JOAN OF ARC
A FILM BY BRUNO DUMONT
OFFICIAL SELECTION
UN CERTAIN REGARD
FESTIVAL DE CANNES
Synopsis
In the 15th century, both France and England stake a blood claim for the French throne. Believing that God had chosen her, the young Joan leads the army of the King of France. When she is captured, the Church sends her for trial on charges of heresy. Refusing to accept the accusations, the graceful Joan of Arc will stay true to her mission.

Bruno Dumont’s decision to work with a ten-year-old actress re-injects this heroine’s timeless cause and ideology with a modernity that highlights both the tragic female condition and the incredible fervor, strength and freedom women show when shackled by societies and archaic virile orders that belittle and alienate them.

Joan of Arc
A film by BRUNO DUMONT

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Cast
Lisa Leplat Prudhomme, Jean-François Causeret, Daniel Dienne, Fabien Fenet, Robert Hanicotte, Yves Habert. With the kind participation of Fabrice Luchini and Christophe.

Crew
Director & Screenwriter: Bruno Dumont
Based on novels by: Charles Péguy
Music Composer: Christophe
Producers: Jean Bréhat, Rachid Bouchareb, Muriel Merlin
Line Producer: Cédric Ettouati
Cinematographer: David Chambille
Script Supervisor: Virginie Barby
Sound: Philippe Lecœur
Mixing: Emmanuel Croset
Editors: Bruno Dumont and Basile Béthuin
First Assistant: Rémi Bousier
Casting: Clément Morelle
Dialogue Coach: Julie Sokolowski

Make Up: Simon Livet
Hair: Clément Douel
Costume Design: Alexandra Charles
Set Designer: Erwan Legal
Location Manager: Edouard Suer
Still Photographer: Roger Arpajou

A 3B Productions. With the participation of Pictanovo and the support of La Région Hauts de France with the participation of the Centre National du Cinéma et de l’Image Animée. In association with CINECAP 2.

World Sales: Luxbox
French Distribution: Les Films du Losange

2019, 138 minutes, France,
Color 1.85 - 5.1 – French
Joan is the sequel to Jeannette and the two films form the adaptation of a play by Charles Péguy. Why tackle the subject of Joan of Arc through this writer?

While Jeannette was a film «in song», like a musical, Joan of Arc is a psychological action film with dialogue because it focuses on the debates of the Battles and the suspense of a Trial.

Charles Péguy is an author that I discovered quite recently and I was very impressed by his writing, especially its song-like aspects and musicality. When I first had the idea of making a musical, I was looking for the ideal text, so I naturally thought of him and his play, Joan of Arc, as a libretto. My previous film, Jeannette, was about Joan's childhood and was the adaptation of the first part of the play, which is called “Domrémy”. Joan of Arc is the continuation of it and adapts the other two parts: The Battles and Rouen. The literary complexity that can at times be attributed to Péguy no longer frightened me because the cinematic and musical adaptation allowed me to remedy it and establish an unprecedented balance: if what Péguy says is sometimes very deep and obscure, it is counterbalanced here by the cinematography of action, songs and music which make everything simple and easy to access, much lighter and with its power undiminished.

Péguy wrote a text that was precise in the field of ideas and very lyrical in its form, which with such cinematography could then be presented as it was, without renovicing or pretending, as if it kept both the rose and its thorns; so to speak. With Joan of Arc, I wanted to extend this ambition and this balance, that of all things, the natural bond of gentleness and ardour, that is to say without falsifying things, without dissolving them, without giving in to the clarion calls of popularization.

Then, in addition to the poet, I was also very interested in the philosopher in Péguy’s thinking. Beyond literary pleasure, there is an intellectual power, a very new way of thinking; in particular a rather dazzling comprehension of our modern world.

