

REVIEWS

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre's **Le Jour S**

Le Jour S is a title which made me suspect that Jean-Pierre Lefebvre's latest film might be tense and apocalyptic, perhaps political, like *Z* or *The Day of the Jackal*. But film titles can be deceiving and, luckily, *Le Jour S* follows in Lefebvre's own tradition of low-key, highly personal film-making; this film is as far removed from a thriller or blockbuster as it is possible to be.

Instead, *Le Jour S* is a subtle and fluid work, full of cheerful romanticism. Lefebvre prefers to soothe rather than to shock, and he has the special talent of making us see the small changes that occur as relationships evolve.

In the opening scene of *Le Jour S*, Jean-Baptiste (played by Pierre Curzi), an amiable TV producer approaching 40, is lying in bed and, speaking to whoever is on the next pillow, he recounts several contradictory versions of his first sexual experience. As the camera angle widens, it turns out that Jean-Baptiste is actually holding forth to his tape recorder. Lefebvre is not just fishing for laughs, however; today, 'le jour S', will be a day for reflection and recollection. It will be a day, as Jean-Baptiste self-consciously writes in his journal, for accenting "sexualité... sensualité... sentiments..."

From there, the story takes a deceptively aimless turn: Jean-Baptiste has nothing in particular to do, nowhere really to go, no urgent needs or desires. He gets up, reads the morning mail, takes a bus out to a shopping mall to buy some underwear, and sails through a bachelor's Saturday with no pressing agenda. But Lefebvre and Curzi catch myriad little details, and Curzi is particularly good as the put-upon little guy just trying to get through the day. He takes out his pack of Player's Lights, pauses a moment and decides, what-

the-hell, he'll have another one. Sitting in a snack bar, he muses at some length while choosing between a small, medium or large Coke to go with his hot dog (he takes a large). In another director's hands, this kind of anecdote would need a gag line to work. But Lefebvre relies on a relaxed pace – and a sense that he really cares – to make the viewer care, too.

But 'le jour S' is not, of course, a "journée comme les autres"; Jean-Baptiste is haunted all day by echoes and ghosts, memories of what he might have been and women he might have known. There is no epiphany in *Le Jour S*, but the 'S' element of feelings and dreams intrudes everywhere. On opening a letter from his son, Jean-Baptiste is so taken by the lyricism of child's writing ("It is autumn now, and the leaves are falling"), that he begins reading it aloud on the bus, to the great bewilderment of everyone seated nearby. Today, Jean-Baptiste tells the underwear salesman at the shopping centre, "I feel like a caterpillar who has become a butterfly".

The heart of *Le Jour S*, however, is in Jean-Baptiste's relations with women. This is a day of premonitions and intuitions and, somehow, every contact with a woman seems especially acute. A very pregnant matron smiles glowingly at J-B's poetic outburst on the bus, a porno theatre ticket-taker takes immediate offense at his quite innocent queries, and – incredibly – when Jean-Baptiste has a small accident and bumps into another car, the driver turns out to be his long-estranged wife, Louise. And each of these women – dressed in different guises – is played by Marie Tifo.

This is a curious move by Lefebvre, although it must be tempting to play the very adaptable Tifo opposite bewildered, errant Jean-Baptiste. She plays every role that a woman has played in his life: the unattainable woman, the happy mother, the 'bad' girl, the friend, and the adversary. She plays the woman he has lost forever, and the woman he is completely devoted to. On 'le jour S', moreover, each of these relations is felt to be at a critical point: Jean-Baptiste realizes,

during an afternoon encounter in a rue St-Denis tourist room with his ex-wife, Louise, that he need no longer be uneasy about what might have been; the spark is gone from that relation: it is now over. This frees Jean-Baptiste from the subtle pressures of the past, and he can now wholeheartedly embrace his perky girlfriend, Carole, played, of course, by Marie Tifo.

Le Jour S recalls many French romantic comedies, stories in which a brief time somehow becomes the focus for a welling-up of feelings, a quiet coming-to-terms with the changes in one's sentimental life. Tavernier's *Une Semaine de vacances* comes to mind, but in that film, a sense of crisis underlies the protagonist's week of reflection and change. *Le Jour S*, on the other hand, gains its charm through being wholly unforced, never proposing to teach lessons or correct one's behaviour. The viewer, too, finds that a space is somehow cleared among the shower of contingent details in everyday life, and the essential relations which sustain and justify life are brought clearly into view. This is the poetry of Lefebvre's vision, a cinema of clarity, subtlety and fine touches. And *Le Jour S* is one of the most (quietly-) accomplished films in his repertoire.

