

PATRICK GODEAU
presents

LUDIVINE SAGNIER

BENOÎT MAGIMEL

FRANÇOIS BERLÉAND

a film by
CLAUDE CHABROL

A GIRL CUT IN TWO

French release: 8 August 2007

French texts, as well as selected filmographies and photos may be downloaded from the official website:

www.lafillecoupeeendeux.com

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*A young woman who wants to succeed in life,
and whose radiance seduces those around her,
falls in love with a renowned but perverse writer
and marries a young, mentally unstable multimillionaire.*

INTERVIEW WITH CLAUDE CHABROL

■ **The film's starting point is a famous crime of passion: the murder of the architect who designed Madison Square Garden...**

Yes, the story of Stanford White, a celebrated architect in Manhattan at the end of the nineteenth century, and also a notorious womanizer who was murdered at the height of his fame in 1906 by the husband of his current mistress, a former Broadway chorus girl Evelyn Nesbitt.

■ **Have there been previous literary or filmed adaptations of the story?**

E.L. Doctorow refers to it in his novel *Ragtime*, as does Milos Forman in his film of the book. Richard Fleischer's *The Girl In The Red Velvet Swing* from 1955 recounts the facts most faithfully.

■ **This is the first time you've collaborated on a script with Cécile Maistre, your faithful first assistant.**

Right away, I thought she would be perfect to get a grip on this story. She wrote a formidably well-constructed script which I barely had to change. It's very unusual for things to happen like that with a co-writer.

■ **What interested Cécile Maistre and you in this story?**

We wanted to follow the reality of this small event closely, to emphasize, a bit like entomologists, the great revelation it makes about human nature! So it seemed to us essential to transpose the entire affair, without worrying at all about the setting, the period or the psychology of the real life characters. I'd even go so far as to say that this news story is more easily imaginable – and therefore transposable – today than during the era in which it happened.

■ **The film opens with an aria from Turandot and a credit sequence suffused with blood-red light...**

I wanted to set the audience off on the wrong track: right away we are plunged into the very romantic world of Puccini, and then we leave it just as suddenly as the music on the car radio is switched off. Visually, it's expressed by the abrupt transition from the blood-red to reality – a reality stripped of all romanticism.

■ **We're plunged immediately into an opulent-looking world, a world of pretence.**

At a stroke, we move from the excess of feelings evoked by the opera to the flashy world of Saint-Denis' (François Berléand) luxurious home. It's a *trompe-l'œil* world, and one in which the prevailing atmosphere of sexuality reveals a clue to the audience about the events which are going to follow...

■ **This *trompe l'œil* world leads us very naturally to the world of television.**

Absolutely! I showed the backstage world of television world as it is, with the bluescreen on which images are overlaid, and the presenter gesticulating in a void. What interested me, is that this is a world of trickery and illusion that absolutely reflects the world of appearances and pretences in which these characters move.

■ **Each character is perceived by the others as if through a distorting lens...**

Entirely so. Moreover, they see themselves through a distorting lens, as most of the time they are terribly self-indulgent. This is even truer in the case of Benoît Magimel's character, who's crazier than the others: he's genuinely schizophrenic, torn between innocence and guilt. Did he kill his brother in the bath when he was a child? We will never know...

■ **In the film we encounter one of your preferred themes: class warfare.**

We are dealing with two social classes confronting each other stealthily: 'old money', as represented by the characters of Caroline Sihol and Benoît Magimel, and the falsely powerful – TV and publishing folk who possess nothing more than temporal power.

■ **Where does Gabrielle Deneige – played by Ludivine Sagnier – stand in relation to this?**

She is still intact, but she's tempted to split apart. Thus she fully embodies the "girl cut in two" of the title. Gabrielle is a young woman innocent in her very gullibility. I adore the scene where she turns up at Saint-Denis' study with a feather in her bottom: he asks her if she doesn't feel humiliated, and she replies that

she doesn't even feel ridiculous! It's a fantastic proof of self-sacrifice, which is precisely what those around her cannot stand.