Behind the simplicity of Joan’s story lies something essential and true, without it being intellectual or cerebral, because, with Péguy, the background occupies the surface and, even if the surface is simple, it is still the natural expression of its depth. Joan of Arc is the expression and very thrust of this thought.
Joan of Arc means relating France. Timeless France. Representing the everything that is impalpable and secret. From this point of view, relating to be expressed through a story, a narrative, so that we can understand transfigure what is being played out and represent it. This always has where everything rests seems almost concealed by what the word. After all, we French too find them difficult to grasp. This common nucleus to express - surely because they are «knots» in the French family tree. All major questions related to the French Nation are very difficult themes France and the French: like her mystery. about what remains secret in the nature of beings and things, in this case of any hero - has a certain opacity, which says many things, deep down, on the other hand, it seems to me that the figure of Joan of Arc - like that of any hero - has a certain opacity, which says many things, deep down, about what remains secret in the nature of beings and things, in this case of any hero - has a certain opacity, which says many things, deep down, what makes this possible, what underlies this edifying power of the heroic narrative in general, and that of Joan of Arc in particular, is that in human history, according to Péguy, there is little or no progress. History is not linear, it is more like a spiral, a loop, a resumption, a repetition. Human life is a cycle, everything returns, like Nature in the perpetual cycle of its seasons. Evolution is, at the same time, mysteriously, a repetition. No progress, no salvation, therefore no bright tomorrows, only the present is worth anything. For Péguy, the mission of heroes is to reveal this incredible process.

The representation of Joan of Arc, in the many cinematic or theatrical adaptations, focuses on the perpetual development of this mystery and proves the need to «rethink» it. Heroes and their stories must thus be repeated and recalled to us, for the sole purpose of endlessly reminding us of the truths that we tend to forget. Their «present time», reiterates for the duration of their performance, in the cinema in this case, is the culmination of this mystery of which all of us, the audience, are part and parcel.

Joan gives a heroic dimension to what is buried and hidden. Joan bears a timeless truth that can solely express itself through a heroism: cinema carries out this incredible and dazzling manoeuvre of delight and knowledge. It is, strictly speaking, a form of mysticism setting in motion the sacred connections in a harmony in which the viewer is a participant and the cinema the framework.

Do how Joan of Arc go about talking to us today? Joan resonates strongly with us, she touches everything and everyone. Péguy has a natural penchant towards the quest for this timelessness; only the present is worth anything. For Péguy, the mission of heroes is to reveal this incredible process.

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I am particularly won over by the way the story mixes the intellectual and religious, the present and the past. For Joan, there is no «present time» - in the duration, in the «piercing brilliance» of the present. For Péguy, there is no «present time» - in the duration, in the «piercing brilliance» of the present. For Péguy, the mission of heroes is to reveal this incredible process.

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How do you go about prolonging this balance on film? Péguy is very cinematic. Therefore, he strongly believes in time - in the essence of Joan of Arc is that in the past, because through the representation of history, he touches a spiritual, socially, politically. To the very extremes, both right and left, stirring them around and reconciling them... have not many intellectuals of the 19th and 20th centuries and from all walks of life claimed her as their inspiration? Her aura is so vast. It speaks of everything: the Church, the King, nationalism, socialism, Earth, Heaven, war... For them and against them. She baulks in her obedience to the King, she baulks in her submission to the Church, but never compromises in her love of God and the mission to deliver France. It is a veritable holocaust of ideas and complex theological debates, in which I myself do not understand anything. Again, I find this in Joan, in Péguy and in my idea of cinema: relating things that are simple yet not devoid of depth and roughness. Let's not remove the thorns from the rose. How do you go about prolonging this balance on film? Péguy is very cinematic. Therefore, he strongly believes in time - in the essence of Joan of Arc is that in the past, because through the representation of history, he touches a spiritual, socially, politically. To the very extremes, both right and left, stirring them around and reconciling them... have not many intellectuals of the 19th and 20th centuries and from all walks of life claimed her as their inspiration? Her aura is so vast. It speaks of everything: the Church, the King, nationalism, socialism, Earth, Heaven, war... For them and against them. She baulks in her obedience to the King, she baulks in her submission to the Church, but never compromises in her love of God and the mission to deliver France. It is a veritable holocaust of ideas and complex theological debates, in which I myself do not understand anything. Again, I find this in Joan, in Péguy and in my idea of cinema: relating things that are simple yet not devoid of depth and roughness. Let's not remove the thorns from the rose. How do you go about prolonging this balance on film? Péguy is very cinematic. Therefore, he strongly believes in time - in the essence of Joan of Arc is that in the past, because through the representation of history, he touches a spiritual, socially, politically. To the very extremes, both right and left, stirring them around and reconciling them... have not many intellectuals of the 19th and 20th centuries and from all walks of life claimed her as their inspiration? Her aura is so vast. It speaks of everything: the Church, the King, nationalism, socialism, Earth, Heaven, war... For them and against them. She baulks in her obedience to the King, she baulks in her submission to the Church, but never compromises in her love of God and the mission to deliver France. It is a veritable holocaust of ideas and complex theological debates, in which I myself do not understand anything. Again, I find this in Joan, in Péguy and in my idea of cinema: relating things that are simple yet not devoid of depth and roughness. Let's not remove the thorns from the rose.
surpasses us but infuses us. However, it is necessary to find the right balance, to adapt to the modern world in which the audience lives, to seek a connection. When I choose Christophe, for example, to compose the score and perform a song, or when I choose young Lise Leplat Prudhomme, who is ten years old, to play a teenage Joan at the end of her life, all that is part of the links I forge with our present: seeking analogies and correspondences. The same goes for the trial, where the roles were assigned to academics, theologians, philosophy or literature teachers, all very much at home with this subject and already connected to it.

