



NEW RELEASES

Flux Gourmet

No short synopsis to a Peter Strickland film can comprehensively illustrate how bonkers his films are, and *Flux Gourmet* is possibly his wildest yet. His fifth feature takes place at an art institute focusing on culinary performance where a trio perform experimental music. As part of a month-long residency, the collective perform gigs where they play everything from food mixers to the sound of saucepans boiling and frying pans sizzling.

Elle di Elle (Fatma Mohamed) is the notional leader, though her colleagues Lamina Propria (Ariane Labed) and Billy Rubin (Asa Butterfield) are often far from happy about this. As the month passes, the band have their work documented by writer-photographer Stones (Makis Papadimitriou) and are carefully watched, occasionally advised and instructed by institute director Jan Stevens (Gwendoline Christie). Stones partly narrates proceedings and gives detailed insights into the band's dynamics and his own uncomfortable flatulence and related gastrointestinal issues.

Of Strickland's work to date, the film is most of a piece with *Berberian Sound Studio* (2012), given its outlandish sonic themes and key role for a man out-of-his-depth among some very unusual people. It certainly contains as many memorable scenes, including several mimed shopping trips and a colonoscopy performed in front of an audience as though it were a concert.

We met Strickland on the day of *Flux Gourmet*'s world premiere at the Berlin Film Festival. He'd completed the film only two days previously, and the press watched a version that hadn't had its final sonic tweaks. He was in expansive mood as he revealed his own history of sonic catering and how influences from Robert Bresson to *This Is Spinal Tap* (1984) came to inspire him.

How did you begin developing the story?

I was interested in stomach problems and how they're this hidden thing. If they're tackled in cinema, it's done as a joke. But they're not, especially when it comes to allergies and autoimmune issues. It felt like there was a gap that needed filling.

What was it that piqued your interest in the relationship between artists and the institutions that fund them?

I guess because it relates to things way beyond art. It relates to publishing, it relates to film, music, the whole thing; the relationship between the financier or the patron and the filmmaker, the artist, musician, whatever. It's a very delicate relationship, which can go very badly wrong.

A lot of egos are at stake on both sides. I'm not a financier, I'm on the other side of the table, but how do I do this without playing the victim? How do I play it more like a referee, observing, not trying to take sides? So, my job is to

give all the characters a hard time. My job is to make all the characters behave badly. I'm trying to look at every point of view. I'm trying to see what it's like from the financier side of a table, dealing with a lot of people who are rejected, and some of the trolling you would get now from people who are rejected.

The power thing is interesting for me: how people can lock horns over something so ridiculously small, like a flanger. That was interesting, to pick the most insignificant part of their process and make a huge drama out of it. As we all know, it's not about the flanger; it's about their egos.

What can you tell me about your band The Sonic Catering Band?

We were in this band from 1996 until I can't remember. We kept splitting up and getting back together. We were doing pretty much what you see in the film. Actually it's the same gear. Apart from the mixer. The same Watkins Copicat [reverb/echo unit], the same homemade reel-to-reel.

Did you make and perform the kind of stuff we see in the film?

We did exactly that kind of stuff, and actually what you hear in the film is us. I'd say 90% of it is us. Sound designer Tim Harrison did some too. We did a mixture of our older stuff from the 90s, and we did some new stuff a few months back. We got back together just to do a whole new bunch of things for the film.

How did you come up with the idea of recording food being prepared and cooked?

It came from a dream I had. I was a big fan of this band called Zoviet France from Newcastle, an 80s band who were very abstract. I was massively into them. Around 1996, I had a dream in which I went to see them play live and they were miccing up vitamin pills, the effervescent ones, and turning it into this hallucinatory, heightened sound.

What was weird around that time is that other people were cropping up doing similar things. None of us knew of each other; something was just in the air. So Matthew Herbert was doing this Doctor Rockit food thing at that time, or you could be in The Vegetable Orchestra doing their thing.

You've mentioned Robert Bresson as an influence on the voiceover.

Diary of a Country Priest (1951)? I mean that's much more serious. The priest in that is dying, basically. I hadn't really done voiceover in my films before, but decided to take that very sombre, serious tone. Normally [stomach issues] are done for comedy, farting and so on. How do you take that kind of frat boy subject matter into a different context?

Makis Papadimitriou, who plays Stones, is Greek, but why did you keep the voiceover in Greek?

I feel more and more that British cinema isn't as diverse as Britain is becoming. You don't hear languages or accents. Everyone sounds British. So it was very important, especially post-Brexit to keep this European feel. I'm

half-Greek myself, so I feel almost a personal sense of regret not having kept up my Greek. And this is maybe a sly way of learning some Greek without paying for lessons.

