn't *enfant terrible* enough! People are too serious in the world of cinema. And serious for what? To make shit? Apart from Mister Pialat who had the sensitivity of a painter, Mister Renoir, and also Kurosawa, who had real panache, or Rappeneau, who has a sense of rhythm, a musicianship. Ferrara is compelled to dig deep inside the throes of his torment, a bit like Van Gogh.

How did the director of BAD LIEUTENANT direct you?

There was no direction. We sniffed each other out! Directing actors is good for actors. For people like me, there's no such thing. Even though I am very fond of actors. Even when I started, I was a spectator of my partners; I was fascinated to see the likes of Ventura, Delon, Belmondo in the flesh. I learned my métier with Gabin, Michel Simon, going to brothels, drinking with them, eating with them.

So you don't think of yourself an actor?

No, I think of myself as a living being.

How do you see your character, Devereaux?

The character is fascinating... a bit Shakespearean. You find the same ingredients in this affair as you do in all of Shakespeare's work: power, money, sex. It's the same in tragedies, or even in Molière's plays, like *Tartuffe*. This is the theatricality of life and of power.

Has your opinion evolved when playing this character inspired by a man whom you said you didn't like?

Yes, in the end. The news story made him disagreeable to me, but the film made him more likeable. It gave me the dimension of what you could call a sort of instability: an instability inherent to anyone who has urges. In the film, these urges don't really cause Devereaux any great suffering: it's around him that they create collateral damage, which is very interesting. I was lucky after all not to have had much schooling, because you are taught things that will train you. This training makes you judge, right or wrong. Whereas if you live things through playing them, it's different. You think to yourself: "And what if this was me?" I think I am like this too. When we make love we all do the same thing, we make the same sound when we come. And luckily so.

As soon as he arrives in New York, in his suite at the Hotel Carlton, Devereaux gets involved in a long night of debauchery with several prostitutes. True to his legend, Ferrara doesn't shy away from the sex scenes... Were these scandalous scenes exciting or difficult to shoot?

Scenes like this are never exciting to play. You really have to be drunk or on Cialis. The flesh is sorrowful. You recoil from watching orgy scenes in disgust. But this thing that offends us is part of an artistic work. You can dislike these sequences but you need them to get to where you want to go. I understand why Abel wanted to have them, even if I don't like them much. There is a sadness, an ennui emanating from these people, in this world. It's a SALÔ, OR THE 120 DAYS OF SODOM of sorts.

In the film, this privileged man, powerful among the powerful, is suddenly arrested, handcuffed, jailed. You had said this individual left you completely cold, but didn't you feel humiliated having to undress in front of prison guards?

Not at all. Once you're caught in the prison system, that's how it is. You can't get away from it. It's the law. The slammer is the slammer. What was most embarrassing was that the guards were as fat as me. It's true that flesh is monstrous. That's how it is. Why hide who you are behind an image? I was never a huge fan of my appearance, everyone knows that, and it's not a problem. But when I looked at these two cops I wanted to say: "You get undressed, then we'll see who puts his clothes back on quickest."

The film recaptures the main events of this widely covered court case, and aims to get inside the private world of Devereaux and his wife Simone. How do you analyse the rapport between the two.

There's no need to analyse it. It is specified at the beginning of the film: no one knows what really happened. We're in the realm of fiction.

The opening scene of WELCOME TO NEW YORK recreates, pretty much verbatim, an interview you gave. Why do you think Abel used your words?

I don't know. I don't really like this opening scene. But it's his style so I went along with it. I think cinema should be simpler. This scene is slightly similar to what Godard used to do. I'm not a great fan of Godard who, by the way, made some beautiful films, but that was then. That said, I prefer Abel's film to anything I've seen lately on screens around the world.

This is the first time you have worked with Jacqueline Bisset. You were both directed by François Truffaut: Bisset in DAY FOR NIGHT and you in THE WOMAN NEXT DOOR and THE LAST METRO. Does this create a bond?