Can you tell us more about the choice of Christophe as the composer and his appearance towards the end of the film? To this general cinematic «orchestration», I wanted to add the clear line of melodies, rhythms and musical harmonies to further enhance the understanding and scope of the film. Music has subtle equivalents and nuances to difficult and superimposed places of thought. The collaboration with Christophe was extraordinary. He understood very quickly what I needed. He discovered Péguy on this occasion and his writing clearly inspired him.

The writer’s stanzas, rhythms, layers and repetitions seem predisposed to their musical metamorphosis and, therefore, close to the universe of a contemporary composer whose musical evolution is unheard of. Finally, Christophe wrote four songs, one of which he sings himself in the film. Its sound architecture mysteriously follows Joan’s heart all along, it is her song. It is extraordinary: the musical composition provides a sort of «knowledge» of what is happening in the story, a fine and contrasting sketch of the mysteries of Joan’s interiority.

Regarding Joan, you never use the word “myth”. Because I want to get as far away from that as possible! My goal is to «temporalize» the spiritual. To bring the icons down among us today. To show that Heaven is on Earth, that the sacred is not found in religious institutions but is present in the common things. I further «demythologize» the myth of the religious and institutional straitjacket to «re-mythologize» it in a cinematic representation, that is to say, to return it to its original state: it could be a means to return to the sacred, but with the sacred set where it should be, in Art. The proximity of Art and Religion says lot about what unites these two, the former probably being at the origin of the latter for it to have demanded to be part of it to such an extent.

I am a great admirer of Pasolini’s Gospel According to Saint Matthew, which puts the sacred exactly where it belongs: in the cinema. I think that the artistic experience is the source of the spiritual one and that, to achieve this, God is a very good character: a good story. Christ is very propitious, very favourable to cinema from this point of view! That is also why we should not distance ourselves too much from the religious trappings, it would be a shame: on the contrary, we should put God back in our theatre... In the cinema! Cinema can satisfy our deepest venerations and cinematic superstition is merely poetic, that is to say, it finally put back in its place. Like all art, cinema emancipates us and frees us from religious alienation.

The modernity of the film also comes from its transposition of this story. Joan’s theme belongs to a cinematographic tradition, with no less than thirty adaptions. My favourite Jeans so far, are those of Melies, De
for me, the most crucial thing is the form, the style, because that’s what connects the viewer to the content. With Joan, everyone knows the story and how it ends. The real question is how to adapt it, connect it and represent it nowadays. Through his repetitive style, Péguy immediately adapts it to the modern world: the modernity of the eternal mystery of human freedom... Here the mystery of Joan’s vocation, the mystery of the confusion of heart and the voices of Heaven... Personally, in cinema, I only believe in transposition. The cinematic reality is poetic. Joan is thus a sublimated form of the human soul which, before our eyes, struggles and fights in the excitements of existence. The heroine delivers us from what is at stake. Deep down Joan plays us, she works for us by examining our own mystery. That is the function of every hero.