On the music side of things, you've mentioned This Is Spinal Tap.

I adore *Spinal Tap*. It's one of my favourite films. I wanted to make my own version. Just band politics. The interesting thing is how do you make it interesting for people who are not in bands, all those power games and conflicts?

It's not so much the music, it's the gang mentality. I was never in a gang. I was always on the outside looking in. What's interesting with *Stones* is that he's the outsider who becomes the insider at the end. He's that invisible guy in the background, who's there to be invisible, and he becomes the most visible person.

Another inspiration were the performance artists of Viennese Actionism.

They're too hardcore for me, those films, but their aesthetic informed this film. Hermann Nitsch, Otto Muehl and Kurt Kren – ethically there are a lot of issues with some of those filmmakers. It's all out on the internet, you can read about it; there was a lot of slaughter involved, which, being a vegetarian, I can't really watch.

The Actionists' aesthetic – of bodily fluids and blood and shit and piss and God knows what else – fed into what Elle was trying to do with her work. She's someone who's always looking to push boundaries. Sometimes she doesn't know why, but then she sees *Stones* and says, 'Ah, I can exploit that.' But then it provokes all these questions about *Stones*, who's too polite to say no.

I think it's in our nature as filmmakers to question how much of ourselves to reveal when we make a film. It's this game of hiding, revealing and considering where the line is when it comes to our privacy. Shock value comes into that, but it's the easiest thing in the world to shock anyone. It only becomes interesting when it provokes a discussion. Extreme violence doesn't interest me. It doesn't really provoke. There's no progression from that. Torture porn, what is there to talk about?

Once you've seen one of those films, that's kind of enough, isn't it?

Yeah. Whereas this, it does provoke questions about the body and why these things which all of us do – and some of us suffer from – are something we can't talk about. That's what I was interested in. All the shock value stuff I've been interested in has provoked discussions about sexual liberation or bodily liberation.

Lou Thomas, bfi.org.uk, 16 February 2022

FLUX GOURMET

Directed by: Peter Strickland
©: Flux Gourmet Limited, Bankside Films Ltd, LLC IFC Productions I
a Lunapark Pictures and Red Breast production
Presented by: Bankside Films, IFC Productions
In association with: Blue Bear Film & TV, Head Gear Films,
Metrol Technology
Executive Producers: Stephen Kelliher, Sophie Green, Arianna Bocco,
Betsy Rodgers, Phil Hunt, Compton Ross, Ian Benson
Produced by: Serena Armitage, Pietro Greppi
Casting Director: Shaheen Baig
Written by: Peter Strickland
Cinematographer: Tim Sidell
Editor: Mátyás Fekete
Production Designer: Fletcher Jarvis
Costume Designer: Saffron Cullane
Costume Co-designer: Emily Newby
Hair & Make-up Designer: Siobhan Harper-Ryan
Song and Noise: Jeremy Barnes & Heather Trost,
Jeremy Barnes & Heather Trost, ROJ, Cavern of Anti-matter,
Dan Hayhurst, The Sonic Catering Band
Sound Design: Tim Harrison
Production Sound Mixer: Cassandra Rutledge
Re-recording Mixer: Raoul Brand

Cast

Asa Butterfield (*Billy Rubin*)
Gwendoline Christie (*Jan Stevens*)
Ariane Labed (*Lamina Propria*)
Fatma Mohamed (*Elle di Elle*)
Makis Papadimitriou (*Stones*)
Richard Bremmer (*Dr Glock*)
Leo Bill (*technical assistant Wim*)

UK-Hungary-USA 2022
112 mins

A Curzon release

NEW RELEASES

Bodies Bodies Bodies

From Fri 9 Sep

Crimes of the Future

From Fri 9 Sep

In Front of Your Face

From Fri 23 Sep

Flux Gourmet

From Fri 30 Sep

Decision to Leave (Heojil Kyolshim)

From Mon 17 Oct

Triangle of Sadness

From Fri 28 Oct

The Greenaway Alphabet

From Fri 11 Nov

What Do We See When We Look at the Sky? (Ras vkhedavt, rodesac cas vukurebt?)

From Fri 25 Nov

RE-RELEASES

The Others

From Mon 17 Oct

Poltergeist

From Fri 21 Oct

Nil by Mouth

From Fri 4 Nov (Preview on Thu 20 Oct 20:20; extended intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer at Large on Fri 4 Nov 17:50; intro by Kieron Webb, Head of Conservation, BFI Archive on Mon 7 Nov 18:00)

The Draughtsman's Contract

From Fri 11 Nov (+ intro by Kieron Webb, Head of Conservation, BFI National Archive on Fri 11 Nov 17:50)

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