



MICHEL PICCOLI: A FEARLESS TALENT

Belle toujours

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*Un film de/*Directed by: Manoel de Oliveira

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Production Companies: Filbox Producoes, Les Films d'Ici

Presented by: Miguel Cadilhe

With the financial participation of: MC - Ministério da Cultura, ICAM - Instituto do Cinema Audiovisual e Multimedi, CNC - Centre national de la cinématographie, RTP - Radio Televisão Portugal

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Assistant Script Supervisor: Sophie Audier

Casting: Marion Toutou

Casting Assistant: Justine Leocadie

Scenario/Dialogue: Manoel de Oliveira

Director of Photography: Sabine Lancelin

Camera Operator: Francisco Oliveira

1st Assistant Camera: Mathieu Giombini

Gaffer: Christian Magis

Key Grip: Miguel Efe

Stills Photographer: Francisco Oliveira

Special Effects: Hugues Namur

Graphic Designer: Francisco Laranjo

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Set Dresser: Raphael Mittet

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Construction Manager: Claude Vincent

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Key Costumer: Patricia Talandier

Costumer: Olivier Ligen

Wardrobe: Laurence Tallon

Make-up: Emmanuelle Fèvre

Hair stylist: Estelle Tolstoukine

Negative Cutter: Ana de Lurdes

Colour Timers: Dora Rolim, Jean-Marc Grejois

Film Stock: Kodak

Laboratories: GTC, Tóbis

Sound Recording: Henri Maikoff

Boom Operator: Ricardo Leal

Sound Mixer: Jean-Pierre Laforce

Sound Editor: Mikaël Barre

ADR Supervisor: Claudio Ventura

In homage to: Luis Buñuel, Jean-Claude Carrière

Studio: Studio Sets

Cast:

Michel Piccoli (*Henri Husson*)

Bulle Ogier (*Séverine Serizy*)

Ricardo Trêpa (*Benedito, barman*)

Leonor Baldaque, Júlia Buisel (*prostitutes*)

L'Orchestre de la Fondation Calouste Gulbenkian (*orchestra*)

Lawrence Foster (*orchestra conductor*)

Benoît Gourley (*concierge*)

Yves Breton (*hotel manager*)

Portugal-France 2006©

69 mins

I wasn't expecting all that much from this follow-up to Buñuel's 1967 masterpiece *Belle de Jour*, but any reservations disappeared the moment Michel Piccoli appeared on screen, twinkling with the kind of barely suppressed decadence Peter O'Toole can only dream of.

The now elderly Belle is played by Bulle Ogier, Catherine Deneuve having presumably refused. But the Piccoli of *Belle toujours* is the same Monsieur Husson of the first film, now 40 years older, his lasciviousness and duplicity reduced to defiant alcoholism. Husson spots Belle at a concert, tracks her down with resourcefulness and bribes, and invites her to dinner.

This dinner scene is a marvel. The two elderly people race through the courses without exchanging a word, the only sounds being the clicking of cutlery and a series of chortling grunts from Piccoli. But what makes it fascinating is that it's a rare instance of an arthouse star system in operation, since it relies on an awareness of the past careers of the two actors, both of whom tended to play characters defined by their sexuality – free in Ogier's case, feral in Piccoli's. Behind *Belle toujours* twinkly, 82-year-old Piccoli lurks the amoral star of *Themroc*, *La Grande Bouffe* and *La Belle Noiseuse* – half a century of magnificent decadence.

Nick Roddick, *Sight and Sound*, December 2007

The best films of Portuguese master Manoel de Oliveira exploit a fine, utterly unique tension. At first glance, everything is history, the past, memories: the architecture, paintings and music are ancient (or at least 'classical'), the unresolved 'backstories' of the plot may go back several generations or even centuries, and the actors bring with them associations of their roles in many prior films (including Oliveira's). And, of course, the filmmaker himself is, at the time of this release, pushing the age of 100. How could he not be preoccupied with the spectres of lost time, on every personal and political level?

And yet Oliveira's films are also among the lightest, funniest and most ephemeral of contemporary cinema – as if his proximity to the prospect of shuffling off this mortal coil has engendered in him a droll, playful, even carefree attitude. His characters (whether youthful or elderly) frequently seem like ghosts, already halfway between the worlds of the living and the dead; and the usually heavy social environment seems itself transparent, illusory, veil-like. The 'immortal stories' that he favours – ambiguous tales of love and obsession, idealism and disenchantment – frequently end on a quizzical note of detachment.

