



BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Lourdes

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

‘You have to remember it’s a fairytale,’ says Austrian filmmaker Jessica Hausner about her new feature *Lourdes*. It’s a disarming remark. *Lourdes* is about Christine (Sylvie Testud), a woman confined to a wheelchair who joins a pilgrimage to Lourdes in the hope of a miracle cure. The film is surprisingly open-ended. It contains elements of Buñuelian satire about Catholic believers who fervently hope that spending a few days in the Pyrenees tourist town will somehow cure them of their ailments. At the same time, Hausner doesn’t entirely debunk the idea of the ‘miracle’. Not only Christians but all human beings cling to hoping, as Hausner puts it, ‘for luck and happiness in their life – the wish that everything might turn out well in the end’. *Lourdes* is as much about this instinct as it is about the blind suddenly being able to see. When I interviewed her during the Venice Film Festival, where *Lourdes* won the Fipresci Prize, Hausner acknowledged she was uncomfortable about her French distributors’ plans to open the film in Lourdes itself. ‘I am against it,’ she declares. ‘The film is not a film that is criticising Lourdes at all. On the other hand, I would not want to say it is a film for Lourdes. I personally would prefer to keep a little distance from the place of Lourdes and the officials of Lourdes.’

The authorities in Lourdes were initially very sceptical about the film, having had bad experiences with filmmakers such as Jean Pierre Mocky, whose *Le Miraculé* (1987) lampooned the town and its pilgrims. ‘I was able to explain to them that, for me, it was not so important to make fun of Lourdes,’ she says. ‘I was trying to do something else.’ When she showed them her previous features *Lovely Rita* (2001) and *Hotel* (2004), they accepted she was a serious director.

Born in Austria in 1972, Hausner was brought up Catholic but describes herself as agnostic. ‘When I was young, I was a believer,’ she says. ‘But then when I grew up, I had the impression that it’s not very probable God exists. Everything I experienced told me that things happen by chance, and that the human being is struggling in a world of forces that nobody knows or could control.’

Hausner’s shooting style in *Lourdes* is subtle and understated. The central character Christine is often seen at the corner of the frame, or as part of a much bigger group in long shot, but we are always able to identify her by her red hat. ‘In all my films I have some kind of sign for each character,’ Hausner explains. ‘In my first film, the main character had red shoes. In the second

film, she had a red uniform and a red suitcase. In this one, she has a red hat! It's like a chain of symbols.'

The director acknowledges that her French star was frustrated by a role that confined her to a wheelchair. 'Sylvie Testud was in every scene and had to play this paralysed woman, which was exhausting. As an actress, she couldn't use her whole repertoire – only her face.' At one stage, Testud confided to her director that she felt she was being treated like a disabled person. 'She understood how you feel when you're disabled,' Hausner recalls. 'You can't walk and so people think you can't think.'

Hausner has been seen as part of a mini new wave in Austrian cinema: alongside established directors like Michael Haneke and Ulrich Seidl, younger filmmakers have emerged who seem to share the same formal daring, including documentary-makers Hubert Sauper and Michael Glawogger, and directors Barbara Albert and Antonin Svoboda (both partners of Hausner's in their production company, coop99).

'I've been told by some people that there is an Austrian identity that maybe has to do with a certain harshness or sharpness or rigidity. I can't really say,' muses Hausner. 'I know that I am very much related to a certain Austrian black humour. The traditional Austrian songs are always about love and death, but death is nothing sad or dramatic – you go to your funeral with a smile on your face!'

Jessica Hausner interviewed by Geoffrey Macnab, *Sight & Sound*, November 2009

Jessica Hausner's third feature – following troubled-teen drama *Lovely Rita* (2001) and psychological horror *Hotel* (2004) – is a low-key but often beguiling oddity that attempts an ambitious fusion of the sublime and the corporeal in the unlikely form of a wry comedy of manners. If it's ultimately rather too schematic to make it wholly satisfying (many characters are little more than single-function pieces on the narrative chessboard), connoisseurs of the deadpan pleasures proffered by Juan Pablo Rebella and Pablo Stoll's *Whisky* (2004) or the films of Aki Kaurismäki will find much to enjoy.

The film revolves around a few days in the lives of pilgrims travelling to the French town that has become synonymous with the notion of miraculous cures. Hausner has a keen eye for the meticulously marshalled ghastliness of cultural/spiritual package tours, and while she makes no overt criticism of the way much of Lourdes has become a giant marketplace for religious tat, she constantly frames backdrops of souvenir shops offering endless rows of Virgin Mary effigies – a conveniently Oscar-sized version comprises the award for 'best pilgrim'.

