



PREVIEW

Vortex

+ intro by Gaspar Noé

Françoise Lebrun on 'Vortex'

Do you know why Gaspar Noé called you in?

Yes! He saw *The Mother and the Whore* and he loves that film, it really moved him. But we didn't talk much about it, we stayed very demure.

Did he give you a script?

No, and I didn't want one. He called me a few months ago, we had lunch. Later, he asked if I wanted to read the script and I refused, because it was obvious to me that we were going to do something together. He more or less told me the story, but I had a kind of trust in our connection. I thought: this man has seen what I can do and loved what was at the origin of my whole story with cinema. So, I trusted him. It's as simple as that...

Were you familiar with Gaspar Noé's cinema?

A little. I had seen *Lux Æterna* and he gave me some DVDs of his films that made me laugh a lot... I felt he filmed his actors with great empathy... I'm thinking of certain shots of Béatrice Dalle... he has a beautiful way of looking at actors and actresses. Gaspar Noé is the son of a painter, and I find that he works like a painter, he prepares his frame like a painting. He's very meticulous with the composition of the image.

Still, he is seen as a provocative director, with scenes that venture very deep into violence or sex.

Obviously he didn't want to take me in that direction, with this film, he took a different turn. I pretty much knew that the subject was very personal to him, he has a deep understanding of the character I portray. That helped me to act it. I watched a lot of documentaries about Alzheimer's and I realised that each person develops their own disease. I threw myself into it knowing that Gaspar was there to direct this exploration of the unknown that I was making.

Does Gaspar talk about the psychology of the characters?

Not at all! Or perhaps I didn't get it! (laughs) He gives practical indications: 'An emptier look, wiggle your fingers, mumble...' Very concrete things. He doesn't talk about the character's moods and so much the better because I can't bear all that.

How was the filming?

Through the documentaries I watched, I discovered that people who suffer from Alzheimer's often have problems with speech and don't always respond when they're spoken to. With my partners I tried to find a way of communicating that wasn't necessarily with words. It was a demanding adventure but undertaken with trust. And my two partners were terrific. We were in the same boat, each with our own modes of communication. You know we did re-takes a couple of weeks after the end of the shoot, simple things – I go out in the street again, I walk... I found that it took me some time to recover the state I was in during the shoot. Without my realising it, it had been a dive into something unfamiliar to me, that I hadn't controlled. A leap

into the unknown. One of the first people to watch the film asked Gaspar if I really had Alzheimer's, so I did a good job...

Was it a demanding shoot?

It was necessary to abandon all preconditioned reflexes. Because of the split-screen we did many takes. The biggest task was to let go of control. And at the same time, because of the work with two cameras, it was sometimes also very technical. I remember we once had to do a take of exactly ten seconds. It's a change and it's very exciting.

Dario Argento on 'Vortex'

This is the first time you've taken the lead role in a film.

I was the narrator for several of my films, including *Suspiria*, *Opera* and *Tenebrae* and you can see my hands stabbing women in *Giallos*. Gaspar is one of my great friends, we've known each other for more than 20 years. He begged me, told me he wrote the film for me, everyone around me advised me to act in *Vortex*. Even so, when Gaspar came to see me in Rome and we watched his film *Love at 10am*, I must admit that I had big doubts... It was my daughter, Asia, who finally convinced me. So, at 80, I agreed to play my first leading role, and in French. I put all my will, all my strength, all my being into it.

What did you think of the script?

There wasn't a script, perhaps some 15 pages. My two partners and I improvised the whole film. Gaspar would tell us about a situation and we'd improvise for longer or shorter periods of time. But it wasn't really complicated, I think it would have been harder for me with a real script, with dialogues to follow, since I struggle with French. I had to search for the truth in the depths of myself, of my feelings.

Did your experience as a director help you to incarnate a character?

Of course. I've directed actors for years, I've been at their side. And I remembered it. For *Vortex* it was sometime very technical, because of the two cameras and the split-screen, with many shots – even if I too shoot my films with two cameras. As an actor you don't think about it, you think about your marks, about what you have to say, but not about the cameras. Gaspar did the framing himself, he was behind one of the cameras. He pitched in and talked to the actors a lot. But it was very tiring. We shot the same scenes many times in a row but I didn't remember my improvisations so I would do something else... The improvisation sessions were sometimes very long I remember in particular my conversation on the phone with my friend, the critic Jean-Baptiste Thoret, which lasted 31 minutes!

Moreover, you play a film critic.

You know, I started my career as a critic. Before writing the screenplay for *Once Upon a Time in the West* for Sergio Leone and becoming a director, I was a film critic, in particular for the daily *Paese Sera*. For *Vortex*, Gaspar asked me what my character's profession was and I thought: a film critic.

What will you take away from Vortex?

It is a very intimate film for Gaspar, a personal story that touches him. It might be the most important film he has directed. I'm very happy about this experience, very enthusiastic, but I will never be an actor again, *Vortex* will remain a unique experience.

Alex Lutz on 'Vortex'

People might find it surprising to see you in the credits of a Gaspar Noé film.

Really? Tell me why?

I have the impression that you move in different worlds, you have rather the image of a comedian.