David Winch ●

LE JOURS d. Jean-Pierre Lefebvre a.d. José Beaudet sc. Barbara Easto, J.-P. Lefebvre p. Yves Rivard d.o.p. Guy Dufaux asst. cam. Robert Guertin, Michel Girard sd. Claude Hazanavicius sd. asst. James Louis Thompson mix. Michel Charron elect. Jean-Maurice de Ernsted, Gilles Fortier grips Marc de Ernsted, Stéphane de Ernsted cont. Claudette Messier stills Gilles Corbeil make-up Diane Simard p. assts. Edouard Faribault, Sara Mills, Marcel Royer lab. Bellevue Pathé Québec 1972 grader Pierre Campeau titles Yves Rivard mus. Jean-Pierre Lefebvre, Barbara Easto ed. Barbara Easto optical Groupe Film Optical (Qué.) Inc. p.c. Cinak Ltee, with the financial assistance of l'Institut québécois du cinéma and Bellevue Pathe Québec 1972. color, 16 and 35mm running time: 88 min. dist. (world) Astral Bellevue, (514) 747-2441 l.p. Pierre Curzi, Jean-Baptiste Beauregard, Marie Tifo, Simon, Esterez, Benoit Castel, Adrien Morot, Michel Daigle, Pierre Brisset Des Nos, Roger H. Guertin, Guillaume Chouinard, Réjean Gauvin, Brigitte Lecours, Gregory Keith, Michel Viala, Anne Lecours, Berenard Fortin, Vincent Gratton and with the friendly participation of Marcel Sabourin and Marthe Nadeau.

Philippe de Broca's **Louisiana**

Louisiana, a Canada-France co-production funded partly by Telefilm Canada's Broadcast Fund and destined for eventual release as a television mini-series, opened Aug. 2 in both French and English in various Montreal theatres. Quite the cultural event, truly bilingual, and the premiere, at the Champlain theatre, was certainly one of the social events of the month: Denis Héroux (producer), Pierre Trudeau (ex-prime-minister) and Margot Kidder (leading actress) spiced up the audience with their presence. This gathering, at 15\$ a ticket, also had a specific charitable mission since the benefits went to the Canadian Association of Mental Health – a premiere for the Canadian film industry.

