



# Cléo from 5 to 7

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

Sixty years after it was first released, *Cléo from 5 to 7* has finally leapt into the top 20: a slow pace for a film so light on its feet. When was this immaculate feature film, Agnès Varda's essay on time and space, love and death, ever not on our minds?

Arriving with the first surge of the French New Wave, *Cléo from 5 to 7* crackles with the energy and modernity of that *cinophile* movement, but it's ultimately an introspective piece, characterised by the philosophical preoccupations of Varda's Left Bank peers. Corinne Marchand plays Cléo, a blonde pop singer whose vanity relaxes as her anxieties swell. As the film begins, she visits a tarot reader, hoping for good news about the medical test results she is awaiting – but the cards spell only death, and transformation.

While Cléo's mind is fixed on the future, Varda's camera captures her in the present tense, killing time in Paris as she ponders her own decay. Echoing Marcel Duchamp's 1912 painting *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2*, Varda dissects a trip down the stairs to emphasise the moment as it passes, one we would otherwise have missed. As Cléo, a Parisian Mrs Dalloway, walks the streets of her city, Varda also captures a broader sense of time, an era in history: Paris in the early 1960s, with its crowds, cafés, shops, music, fashion and cinema. The geography is precise: Varda called the film 'the portrait of a woman painted on to a documentary about Paris'.

The film shifts from colour to black-and-white to remind us that this is what cinema does – it transforms life. A film within the film turns the idea into a joke: life makes no sense in monochrome. But Cléo is transformed by the film, by these 90 minutes and the images of herself and her future that confront her everywhere. In real time, Cléo becomes more real, more subject than object, more human, more in tune with the city. She discards her whipped-cream wig and polka dots for a simple black shift. She performs less and feels more.

With the kind of playfulness that Varda enjoyed so much, we could call this ticking-clock film timeless. From the feminist analysis of a woman's commodified beauty and a celebrity's self-regarding narcissism to the vulnerable heroine acting out her messy emotions in public, the spectre of war and the fear of disease darkening a midsummer day, *Cléo from 5 to 7* feels pertinent to the modern moment. It always will. Marchand's Cléo was pinned in a point in time, but the film marches on, playing on a loop in our imaginations.

**Pamela Hutchinson, [bfi.org.uk](http://bfi.org.uk)**

## **A contemporary review**

Agnès Varda came up the hard way. Starting as official photographer for the Théâtre National Populaire, she somehow managed to finance a featurette in 1954, *La Pointe-courte*, a co-operative production and one of the true ancestors of the *nouvelle vague*. The film, I thought, had all the faults of her set – an over-addiction to Giraudoux, accompanied by a compulsive need to inject her social preoccupations. Then came the shorts – *Du côté de la côte*,

*O saisons, O châteaux, and Opéra Mouffe*, Brussels prize-winner. And now, free from almost all traces of preciousness à la Giraudoux, *Cléo*.

'A bracelet of bright hair about the bone': Cléo is a young singer who is suddenly faced with the possibility of death. In spite of her beauty, her talent, her lover, and her friends, she finds herself alone and defenceless. The film follows her from five o'clock on the longest day of the year to half-past six; from her anguished visit to a fortune-teller, to the hospital where she is to learn the results of a medical analysis. Follows her step by step: nothing is omitted, there are no ellipses. The film is at once documentary and subjective. The streets and cafés of Paris, the taxis and cinemas, are seen both as they really are, and also as they appear to the eyes of a woman who is tracked by death. But the real subject of the film is loneliness, not death, although it's on a second viewing that this becomes clearer, when one gets away from one's own pre-conceived responses and from the highly subjective reactions that such a theme is bound to evoke. Even more frightening than the thought of death is the wall it creates between Cléo and her friends. She can't even bring herself to talk about it to her lover, for she realises it would only put him out, and with this comes the realisation that they are not in love. Her best friend, Dorothee, reacts to the news with cries of 'C'est affreux!' and vague reassurances, and then goes off to her boyfriend with the parting shot of 'Let's keep in touch.'

Agnès Varda has beautifully succeeded in striking a balance between the frivolity of Cléo's little group and the outside world – the streets of Paris, its shops and parks. And it is from this outside world that help finally comes to her. A chance meeting in the Parc Montsouris with a young soldier on his last day of leave from Algeria brings, not love, perhaps, but at least a kind of human contact, a kind of understanding which can only come from strangers. They may fall in love, and Cléo's cancer may be curable but in any case by the end of the film Cléo has achieved a deeper understanding of what life is and of what human relationships can be. She has, in a sense, been converted to life.

The most important problem in making such a film was to render the visible world in all its beauty, thus increasing the poignancy of the idea of death, without falling into the trap of aestheticism. Largely shot in the street like a documentary, *Cléo* shines with some fantastically beautiful images – the long bus ride with the soldier, the shop-windows with their disturbing reflections, the elegiac sadness of the park in the late afternoon light: *et ego in Arcadia sum*. But Cléo is by no means just a 'photographer's film'. Corinne Marchand (Cléo) and Antoine Bourseiller (the soldier) are not, I dare say, great actors, but in *Cléo* they give great performances: which is perhaps the same thing as saying that I think, as might already have been guessed, that Agnès Varda has made a sensational debut, and that we may expect even greater things from her.