Christine (Sylvie Testud) is one of the potential contenders. Confined to a wheelchair and almost completely paralysed by multiple sclerosis, she's painstakingly helped in and out of bed by two Order of Malta volunteers: the young and easily distracted Maria (Léa Seydoux) and the older, purse-lipped

Cécile (Hal Hartley's sometime muse Elina Löwensohn). A stickler both for protocol and religious respect (eagerness is all very well but God dislikes queue-jumpers), Cécile repeatedly claims she doesn't believe in miracles, despite a midpoint revelation making it clear that she's in greater need of one than many.

The group's itinerary largely consists of trips to the baths and various religious services (both equally ritualised), while fellow pilgrims scrutinise each other for evidence of miracles in between spreading often misinformed gossip – two garrulous Fraus, Huber and Spor, form a kind of elderly Greek chorus. After a couple of false alarms, Christine becomes the focal point of the group's admiration and envy as she walks unaided for the first time in years.

Is this an authentic Lourdes miracle? Hausner isn't saying, but she leaves plenty of room for speculation, official investigation and widespread bafflement as to why it happened to someone so ostensibly ordinary. Much of her fellow pilgrims' resentment concerns Christine's apparent lack of piety, certainly in comparison with Cécile or the far more devout Frau Hartl.

As Christine herself confesses to Kuno (Bruno Todeschini), the male volunteer on whom Maria also has designs, trips such as this are the only way someone like her can get to see the world. Accordingly, her reaction to a potentially life-changing event is distinctly low-key: no great plans, merely tentative steps towards the possibility of leading a 'normal' life. An alarming eleventh hour wobble on the dancefloor suggests she's right to be cautious.

Hausner's cool visual approach involves tight compositions, little camera movement bar the occasional slow pan and zoom, and a colour scheme dominated by blue with the occasional vivifying splash of red. Until the karaoke-fuelled final party, the music mostly consists of very familiar spiritual standards – Schubert's 'Ave Maria', Bach's 'Ich ruf' zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ' – which may even be diegetic: it's easy to imagine Lourdes authorities using it as on-site muzak. They have apparently responded warmly to the film, despite or possibly because of its ambivalence: spiritually flawed and often cynical though Hausner's pilgrims undoubtedly are, they're all too recognisably human.

Michael Brooke, *Sight & Sound*, April 2010

LOURDES

Director: Jessica Hausner

©: coop99 filmproduktion, Essential Filmproduktion, Parisienne de Production, Thermidor Filmproduktion

Production Companies/Presented by: coop99 filmproduktion, Essential Filmproduktion, Parisienne de Production, Thermidor Filmproduktion

Produced with the support of: Österreichisches Filminstitut, Filmfonds Wien, Eurimages Conseil de l'Europe, MBB - Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg, Filmstiftung NRW, La Région Midi Pyrénées, CNC - Centre national de la cinématographie, Land Niederösterreich

In co-production with: Arte France Cinéma, ZDF-Arte

With the participation of: ORF Film/Fernseh-Abkommen, TPS Star

Executive Producers: Bruno Wagner, Isabell Wiegand

Producers: Martin Gschlacht, Susanne Marian, Philippe Bober

Unit Manager: Thomas Pascher

Unit Manager (France Unit): Sylvie Duluc-Guivarch

Unit Production Manager: Thomas Pascher

Unit Production Manager (France Unit): Sylvie Duluc-Guivarch

Production Manager (France): Laurence Farenc

Post-production Co-ordinator: Tolke Palm

Assistant Directors: Georg Mayrhofer, Valentin Hitz

2nd Assistant Director (France Unit): Sybil Rerat

Script Supervisor: Jean Baptiste Filleau

CASTING: Kris Portier De Bellair, Markus Schleinzer

Artistic Collaborator: Géraldine Bajard

Screenplay: Jessica Hausner

Director of Photography: Martin Gschlacht

Gaffer: Werner Stibitz

Visual Effects: k-effects

Supervising Editor: Karina Ressler

Supervising Art Director: Katharina Wöppermann

Set Decorator: Sebastian Thanheiser

Costume Designer: Tanja Hausner

Costumer: Moana Stemberger

Wardrobe: Elisa Schmidt

Wardrobe (France Unit): Véronique Gély

Key Make-up: Maya Benamer, Silvia Pernegger, Martha Ruess

Special Make-up Effects: Alexis Kinebanyan, Frédéric Balmer

Key Hairdresser: Loli Avellanas

Titles: Johanna Kurz, Niklaus Warda

Sound Design: Out of Silence, Erik Mischijew, Matz Müller

Sound Engineer: Uve Haufig

Sound Mixers: Bernhard Maisch, Matthias Lempert

Cast

Sylvie Testud (*Christine*)