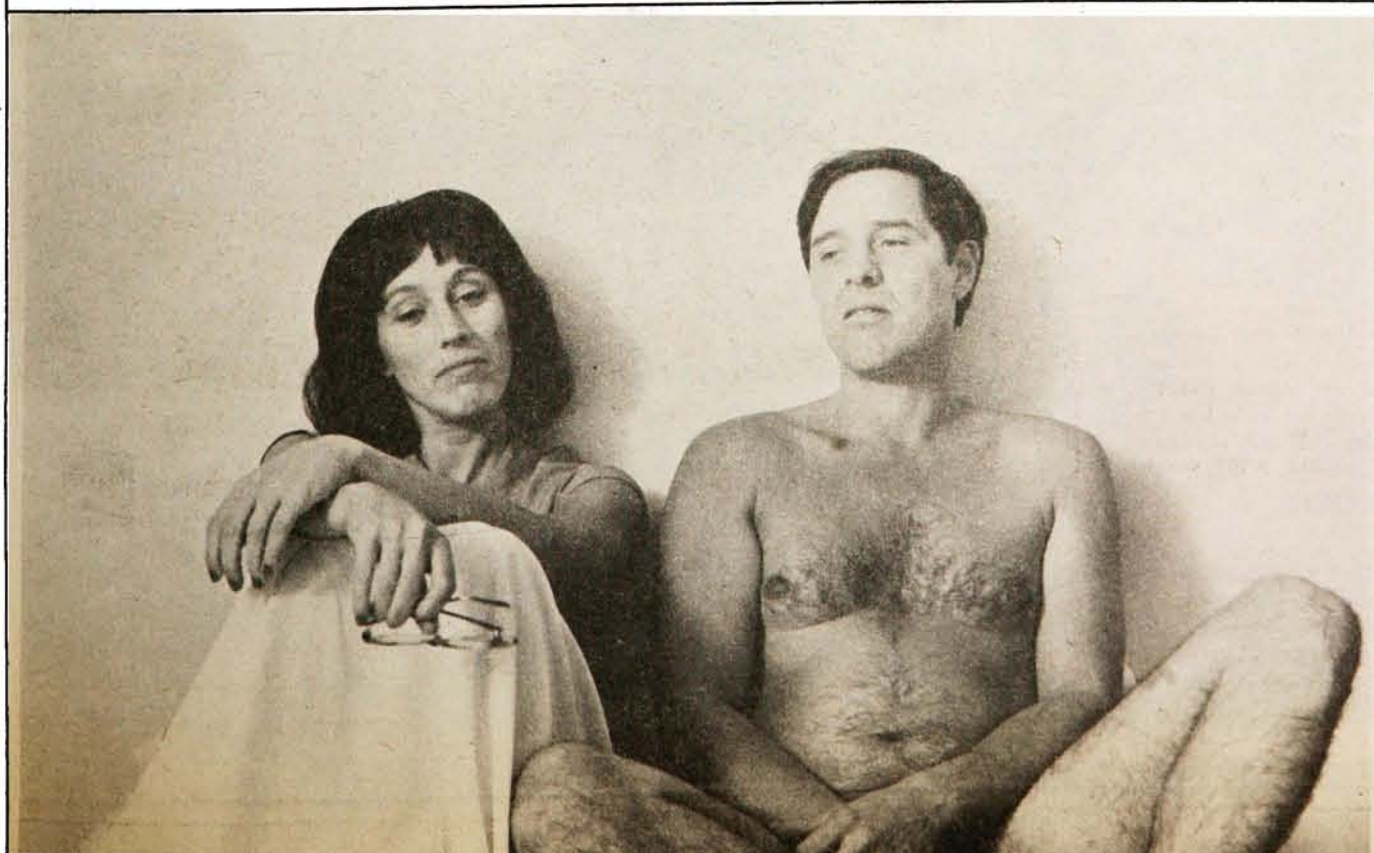
If the organizers of the benefit were extremely pleased with this venture of a new kind and expressed their gratitude to the generosity of the film industry, how we ignore that *Louisiana*, the film, simply reinforces the same old patterns of international co-production?

The moment for the release of this film was well chosen. Summer, vacation time, a period of the year when we are thirsty for stories, when we are just about ready to dive into the longest, thickest best-selling novel on the market, searching out new characters, landscapes, and passions. In the windows of many bookstores, Maurice Denuzière's three novels *Louisiana*, *Fausse Rivière* and *Bagatelle* stand ready to reveal, one by one, their worlds.

Louisiana the movie, based on the first two volumes of Denuzière's imaginary world, promised much for lovers of fictionalized history – not only characters, landscapes and passions, but the grandeur of big-screen spectacle. The saga of Virginia and her struggle to secure Bagatelle, her childhood home, in the explosive years of the mid-19th Century, offered to seduce us with its settings, costumes and lavish images, bathed in soft light by the cinematographic expertise of Michel Brault. *Hélas* – big, yes, and visually beautiful – but this is by no means a seductive film.

"New Orleans, 1836" is superimposed over the first images of the film. Thus time and space simply declare themselves, as, unfortunately will all of the other elements of the film – character, plot, emotion, etc., are simply presented on the screen without ever being really developed. Arriving from France, Virginia (Margot Kidder) tells her maid, Mignette, that she is determined to get Bagatelle back at all costs. So much for plot line! As soon as the two women are on shore romantic sub-plots are outlined: Virginia and Clarence Dandrige (Ian Charleson) exchange looks. How is Virginia going to get Bagatelle and the tall, blond Clarence Dandrige? Against a background of social history, of course: the same first scene stereotypically portrays the "hardship of slavery" in a few long shots which, just like a cardboard backdrop, sketch out local and temporal "colors." So much for history!