Belle toujours is among Oliveira's best. Introduced as a 'homage' to Luis Buñuel and screenwriter Jean-Claude Carrière, it begins from a speculative musing: what if Henri Husson and Séverine Serizy, characters in Buñuel's *Belle de Jour* (1967), were to meet again, almost four decades later? What would they say to each other? Oliveira hoped to cast both the original stars, Michel Piccoli and Catherine Deneuve, in this curious 'continuation' of Buñuel's story, but only the former agreed. In the event, it's hard to imagine how the perhaps too-well-preserved Deneuve might have fitted into the brittle tone of this chamber-piece: Bulle Ogier brings as much fragility as toughness to the part, and above all an endearingly screwball body language which is a perfect match for Oliveira's Tati-like long-shot exteriors.

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La Mort en ce jardin (Evil Eden)

Thu 1 Jun 20:35; Tue 6 Jun 18:15

Le Mépris (Contempt)

From Fri 2 Jun

The Diary of a Chambermaid

(Le journal d'une femme de chambre)

Fri 2 Jun 18:15; Fri 16 Jun 20:55

Belle de jour

Fri 2 Jun 20:40; Sun 25 Jun 18:45

Les Choses de la vie (The Things of Life)

Sat 3 Jun 12:30; Tue 13 Jun 20:45

Themroc

Sat 3 Jun 15:00; Wed 14 Jun 18:15

La Grande Bouffe (Blow-Out)

Sat 3 Jun 20:30; Mon 12 Jun 18:10

Ten Days' Wonder (La Décade prodigieuse)

Sun 4 Jun 15:20; Sat 17 Jun 20:40

Vincent, François, Paul et les autres

Sun 4 Jun 18:00; Sun 18 Jun 13:10

Beyond Good and Evil:

The Discreet Charm of Michel Piccoli

Mon 5 Jun 18:15

Passion

Tue 6 Jun 21:00; Fri 16 Jun 18:20

Spoiled Children (Des enfants gâtés)

Wed 7 Jun 18:10; Mon 12 Jun 20:40

Une chambre en ville (A Room in Town)

Wed 14 Jun 20:45; Sat 24 Jun 13:00

Mauvais sang (The Night Is Young)

Sat 17 Jun 15:15; Thu 22 Jun 20:40

Milou en mai (Milou in May)

Sun 18 Jun 16:00; Mon 26 Jun 20:40

Belle toujours

Wed 21 Jun 20:50; Sun 25 Jun 16:30

La Belle Noiseuse

Sat 24 Jun 15:20; Wed 28 Jun 18:10

Habemus Papam – We Have a Pope

Sun 25 Jun 14:00; Thu 29 Jun 20:45

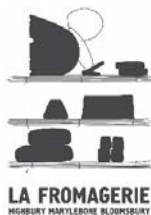
Is *Belle toujours*, in any ordinary sense, a sequel to *Belle de Jour*? In truth, the two films share very little – beyond the central characters, a mysterious ‘buzzing box’ like the one that so tantalised young Séverine (Oliveira needs only its sound, in a darkened, distant frame, for this gag) and a general atmosphere of plush, placid surrealism, a sense of the fantastic that is more latent than manifest. What makes *Belle toujours* a sequel of a modernist or conceptualist kind is the fact that its animating question – what did Husson say to Séverine’s husband all those years ago? – is deepened to infinity, rather than resolved; we know less about the characters at the end of *Belle toujours* than we did at the end of *Belle de Jour*.

Belle toujours is a perfectly constructed jewel. The opening, long-held shot of an orchestra playing Dvorák’s Eighth Symphony introduces not only the musical score but a consistent mode of narrative punctuation: views of Paris at various times of day and night. Inside the Royal Vendôme restaurant where Husson and Séverine dine, the deliberately theatrical, declamatory dialogues that are Oliveira’s trademark are rendered with superb cinematic skill – no two angles on this space are alike and subtle surprises constantly await us. The magnificent comedy of Husson and Séverine’s elaborate meal is an inspired recreation (rather than imitation) of Buñuel’s method: the social *mise en scène* of courses, manners and positions à table is meticulously observed. And, throughout, the strange procession of statues, paintings and other *objets d’art* quietly dematerialises the human characters, turning them into almost abstract ‘figures’.

The ‘belle de jour’ of Buñuel’s title referred not only to a ‘beauty by day’ but also the blush of ‘morning glory’. Correspondingly, Oliveira’s ‘belle toujours’ conjures a beauty in eternal twilight – the glow we have come to recognise in his final, magisterial works.

Adrian Martin, *Sight and Sound*, December 2008

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