■ **Can we describe Berléand's character as an 'opportunist of pleasure'?**

He takes pleasure wherever he can, but he's not a fundamentally unlikeable character all the same. I think he's entirely right to question whether our society is heading towards puritanism or decadence.

■ **You pile up "secret places", like Saint-Denis' pied-à-terre and the very private club to which the writer takes Gabrielle.**

They reflect my desire to explore the theme of perversion without ever showing it. This is an entirely chaste film whose characters are nonetheless haunted by the most perverse ideas. I was helped greatly by the character of Mathilda May who emanates a strange sensuality: seeing her, we ask ourselves straight away into what world we have ventured.

■ **Eduardo Serra is once again your cinematographer...**

We've developed a real complicity over the years, he knows right away what I like and what I don't like. His expertise is such that the hidden meanings of elements in the décor appear without his needing to emphasize them.

■ **The rhythm is very distinctive. Can you speak a little about the editing?**

The film is called *A Girl Cut In Two*, so I wanted the idea of rupture to be present at all times. Very often, scenes end before their natural conclusion, or, on the other hand, go on longer than you would expect. However, there's no wish to fire the imagination.

■ **And the framing?**

When characters are running from themselves, I shoot them in profile, to emphasize that they are revealing only a small facet of the truth. In any case, there were some lines the actors could not deliver straight to camera!

■ **How did you approach the casting?**

François Berléand and I discovered a real complicity when we worked together on *A Comedy of Power*. He's a man I love to have on my set. As I know he's a real ladies man, I wanted to show this aspect of his character.

I've wanted to work with Ludivine Sagnier for several years now, but finally decided to cast her as Gabrielle after seeing her performance as Tinkerbell in *Peter Pan*!

I had already directed Benoît Magimel in *La Fleur du mal* and *La Demoiselle d'honneur*, where he played two very different characters. For *A Girl Cut In Two*, he took great risks in venturing deep into (his character's) schizophrenia. Besides, what's tremendous about Benoît is his capacity to play characters from every social class.

■ **What were the constraints imposed on Matthieu Chabrol when he was composing the score ?**

Above all I didn't want any lyrical or romantic outbursts during the film, (I wanted) the exact opposite of the aria at the beginning. Thus he had to start with serial, atonal rhythms that establish a rather cold atmosphere. In fact I hoped to appeal to the viewer's head rather than his heart. It's music that stops itself from letting go and which plays on a certain brutality. I am particularly happy with the four final blows, which seem to finish, then start again, and so on.

■ **Without in any way giving away the ending, one can say that magic intervenes in the film on a very unexpected fashion...**

The idea is that magic is another trick, coming on top of the tricks of the television and publishing worlds... In a world of illusions and effects, salvation can only appear as another trick. The title, which itself makes reference to magic, could be allegorical, although in fact it isn't at all...

CAST

Ludivine Sagnier	Gabrielle Deneige
Benoît Magimel	Paul Gaudens
François Berléand	Charles Saint-Denis
Mathilda May	Capucine Jamet
Caroline Silhol	Geneviève Gaudens
Marie Bunel	Marie Deneige
Valéria Cavalli	Dona Saint-Denis
Etienne Chicot	Denis Deneige
Thomas Chabrol	Maître Lorbach
Jean-Marie Winling	Gérard Briançon
Didier Benureau	Philippe Le Riou

Special guest appearance Edouard Baer

CREW

a Claude Chabrol film

Screenplay Cécile Maistre and Claude Chabrol

DP	Edouardo Serra
Camera	Michel Thiriet
Sound	Eric Devulder
Assistant director and casting	Cécile Maistre
Art director	Françoise Benoit-Fresco
Wardrobe	Mic Cheminal
Continuity	Aurore Chabrol
Editor	Monique Fardoulis
Mix	Thierry Lebon
Production manager	Michel Jullien
Line producer	Françoise Galfré
Original music	Matthieu Chabrol
Orchestra conducted by	Laurent Petitgirard

Producer Patrick Godeau

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