The film does not seek historical accuracy.

Not at all. More a timeless accuracy. Although all the protagonists and facts are true, Péguy’s representations are true, that is the surface necessary for the plausibility of what will be played out. As the challenge for any representation is spiritual and interior, the historical background is secondary. Joan’s true existence only requires this historical plausibility, and facts related by Péguy are true, that is the surface necessary for the plausibility of what will be played out. The real question is how to adapt it, connect it and represent it nowadays. Another part of the action, for example, takes place in prison but I didn’t see any reason to literally illustrate it and I didn’t want to shut myself in to reproduce a legend. I want to create a kind of prison outdoors, in old blockhouses... For the cathedral of Amiens, which was very important to me but which could not be closed to the public, we created the set at an altar hidden behind a curtain, such as a chapel. I needed this space to move from the « savage » side of the dunes and the battlefield to the sacredness of the Trial, which was made possible by the Gothic verticality of the building that so tangibly expresses spirituality. I seek out places that talk to me, I do not want silent places that let me notice. Through persuaasion and patience, it is possible to find them.

The Battles and defeat of Paris are historical... The musical choreography represents the ritual and internal figures, the ecstasy and hallucinatory nature of any struggle. The choreography roots out « the round » of any confusion of the voices of her heart and the voices of Heaven...

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wonder about anachronism or historical truth. We are in a timeless world and the film is historically inaccurate. Everything is wrong, one might say. Because I only seek equivalences: Joan carries a timeless truth and I remain captivated by the power she can still deploy today, something that I did not measure before.

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Once again, transposition must operate for the work to serve its purpose. The heroine delivers us from what is at stake, here with blockhouses, there with a cathedral... The chemistry of a film is so paradoxical, contradictory, fanciful and true...

Fortunately, a combination of circumstances prevented the actress who played Joan as an adolescent in Jeannette from resuming the role that had indeed been reserved for her. But the idea of casting Lise came as a revelation. When we saw screen-tests how she looked in armour, we understood that she mysteriously had something extraordinary, a unique expression of childhood and innocence, as a trace of what is intangible and permanent in each of us... The treasure sought, which already «rang out» in Péguy’s work.

The chemisty of a film is so paradoxical, contradictory, fanciful and true...

In one stroke, the little girl resonates with our modernity. Her small size undermines all our expectations; it is in contradiction to all our prejudices; deep down, she has the proportional size of our childhood, a childhood that, in life, remains the foundation of every human soul... forever. We can feel it when faced with the little actress. We mysteriously know this. The cinema transports it.

The girl is extraordinary, very powerful, and on the set many adults were clearly awed to perform with her for all these reasons even if they could not comprehend our reasoning. Moreover, this recalls the Flemish paintings that I love so much, those paintings from the Middle Ages where, in the days of Joan, painters from the North were already strangely altering figures, creating smaller, miniaturized characters in comparison to others. Thus, the play of proportion exists in the quest for perspective and truly works in representation. Like portraying it in a dot or square, or even in an abstract manner. Then, the alteration of the figures alone could relate to the whole quest of the history of representation. Wasn’t the disproportion abstract manner... Then, the alteration of the figures alone could relate to the whole quest of the history of representation. Wasn’t the disproportion... The film delivers us from what is at stake, from what is being played out. The real question is how to adapt it, connect it and represent it nowadays.

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Charles Péguy says somewhere that we are all twelve years old. Definitely. Subsequently, it is the little child inside us who sees himself getting older. When I go to the movies, I’m twelve years old and there’s always this little guy inside me who’s watching.

What would be your strongest point in common with Joan?

