



## Big Screen Classics

# Hiroshima mon amour

### Hiroshima mon amour

Director: Alain Resnais

Production Companies: Argos-Films, Como Films (Paris), Daiei Kyoto, Pathe Overseas

Executive Producer: Samy Halfon

Production Managers: Sacha Kamenka, Shirakawa Takeo

Unit Managers: R. Knabe, I. Ohashi

Production Secretary: Nicole Seyler

Assistant Directors: I. Shirai, T. Andréfouet, J.-P. [Jean-Pierre] Léon, R. [René] Guyonnet, Itoi, Hara

Script Supervisor: Sylvette Baudrot

Scenario/Dialogue: Marguerite Duras

Literary Adviser: Gérard Jarlot

Director of Photography (France): Sacha Vierny

Director of Photography (Japan): Michio Takahashi

Lighting: [Akihiro] Ito

Camera Operators: [Pierre] Goupil, Watanabe, Ioda

Assistant Operators: [Jean] Chiabaut,

[Denys] Clerval, Nogatomo, Yamagutschi

Editors: Henri Colpi, Jasmine Chasney,

Anne Sarraute

Art Directors: Esaka, Mayo, [Maurice] Petri

Assistant Art Director: [Noboru] Miyakuni

Properties: Roger Jumeau, Ikeda

Costumer: Gérard Colley

Make-up: Alex Marcus, R. Toioda

Hairstyles: Eliane Marcus

Music: Giovanni Fusco, Georges Delerue

Sound: Pierre Calvet, René Renault, Yamamoto

Cast:

Emmanuelle Riva (*she*)

Eiji Okada (*he*)

Stella Dassas (*the mother*)

Pierre Barbaud (*the father*)

Bernard Fresson (*the German*)

France-Japan 1959

100 mins

Digital 4K

When chance brought together Alain Resnais and Marguerite Duras, he found in the writer that essential which he had been looking for in the commentaries to all his films – a kind of unforced lyricism, to be put to the service of an almost musical construction.

Throughout *Hiroshima*, all Resnais' technique is employed to translate the perpetual counterpoint of past and present into vigorously mathematical or musical terms. Five times, early in the film, we move directly from the lovers' embrace into the tragic past of Hiroshima, the 'forgotten city'. And in one of these early episodes – the museum sequence, with its dazzling tracking shots orchestrated with the musical score – we are brought close to the concept of a completely lyrical cinema, an idea which has preoccupied Resnais throughout his career.

*Hiroshima*, though its director regards it as a 'long short' rather than a true feature, is the climax of his experiments in this direction. There are three reasons for this: the absolute pre-eminence of the editing and, consequently, the shooting script (Resnais follows this very closely, with a minimum of improvisation); the parallel importance of the text; and the use of music as a catalytic agent. Resnais' ambition is for a cinema as disciplined in its laws as are the other arts of music, poetry or painting. Undeniably he has made here the film which the more literately demanding cineastes dream of; and in the commentated story, where the principal role is taken by the text, he unquestionably triumphs.

Resnais himself unreservedly defends his choice of writer. 'I wanted to make a film for women, and I more or less forced Marguerite Duras into going her own way. She was an essential factor in the "grand opera" style I wanted to give my film.' Similarly, the sometimes theatrical tone adopted by the leading actress, the previously unknown Emmanuelle Riva, is in accordance with Resnais' ideas. Both she and the writer went through a strenuous preparation, equal to anything demanded by Stanislavsky. Marguerite Duras, for instance, had to write a 'subconscious continuity' in which, parallel to the dialogue, she defined the climate of each scene, the psychological drives of the characters at any given moment. In Emmanuelle Riva's playing one finds a sense of this tension for all that it has, I feel, its moments of emotional dishonesty. Resnais, although he admits these criticisms, confirms that this was the style he wanted, that it belongs to the character invented by Mme. Duras and by the actress. And his own view: 'I have no particular liking for my heroine. I'm showing an example, an instance, that's all...'