**Richard Roud, *Sight and Sound*, Summer 1962**

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## CLÉO FROM 5 TO 7 (CLÉO DE 5 À 7)

Director: Agnès Varda

Production Company: Rome-Paris Films, Paris

Producers: Georges de Beauregard, Carlo Ponti

Production Manager: Bruna Drigo

Unit Managers: Jean-François Adam, Edith Tertza

Trainee: Claude Laporte

Assistant Directors: Bernard Toublanc-Michel, Marin Karmitz

Script Girl: Aurore Paquiss

Scenario: Agnès Varda

Camera: Jean Rabier

Assistant Camera: Alain Levent, Paul Bonis

Key Grip: Roger Scipion

Stills Photography: Liliane de Kermadec

Editors: Janine Verneau, Pascale Laverrière

Art Director: Bernard Evein

Make-up: Aïda Carange

Laboratory: GTC

Music and Songs [Music]: Michel Legrand

Lyricist: Agnès Varda \*

Sound: [Jean] Labussière, [Julien] Coutellier, [Jacques] Maumont

Sound Studio: S.I.M.O.

## Cast

Corinne Marchand (*Cléo*)

Antoine Bourseiller (*Antoine*)

Dominique Davray (*Angèle*)

Dorothee Blank (*Dorothee*)

Michel Legrand (*Bob*)

José Luis de Vilallonga (*Cléo's lover*)

Loye Payen (*Irma, the fortune-teller*)

Renée Duchateau

Lucienne Marchand (*taxi driver*)

Serge Korber (*penpusher*)

Robert Postec (*Dr Valineau*)

Jean-Luc Godard, Anna Karina, Eddie Constantine, Sami Frey,

Danièle Delorme, Jean-Claude Brialy, Yves Robert, Alan Scott

(*actors in the burlesque film*) \*

France/Italy 1962

90 mins

\* Uncredited

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### Cléo from 5 to 7 (Cléo de 5 à 7)

Sun 5 Mar 17:45; Wed 8 Mar 21:00

### 2001: A Space Odyssey

Sun 5 Mar 19:00; Thu 9 Mar 18:00

**Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans** Mon 6 Mar 14:00; Mon 13 Mar 20:35

**Au hasard Balthazar** Mon 6 Mar 18:30

**Vertigo** Mon 6 Mar 20:30; Thu 9 Mar 14:30; Wed 15 Mar 18:10

**In the Mood for Love (Fa yeung nin wah)** Mon 6 Mar 20:40; Fri 10 Mar 21:00; Sun 12 Mar 18:30

**Late Spring (Banshun)** Mon 6 Mar 20:45; Tue 7 Mar 14:30; Sun 12 Mar 18:20

### The Night of the Hunter

Tue 7 Mar 18:00; Sat 11 Mar 20:45

**Mulholland Dr.** Tue 7 Mar 20:10; Tue 14 Mar 20:15

**Citizen Kane** Tue 7 Mar 20:30

**The Searchers** Tue 7 Mar 20:35

**Beau Travail** Wed 8 Mar 14:30; Fri 10 Mar 20:45; Mon 13 Mar 18:20 (+ intro by Catherine Wheatley, Reader in Film Studies, King's College London)

**Daisies (Sedmikrásky) + Meshes of the Afternoon** Wed 8 Mar 18:20 (+ intro)

**Portrait of a Lady on Fire (Portrait de la jeune fille en feu)** Wed 8 Mar 20:30

**Singin' in the Rain** Thu 9 Mar 18:10

(+ intro by Miles Eady, Film Writer and Curator); Tue 14 Mar 14:30

**Man With a Movie Camera (Chelovek s kino-apparatom)** Thu 9 Mar 20:50

**Persona** Thu 9 Mar 21:05

**Tokyo Story (Tôkyô monogatari)** Fri 10 Mar 18:00; Wed 15 Mar 14:30

### Close-Up (Nema-ye Nazdik)

Fri 10 Mar 18:30; Wed 15 Mar 20:50

**The Godfather** Fri 10 Mar 19:00; Sun 12 Mar 18:15

### La Règle du jeu (The Rules of the Game)

Sat 11 Mar 18:05

**Do the Right Thing** Sat 11 Mar 18:10

**Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles** Sat 11 Mar 18:50

**Playtime** Sat 11 Mar 20:30

**Shoah** Sun 12 Mar 11:00

### Apocalypse Now: Final Cut

Sun 12 Mar 20:00 BFI IMAX

**Taxi Driver** Mon 13 Mar 20:40

### Seven Samurai (Shichinin no samurai)

Tue 14 Mar 18:40

**The Passion of Joan of Arc (La passion de Jeanne d'Arc)** Wed 15 Mar 20:40 (with score)

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