And we have both made love with François Truffaut! (laughs) I've always loved Jacquie. Women in this profession are very courageous, much braver than the men.

From his "little prison" in New York, rented for \$60,000 a month by his wife, Devereaux, who has been released on a million dollars bail, watches a scene scene from BED AND BOARD. The scene where the unfaithful Jean-Pierre Léaud is face to face with Claude Jade, the wife he is cheating on, wearing a Japanese kimono. Were you moved by this homage to Truffaut by Ferrara?

I am always moved by filmmakers with a film culture. It's the same when Scorsese talks about Renoir, or Godard - it's always interesting.

At his wife's command, Devereaux agrees to see a shrink. It's a very eloquent scene where he confesses to not feeling guilty, and to having realised he doesn't want to change or be saved. What do you think of that?

When you see a shrink like the one in the film, who asks such questions, you can't expect any other replies... replies, by the way, that are mine.

Would you agree with Simone, that "the other side of love is indifference, not hate"?

There is always hate at the beginning, it becomes indifference, then experience and finally life. Having rows and hating each other is a waste of time.

At the end of WELCOME TO NEW YORK Devereaux admits to his wife that he is a monster. What about you, aren't you a legendary monster?

But of course we are monsters! Duras was a monster, Simenon was a monster, Picasso was a monster... Everyone with quote "talent" unquote - or freedom, rather - is quite monstrous to uptight people. It's true that when you embrace this freedom you are monstrous, selfish, for others... And for yourself...? As it happens the character in the film, who is intelligent, most certainly is a monster to others. But he is also more tolerant while misusing his power. It's a double-edged sword.

Have you read “Belle et Bête” by Marcela Iacub and “La Ballade de Rikers Island” by Régis Jauffret?

No. I’m not interested. Again, I prefer to not have gone to school and not to have read what is drilled into children. I prefer to live Marivaux myself rather than having it taught by some teacher who has never lived any of it at all. I have simply lived what I have read and felt for myself. No one ever explained to me what I was meant to feel.

How do you think the film will be received?

I don’t know. But I had a great time making it. Think, only 18 days of shooting! Fantastic!



Interview by Emmanuèle Frois



A CONVERSATION WITH JACQUELINE BISSET

What interested you in WELCOME TO NEW YORK?

I was fascinated by the female character, just as much as I was by the very universal situation into which she is thrown. Simone has spent her life with an unfaithful husband... Before I agreed to do it, I met with Abel Ferrara. We talked a great deal and got on very well. He has a kind of raw energy that I like. The script was good, there was a whole range of emotions to play and I wanted to work with Gérard Depardieu. I didn't hesitate for a second. Everything happened quite naturally. WELCOME TO NEW YORK gave me the opportunity to explore a particular world, not only as an actress but also as a woman. Probing the human soul is much more fascinating than any other pastime!

In the pantheon of directors you have worked with - Cukor, Huston, Truffaut, Yates, Lumet, Comencini, de Broca, Chabrol... - does Abel Ferrara hold a unique place?

I only knew two of his films: BAD LIEUTENANT and 4:44 LAST DAY ON EARTH. I discovered his particular working methods on set. His work is based on improvisation because he wants to capture realistic scenes, as real as life. He doesn't hide his opinions or feelings. He can be very abrupt, impatient but also very gentle and poetic. Abel is a funny mix. In any case he's not a silent director: he is quite loud, explosive even. When directors have real character and when it helps the film and the story, I follow blindly, uncomplainingly. That was the case with Abel, who knows what he wants and has led a pretty extreme life I believe...

You have worked alongside some of the greatest actors: Steve McQueen, Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, Marcello Mastroianni, Jean-Paul Belmondo, Jean-Louis Trintignant... only Gérard Depardieu was missing. Did you know him before this film?

I met him for the first time in 1989 when I visited a friend on the set of CYRANO DE BERGERAC. He called me as soon as he found out I had agreed to do WELCOME TO NEW YORK. He was so kind. Three minutes into our conversation I said: *"Right, I get the picture, we're married!"* (laughs)

Beyond the news item that inspired the film, what does this court case, with its links to sex and politics, say about our times?