I only think about making unique objects, which don't resemble each other. Like Gaspar I am interested and deeply moved by time, like Guy who turns around and tries to move forward, or *Final Set*, the swansong of a 34-year-old tennis player... It's not so inconsistent... Otherwise, I know that Gaspar loved my feature *Guy* and knew that I love to improvise. As for me, I didn't hesitate. Gaspar called me and offered me the role two weeks before filming began. I love that! Films should always be made like this, with this urgency. There was a window for me, and I went for it. Brilliant!

Isn't it a bit of a leap into the void to appear in a film without a script, that will be improvised as you go along?

Culture is one of the last sanctuaries where it is a duty not to be afraid. Our profession still allows that. And what could happen to me? Gaspar is a brilliant filmmaker, he has directed wonders, whether I can be an oil or an acrylic on his canvas, that's awesome! The shoot was a crazy chaos in which we told ourselves: 'We've got tons of Lego, what can we make together?' I loved making this film.

How did the work unfold day-to-day?

Gaspar has his film in his head, a total vision of what he's going to do, but no script – maybe 20 pages. On set, it's a strange mix. You feel like you can do whatever you want, but at the same time Gaspar knows exactly what he wants, he doesn't let go of you. There is a heavy, slow and very precise work of setting up with the two cameras, because of the split screen. Sometimes he moves the camera 4 inches, and it makes a real difference. And while he is searching, the actor has time to brew. Then he launches us, with things to say or encounters, and we refine it, take after take.

Does he give you psychological hints?

He's an artist of great delicacy, he'll give you a few bones to chew on, but he doesn't do psychology. I didn't know if my character was into drugs or if he had given up. We said that he had taken himself in hand, that he worked in some organization. I suggested that my character get some help from a social worker for his son, that he worked in editing to have a schedule that allowed him to get high. He's into drugs without being into drugs, it's the eternal problem of the addict who knows very well that that's what he'll be all his life. A junkie once said to me "Drugs? Simple, it's the mother's breast." I really like the fact that Gaspar doesn't underline anything, doesn't explain everything, and it's for the viewer – the co-author – to fill in the blanks.

How did you work with your two partners?

It was very powerful with Françoise and Dario.

I was familiar with Dario's films, I liked his language, his accent, in a film where we struggle to talk. And Françoise is an iconic actress. In the script I'm closer to Françoise, while my character has had fights with Dario in the past, a father who has had to scour police stations and clinics for his son... I loved improvising, letting go, I'd love to do only that. But you need a director who isn't afraid of heating up the camera.

Production notes

VORTEX

Directed by: Gaspar Noé

©: Rectangle Productions, Wild Bunch International, Les Cinémas de la Zone, KNM, Artemis Productions, Srab Films, Les Films Velvet, Kallouche Cinéma

Production Companies/Presented by: Rectangle Productions, Wild Bunch International

In co-production with: Les Cinémas de la Zone, KNM, Artemis Productions, Srab Films, Les Films Velvet, Kallouche Cinéma

With the participation of: Canal+, Ciné+

With the support of: Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image animée

In co-production with: Shelter Prod

With the support of: Taxshelter.Be & Ing, Tax Shelter du Gouvernement Fédéral de Belgique

Produced by: Edouard Weil, Vincent Maraval, Brahim Chioua

Co-produced by: Michel Merkt, Gaspar Noé, Lucile Hadzihalilovic, Patrick Quinet, Frédéric Jouve, Toufik Ayadi, Christophe Barral, Jean-Rachid, Arnaud Chautard

Line Producer: Serge Catoire

1st Assistant Director: Claire Corbetta Doll

Written by: Gaspar Noé

Director of Photography: Benoît Debie

Editors: Denis Bedlow, Gaspar Noé

Production Designer: Jean Rabasse

Costume Designer: Corinne Bruand

Sound: Ken Yasumoto

Cast

Françoise Lebrun (mother)

Dario Argento (father)

Alex Lutz (son)

Kylian Dheret (Kiki, grandson)

France/Germany/Belgium 2021

135 mins

A Picturehouse release

FOCUS ON: GASPAR NOÉ

Gaspar Noé in Conversation

Tue 10 May 21:00

Gaspar Noé's Mixtape + Q&A with Gaspar Noé

Thu 12 May 18:00

Lux Æterna

Fri 20 May 18:40; Mon 23 May 18:40

I Stand Alone (Seul contre tous)

Fri 20 May 20:40

Enter the Void

Sat 21 May 20:00

Love (3D)

Mon 23 May 20:20

Climax

Fri 27 May 18:15; Mon 30 May 20:50 + extended intro by season programmer Anna Bogutskaya

CRUEL FLESH

FILMS OF THE NEW FRENCH EXTREMITY

Carne + La Bouche de Jean-Pierre

Thu 12 May 20:45 (+ Q&A with Lucile Hadzihalilovic)

Criminal Lovers (Les Amants criminels)

Sat 14 May 12:00

Inside (À l'intérieur)

Sat 14 May 20:50; Thu 26 May 18:20

Them (Ils)

Mon 16 May 20:50; Sun 29 May 18:20

Romance (Romance X)

Tue 17 May 20:45

In My Skin (Dans ma peau)

Thu 19 May 20:40

Irreversible (Irréversible) (theatrical version)

Sat 21 May 17:45

The Ordeal (Calvaire)

Sun 22 May 18:20

Trouble Every Day

Tue 24 May 20:45

High Tension (aka Switchblade Romance) (Haute Tension)

Sat 28 May 12:20

Pola X

Sat 28 May 17:50

Martyrs

Sat 28 May 20:50; Tue 31 May 20:40

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