

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 "journal 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 Estévez, 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 Dandridge (Ian Charleson) exchange looks. How is Virginia going to get Bagatelle and the tall, blond Clarence Dandridge? 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*