● "A caterpillar who's become a butterfly": Marie Tifo and Pierre Curzi in *Le Jour S*



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Five minutes, and already we know what will happen to these characters, for whom we care virtually nothing. Fade-in the music, flip a few pages, stop just in time to hear the end of a conversation between Virginia and her godfather: the sad history of Bagatelle since the death of Virginia's father is summarized in a couple of sentences. Oh well, it probably wasn't important! But at this point, nothing seems important in the lives of these shallow characters. So throw in a French revolution, let's have a War of Secession - all the "events" remain sterile, unidimensional, decors, against which Virginia's sentimental life unfolds.

When a story lacks dramatic momentum, one can always hope to take refuge in the acting, the music or in other formal elements of the film. Well, here the editing relies on titles to introduce new "chapters," giving the impression of skipping pages between scenes. Characters die without ever having had the time to develop: Adrian, Virginia's first husband; Pierre, the younger son; Adrien, the older son; Julie, the daughter - an entire family has died without a single moving moment or flow of sentiments. And even while they were still alive, the dialogue between the characters is never more than unconvincing clichés. Clarence: "I have been maimed, Virginia." (music) Her jaw drops as she stares at him, alternating her gaze from his eyes to below his belt.

Tacky, très québécoise and even redun-

dant, since the accident had already been evoked in an earlier flashback. As for the music, it only gives a caricatural tone to the whole venture. Yet somehow, fortunately, Margot Kidder and Ian Charleson manage to become more credible and sensitive by the last scene when, as an elderly couple, they save Bagatelle from the hands of a corrupt politician. This is undoubtedly the most touching moment of the film, and probably where the film should have started.

Directors Étienne Périer, Jacques Demy and finally Philippe de Broca succeeded one another in the production of the film, which certainly didn't make it easy for the actors or for the crew. The film's official co-production status faced strong opposition from both Canadian and French unions because no shooting was planned in Canada and certain technical positions were not clearly assigned to people of the official countries.¹ In the end, \$12 million were spent for a production that looks "international," neither French nor Canadian nor even American - a production that is so characterless that tries to be both a feature film and a 5-hour mini-series simultaneously, an exiled hybrid, never at home wherever it goes. Oh well, it remains to be seen how all this looks on television... that is, if anybody still cares.

Camille Gueymard ●

1/ See René Jeanneret's letter to Pete Legault in *Cinema Canada*, No 100, p. 17.



● Magnolia melodrama: Margot Kidder and Ian Charleson in *Louisiana*

LOUISIANA d. Philippe de Broca p. John Kemeny, Denis Héroux co-p. Gabriel Boustani, Nader Atassi sc. Charles Israel, Dominique Fabre, Etienne Périer, based on Maurice Benuziere's trilogy d.o.p. Michel Brault p. des. Jack McAdam cost. des. John Hay ed. Henry Lanoe p. man. Stéphane Reichel 1st a.d. Pierre Magny 2nd a.d. Jacques Methe unit man. Peter Bray p. acct. Kay Larham asst. cost. Louise Jobin ward. coord. Blanche Boileau ward. mist. Renee April ward. Luc LeFlaguais, Francesca Chamberland, Nancy Heck set dresser Linda Allen asst. set dresser Serge Bureau props. Gilles Aird asst. props. Marc Coriveau sp. efx. Thomas Fisher, Cliff Winger cont. Joanne Harwood make-up Suzanne Benoit, Josiane Deschamps, Joan Isaacson p. coord. Becky Horne

p. sec. Jodi Mauroner sp. make-up Stephan Dupuis hair Aldo Signoretti, Leslie Ann Anderson, Karl Wesson, Gaétan Noisieux cam. op. Al Smith focus puller Sylvain Brault loader/clapper René Daigle gaffer Jock Brandis best boy Frieder Hochheim elect. Ira Cohen key grip Johnny Daoust cam. grip Emmanuel Lépine grip Pierre Charpentier sd. rec. Richard Lightstone boom Jim Thompson stills Takashi Seida unit. pub. Katherine Moore sd. Richard Lightstone mus. Claude Bolling lp. Margot Kidder, Ian Charleson, Victor Lanoux, Andrea Ferreol, Lloyd Bochner, Len Carlou, Hilly Hicks, Raymond Pellegrin, Corinne Marchand, Ken Pogué, Larry Lewis p.c. Cine-Louisiana (ICC), Filmmax, Gaumont, Antenne 2, Films A2 dist. Les Films René Malo Inc. (514) 878-9181.

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