Louis Marcorelles, *Sight and Sound*, Winter 1959-60

### Marguerite Duras on 'Hiroshima mon amour'

*Did Resnais suggest the idea of the film, or did it come from the producers?*

The film was proposed by the Japanese. All they specified was that one episode should take place in France and one in Japan; that there should be one Japanese star and one French one. As a matter of fact they first asked Françoise Sagan to write the scenario, but she turned it down. Resnais and I both agreed that we could not imagine a film about Japan which did not deal with Hiroshima, and we also felt that all that could be done along the lines of showing the horror of Hiroshima by horror had been done – and very well done – by the Japanese themselves in *Children of Hiroshima*. So I tried to do

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Tue 2 Jun 14:30; Sun 14 Jun 13:00;  
Tue 16 Jun 20:45; Sun 21 Jun 12:10

### Jour de fête The Big Day

Wed 3 Jun 18:15 (+ intro by Diana Cipriano,  
BFI Programme and Research Coordinator);  
Fri 12 Jun 20:55

### Une femme est une femme A Woman is a Woman

Thu 4 Jun 20:55; Mon 8 Jun 18:20;  
Wed 17 Jun 21:05

### Hiroshima mon amour

Fri 5 Jun 20:50; Sat 13 Jun 15:10; Thu 25 Jun 20:45

### Bicycle Thieves Ladri di biciclette

Fri 5 Jun 21:00; Mon 29 Jun 18:15

### Call Me by Your Name

Sun 7 Jun 18:00; Thu 18 Jun 12:15;  
Sat 20 Jun 20:20

### Barbara

Tue 9 Jun 20:45; Thu 25 Jun 18:10 (+ intro by  
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Coordinator)

### Breaking Away

Wed 10 Jun 18:00 (+ intro by Philip Dobson,  
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Sun 28 Jun 12:30

### E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial

Thu 11 Jun 20:45; Sat 13 Jun 12:15

### The Kid with a Bike Le gamin au vélo

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something different. I had nine weeks in which to write the script. All Resnais said was, 'Write literature, write as if you were doing a novel. Don't worry about me; forget the camera.' His idea was to film my scenario just as a composer would set a play to music – as Debussy did with Maeterlinck's *Pelleas et Melisande*.

*One thing I'd like to ask you about is the very beginning of the film. We see the naked bodies of the lovers tightly intertwined. Then the film cuts to show the bodies glistening as if covered with mica dust. Is this meant as a premonitory image of Hiroshima? Actually, they look like those petrified human couples found at Pompeii.*

Yes, there is a kind of anticipatory quality about the image. The bodies are covered with sweat, ashes and dew. I hadn't thought of Pompeii, but it is quite possible as I had just been reading *Gradiva*, a fascinating novel by a German writer Jensen, about Pompeii. Do you know what Resnais calls the next sequence? The opera! It starts with the Japanese architect saying, '*Non, tu n'as rien vu a Hiroshima, rien.*' The girl protests that she has seen everything – the hospitals, the museum, the sightseeing buses, the newsreels and photographs. We see all these things in this episode, orchestrated with the Stravinskian *ostinato* of Fusco's score and her constant repetitions. ('*J'ai vu les gens se promener, pensifs ... a travers les photographies, les reconstitutions, faute d'autre chose, les photographies, les reconstitutions, faute d'autre chose, les explications, faute d'autre chose.*') We put this sequence in to clear everyone's mind of prejudice, of conventional feelings, and to prepare them to accept what follows, the story of the girl's love for the German soldier.

*Critics have talked about resemblances to Joyce, Faulkner and Proust. Do you see anything in this yourself?*

Joyce, not at all. Proust, well... perhaps. The theme of memory and forgetfulness and so forth, I suppose there is something Proustian about it.

*Have you a favourite scene in the film?*

The one on the staircase in the hotel – but that's because of the way Resnais filmed it and cut it. For sheer visual beauty, though, I think the love scenes in Nevers ... that waltz!

*Tell me, the music score is credited to Giovanni Fusco and Georges Delerue. Who did what?*

The waltz is by Delerue. All the rest is Fusco. Do you remember when the waltz is first heard – in the scene when she is bicycling across the fields to meet her lover? Those extremely fast tracking shots, and that sudden effect of the camera stopping short when we come to the German. It stops so fast that there is a recoil, as in a car when it pulls up suddenly. The camera seems to go past the man for a fraction of an inch, and then returns.

*Let me ask you one last question. It seems clear to me at the end of Hiroshima that the two are separating for ever, and yet I read an interview with Resnais in which he says that they stay together for a few days, and then separate.*

I don't know why Resnais goes on about their sticking together. That's not the way I wrote it, and it's not the way we planned it. I'll have to talk to him about that ... Actually it's a pity that no one ever thought of interviewing us together. It might have been very interesting, really...'

Interview by Richard Roud, *Sight and Sound*, Winter 1959-60