Léa Seydoux (*Maria*)

Bruno Todeschini (*Kuno*)

Elina Löwensohn (*Cécile*)

Gilette Barbier (*Frau Hartl*)

Gerhard Liebmann (*Father Nigl*)

Lindi Prelog (*Frau Huber*)

Heidi Baratta (*Frau Spor*)

Hubsli Kramar (*Herr Olivetti*)

Helga Illich (*Frau Olivetti*)

Walter Benn (*Herr Hruby*)

Petra Morzé (*mother*)

Orsi Tóth (*girl in wheelchair*)

Katharina Flicker, Thomas Uhlir, Martin Thomas Pesl, Gerith Alice

Holzinger, Karoline Kuchar, Birgit Langer, Maria Lassl, Stefan Lirsch, Uta

Ohrner, Josef Prenner, Andrea Schlor, Renate Summer, Adolf Tax,

Theresia Wegmann (*members of the Order of Malta*)

Gertrude Baumgartner, Aurelia Burckhardt, Barbara Chobola,

Florian Heinz Dubois, Martin Hobacher, Angelo Kreuzberger, Armand

Lenaerts, Hermine Popper, Mike Tennison, Irma Wagner, Ernestine

Winter, Jackie Wulf (*pilgrims*)

Bernadette Schneider (*woman at hospital*)

Robert Brun (*doctor*)

Pierre-Emmanuel Finzi (*sound assistant*)

Elisabeth Kervarrec (*secretary*)

Jacques Pratoussy (*miracle man*)

Laislavo 'Lado' Kravanja (*singer*)

Austria/Germany/France 2009

100 mins

BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Léon Morin, prêtre (Léon Morin, Priest)

Mon 28 Mar 17:50; Thu 7 Apr 20:40; Sun 24 Apr 12:00

Lourdes

Tue 29 Mar 20:50; Thu 7 Apr 18:10; Wed 20 Apr 20:50

Ordet (The Word)

Wed 30 Mar 17:45 (+ intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-Large);

Sun 10 Apr 15:30; Fri 15 Apr 18:10; Sat 23 Apr 11:50

Black Narcissus

Thu 31 Mar 21:00; Tue 12 Apr 20:45; Tue 19 Apr 18:10; Sat 30 Apr 15:00

Babette's Feast (Babettes Gaestebud)

Fri 1 Apr 18:10; Sun 10 Apr 12:10; Sat 16 Apr 12:20; Tue 26 Apr 20:50

Aguirre, Wrath of God (Aguirre, der Zorn Gottes)

Sat 2 Apr 20:40; Fri 8 Apr 18:15; Tue 19 Apr 20:50; Mon 25 Apr 18:10

The Seventh Seal (Det Sjunde Inseglat)

Sun 3 Apr 15:20; Mon 18 Apr 15:20; Fri 22 Apr 20:50

The Miracle Woman

Mon 4 Apr 18:20; Fri 15 Apr 20:50; Thu 28 Apr 18:10; Fri 29 Apr 18:10

Stalker

Tue 5 Apr 20:00; Sat 9 Apr 17:30; Thu 21 Apr 20:00; Sat 23 Apr 20:00

My Night with Maud (Ma Nuit chez Maud)

Wed 6 Apr 18:10 (+ intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-Large);

Thu 14 Apr 20:30; Fri 22 Apr 17:50; Mon 25 Apr 20:45

Une Femme douce (A Gentle Creature)

Wed 6 Apr 21:00; Wed 13 Apr 18:20 (+ intro by independent filmmaker and critic Alex Barrett); Mon 18 Apr 13:10

The New World

Sun 10 Apr 17:30; Sat 30 Apr 19:50

The Gospel According to Matthew (Il vangelo secondo Matteo)

Mon 11 Apr 18:00; Sun 17 Apr 14:40

The Last Temptation of Christ

Fri 15 Apr 14:15; Sun 24 Apr 17:40

Sebastiane

Sat 16 Apr 14:50; Tue 19 Apr 20:30; Wed 27 Apr 17:45 (+ intro by BFI curator Simon McCallum)

I Confess

Sun 17 Apr 12:00; Wed 20 Apr 18:00 (+ intro tbc)

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