



FOCUS ON: GASPAR NOÉ

Lux *Æterna*

The films of the New French Extremity and the accompanying focus on Gaspar Noé examine an important, controversial and highly violent cinema movement. They are not suitable for all.

The film you are about to watch may contain very dark themes, graphic imagery, and scenes of a very upsetting nature including sexual violence and body horror.

Lux *Æterna* contains a sequence of flashing lights which might affect customers who are susceptible to photosensitive epilepsy.

Despite the ominous prelude – a Dostoyevsky quote extolling the extreme joy felt by epileptics ahead of a seizure, followed by clips drawn from Dreyer's *Day of Wrath* of witches being tortured and burned at the stake – Gaspar Noé starts *Lux *Æterna** in an uncharacteristically warm and welcoming vein. On a very cheap-looking film set, sitting next to each other but framed in separate medium shots juxtaposed in split screen, Béatrice Dalle and Charlotte Gainsbourg discuss previous film roles, set experiences and sexual partners while waiting for the crew to prepare the next scene. The conversation, captured in static long takes, has an improvisational fluidity and it's a delight to watch two of the sexiest, most charismatic women in French cinema simply shoot the breeze for ten minutes.

Of course, this being a Noé film, such a laid-back state of affairs cannot last. Once the two are called over to start the scene, *Lux *Æterna** switches gears from genial to assaultive, revealing itself as Noé's contribution to the long and variegated tradition of films about film shoots.

Dalle is the director, embattled with virtually everyone except Gainsbourg, who has agreed to act in a witch-burning scene as a favour. The producer and DP are conspiring to fire Dalle and have recruited the set photographer to follow and record her every move, only enraging her more. The other actresses are furious about being asked to perform topless without contractual agreement. The makeup artist is scrambling to run after Gainsbourg, who is trying to solve a crisis at home via phone while dodging a young film director who wants to enlist her in his debut. A critic keeps butting in, asking for quotes from the various crew members.

Offering a real-time analogue to the screaming, narcissistic madness of Fassbinder's *Beware of a Holy Whore*, Noé has his regular DP Benoît Debie pursue the characters in lengthy handheld and Steadicam shots as they race through the film set's different rooms engaging in various altercations. The split-screen, which is maintained most of the time, alternates between showing the same scene from different perspectives or two separate ones unfolding in different rooms, with the incessant clamour on the respective soundtracks competing for dominance. At intervals, titles appear on the screen bearing bombastic quotes about filmmaking from some of Noé's cinematic heroes, credited as Rainer W., Carl Th., Jean-Luc and Luis. (As with much of Noé's cinema, one's enjoyment of *Lux *Æterna** will in large part depend on whether one is amused by such knowingly silly self-indulgence.)

Eventually, Gainsbourg is tied to the stake and the scene can finally start shooting. Having sufficiently frayed the viewer's nerves, Noé attempts to make good on the promise of the Dostoyevsky quote by concluding *Lux Aeterna* with yet another, and to date his greatest, homage to *2001: A Space Odyssey*'s 'Star Gate' sequence. As the witch-burning begins, the image gradually dissolves into a stroboscopic onslaught of neon colours accompanied by rapid, high-pitched ringing and a thundering drone. Likely inspired by the flicker films of Tony Conrad and Paul Sharits, this sequence intensifies over several minutes and the effect is phenomenal, as the sensory overload becomes so extreme it actually succeeds in inducing a trance-like state. If watched on a giant screen with a muscular sound system, it offers a sublime realisation of the notion of cinema as a collective and transcendent experience.

Giovanni Marchini Camia, bfi.org.uk, 23 May 2019

LUX AETERNA

Director: Gaspar Noé

Production Company: Les Cinémas de la Zone

Producers: Gary Farkas, Lucile Hadzihalilovic, Clément Lepoutre, Olivier Muller, Gaspar Noé, Anthony Vaccarello

Written by: Gaspar Noé

Director of Photography: Benoît Debie

Editor: Jerome Pesnel

Digital Artist: Fabrice Faure

Music Supervisors: Steve Bouyer, Pascal Mayer

Sound Mixer: Romain de Gueltz

Cast

Béatrice Dalle

Charlotte Gainsbourg

Abbey Lee

Claude-Emmanuelle Gajan-Maull

Clara Deshayes

Félix Maritaud

Frédéric Cambier

Karl Glusman

France 2019

51 mins

FOCUS ON: GASPAR NOÉ

I Stand Alone (Seul contre tous)

Sun 1 May 18:10; Fri 20 May 20:40

Irreversible: The Straight Cut (Irréversible)

Mon 2 May 18:30

Enter the Void

Sun 8 May 14:30; Sat 21 May 20:00

Love (3D)

Sun 8 May 18:15; Mon 23 May 20:20

Gaspar Noé in Conversation

Tue 10 May 21:00

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

Thu 12 May 18:00

Lux Aeterna

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

Climax

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

NEW & RE-RELEASES

Croupier

From Wed 4 May

Vampyr

Thu 5 May Preview 18:15; Mon 23 May 14:00 Seniors' Matinee + discussion

From Fri 20 May

Cabaret

From Fri 6 May

Vortex

Tue 10 May 18:00 Preview + intro by Gaspar Noé

From Fri 13 May

Get Carter + The Frighteners: The Manipulators

Mon 30 May 18:00 + intro by Douglas Weir, BFI Technical Delivery Manager

From Fri 27 May

BECOME A BFI MEMBER

Enjoy a great package of film benefits including priority booking at BFI Southbank and BFI Festivals. Join today at bfi.org.uk/join

Join the **BFI mailing list** for regular programme updates. Not yet registered? Create a new account at www.bfi.org.uk/signup

BFI PLAYER

We are always open online on BFI Player where you can watch the best new, cult & classic cinema on demand. Showcasing hand-picked landmark British and independent titles, films are available to watch in three distinct ways: Subscription, Rentals & Free to view.

See something different today on player.bfi.org.uk