Her ordinary appearance, no doubt. Her earthly aspect, without looking to heaven. Then her will and determination. Hope incarnate. Joan, said Bernanos, is the wonder of wonders. She lambasts. Joan lambasts institutions and everything created by them. She draws attention to the malignancy of dogmas and dogmatism and their reasoning. She stands before people who are always there to tell us who is «damned» and who is «chosen». Behind these Catholics, Péguy is targeting all sectarians. Sectarians remain and are an abomination of thought. No matter what Joan says, she will be condemned. Her prosecutors are engaged in a brilliant and acrobatic display of hypocrisy. Although they remain human, as the film shows, they are totally corrupted by their institution and dogma, which make them capable of sending a child to the stake in a logical manner. I find that this produces very current and contemporary resonances with the discourse of all those who believe or claim to hold a truth and judge blindly according to it. There is no progress, human history is an endless interpenetration of evolution and repetition. Human nature is always the same, the human battle is continuous, there is nothing behind us that would have been resolved once and for all. So human life is exhilarating.

In addition, Joan is a woman. A small woman, certainly, but no matter how small she is, she also speaks of a woman’s own substance. Her germination.

Joan’s loneliness is very striking. Could it resemble that of the filmmaker?

It is the loneliness of the condition of human existence taken to its fulness. I have never seen a woman love so much a woman! Joan does not represent someone but something. Something unimaginable within us and that seems transfigured here in the guise of Joan and the medieval landscapes.

This represents, let us say, not so much clarity but clarification. For us, Joan, here, is a clarification, taken to its peak.

All this theatre always takes place in our hearts.

Interview by Olivier Séguret

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Bruno Dumont is a French film director. To date, he has directed several feature films, all of which border somewhere between realistic drama and the avant-garde. His first feature film La vie de Jésus was selected at Directors’ Fortnight. His films have won several awards at the Cannes films Festival. Two of Dumont’s films have won the Grand Prix award: both L’Humanité (1999) and Flandres (2006). The only other director who has twice won the Cannes Grand Prix is Andrei Tarkovsky. Dumont’s Hadewijch won the 2009 Prize of the International Critics (FIPRESCI Prize) for Special Presentation at the Toronto Film Festival. In 2016, Slack Bay, starring Juliette Binoche and Fabrice Luchini, was presented in Competition at the Cannes International Film Festival. The year after, Jeannette, a musical adaptation of Charles Péguy’s writings about Joan of Arc, is selected in Cannes’ Directors Fortnight.

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**Biography & Filmography**

Bruno Dumont
Christophe (MUSIC COMPOSER)

Christophe is a French singer and composer whose recording career spans several decades. In 1965, its famous song “Aline” gave him worldwide recognition and success. At the beginning of the 1970’s, he starts to work with the young Jean-Michel Jarre on his cult album Les Paradis Perdus, very influenced by the British and American artists such as Pink Floyd and Lou Reed. His next albums Les Mots Bleus (1975) and Succès Fou (1983) are true consecrations for Christophe, whose concerts are all sold out. Since the 1980’s, he is dedicating his time to his juke-boxes and rare albums collection as well as his passion for cinema. After composing the music for George Laurnier’s Road to Salina in 1967, Christophe worked several times on film’s soundtracks. In May 2019, he released a new album called “Christophe etc.”

Charles Peguy

Born in Orléans in 1873, Charles Péguy was a writer, a poet and an essayist, a unique talent in French literary landscape. Intellectually committed, he did not fit the models of his time: at first a socialist and a libertarian, he did not agree with his party’s pacifism and internationalism, then a fervent catholic, he aroused mistrust of the Church. His work, strongly influenced by medieval mysteries (The Tapestry of Our Lady), was traversed through by mystical figures like Joan of Arc (Joan of Arc and The Mistery of the Charity of Joan of Arc). Through his work and poetry, Péguy restored their nobility to Christian and National values – notably in Eve, a poetic fresco to the glory of French soldiers – and warned against modern drifts – in Money among other works. Long forgotten after he passed way at war in 1914, Péguy is today rehabilitated by Right-wing and Left-wing French intellectuals, both claiming his invaluable inheritance.

JOAN OF ARC is based on “Rouen” and “Les Batailles” (1897) by Charles Péguy.
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