In a way, there's nothing new. This kind of business has been going on forever. But when politics is added to this human story, it becomes scandalous. The French attitude towards sex and politics is different to the American attitude. We don't share the same views. Although, curiously, don't, American puritanism - a nation that is in other respects so violent and out of control - and France - a country free in many respects - don't they share after all a spirit of conservatism, making "these things" unacceptable? The character Gérard plays is out of control when it comes to sex. I think what Abel found interesting in WELCOME TO NEW YORK is the subject of addiction and dependence, much more than the story of these particular people.

On what did you base your work on Simone's character?

Acting is part of a mysterious process. Abel doesn't talk, there are no discussions. He will throw in a: "*Go on, do it, make him real!*" (laughs). Gérard and I were left to our own devices. We had many discussions. You use what you have experienced in your life, your hopes, your feelings. You dig into the darkest corners of your being to find the necessary material. You have to be very open and rely on your partner. Gérard was a great help, much more than I was to him.

What do you think of this rich, ambitious and influential woman, who does her utmost, with the help of millions of dollars, to save appearances and her husband?

She is an amazing woman. I think she truly loved him. For me, that explains everything.

What sort of man do you think Devereaux is?

I don't know anyone who lives his sexuality with such intensity! The character is both fascinating and repugnant, in more ways than one. But he is also a human being, with multiple sides. He can be tender, cheerful... It should be hard to judge him. He is what he is. And Gérard portrays him with such self-acceptance that you watch him with mixed feelings. He is a changing being whose essence Gérard was able to capture with great skill.

How do you analyse the complex relation that bonds these two characters?

She loves him. He is certainly not the ideal man she dreamed about. He has his faults but she admires him. She lives in a romantic illusion. The heart goes where it will! She stumbled on this man who has an addiction. She's been betrayed but it doesn't mean he doesn't love her. Some men are like that...

After denying it, Devereaux eventually confesses to his wife what really went on with the chambermaid in the hotel suite. He proclaims: "You know I am a sex maniac, you know my life." As a woman, what do you make of such a relationship?

I don't know. Again, I have never had dealings with a sex addict! You don't always know why you love. There is something wild emanating from him that is attractive. Bad boys often appeal to women. Even though she is cheated on, she still finds excuses for him...

Is your very nuanced performance as this humiliated, wounded woman who manages to stay strong and dignified the sign of your comeback?

I've no idea! But I had a positive reaction on watching the film. I thought my work with Gérard was quite good. And I felt that these two characters, despite everything, do love each other. And that if they divorce it doesn't mean they have stopped loving each other.

CAST

Gérard Depardieu : Devereaux
Jacqueline Bisset : Simone Devereaux
Marie Mouté : Sophie Devereaux
Pamela Afesi : Chambermaid
Nikki James : Judge
Paul Calderon : Pierre
Paul Hipp : Guy
Shanyn Leigh : French journalist
Amy Ferguson : Renée

CREW

Directed by Abel Ferrara
Screenplay - Chris Zois and Abel Ferrara
Producer - Adam Folk

Executive Producers - Anthony Gudas and Michael Corso
Associate Producer - Shanyn Leigh

D.P. - Ken Kelsch
Sound - Neil Benezra
Production Designer - Graham Wichman
Editor - Anthony Redman
Costume Designer - Ciera Wells
Production Manager - Ged Dickersin
Art Director - Tommaso Ortino

MUSIC

AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL
Written by Katherine Lee Bates and Samuel A. Ward
Arranged and performed by Paul Hipp

EVERY LIE'S A TEAR
Written by Abel Ferrara
Performed by Amy Ferguson

FROM THE CRADLE TO THE GRAVE
Written by Abel Ferrara and Neil Benezra

AFTER ALL IS SAID AND DONE
Written and performed by Paul Hipp

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