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PAUL AND PAULETTE TAKE A BATH

A film by Jethro Massey
2024 / United Kingdom / 109 minutes

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LOGLINE

A young American in Paris meets a girl with a morbid curiosity for the darker sides of the city's history.

SYNOPSIS

An unconventional romantic comedy about a young American photographer and a French girl with a taste for the macabre. Paul & Paulette's chance encounter on a Parisian boulevard sparks an unusual friendship that grows around a dark game; reenacting scenes of notorious crimes from bygone eras at the sites they occurred. For Paul, the game is a way of getting closer to Paulette. For Paulette, it's a way of escaping a painful break-up with her girlfriend, and of processing her own inherited trauma. As their morbid road trip approaches the more recent past it becomes more uncomfortable, blurring the lines between reality and fantasy, but finding a surprising joy in the darker corners of humanity.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE
By Jethro Massey

I came to Paris just after the 9/11 attacks, a young man dreaming of a life in cinema. I played a game with new friends, recreating the race on the bridge from Jules et Jim. Below my tiny flat, Bertolucci was filming *The Dreamers*. I'd stop each day to watch the lights, the old cars, a boulevard taken back in time to the 1968 riots. Little did I know that those dreamers were playing the same game as me; theirs was a homage to *Bande à Part*.

We watch films to swim in the lives of others. With our game, we wanted to take that impulse further, to immerse ourselves completely in those stories. But it's an impulse that has a dark side. What does our taste for tales of pain and murder say about us?

This film was inspired by a famous photo of Lee Miller, in the intimacy of the room where we brush our teeth, where we see ourselves naked in the mirror. It was the horror of the name associated with that particular room that provoked a cognitive dissonance in me, a question I had to explore.

INTERVIEW WITH JETHRO MASSEY

How did Paul and Paulette Take a Bath begin?

I was doing some writing on another project, and a photo popped up on a friend's Facebook feed of this chap – a friend of mine – in Winston Churchill's bathtub. He'd done a selfie there, it reminded me of the famous photo of Lee Miller in Hitler's bathtub, taken on the day that he committed suicide. She was in his apartment in Munich. There's something really disturbing about the intimacy of a bathroom, the place where you see yourself naked in the mirror, where you brush your teeth, but it being Hitler's bathroom. And then my friend's fascination, wanting to show himself in Winston Churchill's bathtub, really got me thinking about the way a place changes when you tell a story about it, and a sort of celebrity fascination, that I think we all get, but don't think about much... And that was the birth of an idea of these characters that go to places where terrible things happened and recreate those scenes and try and find the little details in those sites, events and lives. There's something unsettling about our fascination with these kinds of places, our human nature for car-crash rubbernecking, our attraction to true crime and historical tragedies... It felt like fertile ground to explore, something I wanted to try to understand a little better.

When did you start writing?

I started writing the script at the beginning of 2020 just before Covid, and then during Covid, I put it down. My head was in a different space. I picked it up again in April 2021 I went to Istanbul for a few weeks with my laptop to disconnect from the world, and create the time and space for myself to finish the story. In November 2021, I nailed my colours to the mast. I put a post out on Facebook saying, 'I'm making a feature film, casting starting tomorrow.' And that was my way of making sure I did it. Because once I said to the world, 'I'm doing this', I'd have to see it through. The potential for shame and embarrassment is a great motivator for me. That, and a sense of responsibility to other people when I ask them to put their time into one of my projects. We started shooting in early July 2022. It was a six-week shoot.

You've lived and worked in Paris, making shorts and music videos among other things, for a long time. Did that help you here?

Oh, absolutely. I mean, there's a lot of locations that we got that are quite hard to get. Things like the Conciergerie...they don't usually let people film in Marie Antoinette's cell... She's such an important figure in France, and there's a lot of controversy around her; Royalists and Republicans still fight over how her story should be told. And her cell is considered a place of respect for the dead, so they don't let people shoot fiction in there usually... they'll only occasionally let a documentary crew in. But I managed to have a chat with them and say, 'Well, listen, it's a fiction, but really, we're just treating it like it's the museum that Paul & Paulette are visiting.' It was the same thing with Père-Lachaise. They very rarely let people film in there, they get so many requests, and again, it's a place of respect for the dead, but because it was part of the script, the Communards Wall is in the cemetery itself, they saw that it was an essential part of our story, and let us in. Knowing the ins and outs of filming in Paris was useful...it's tricky in terms of permits sometimes. The parks' authorities are tough. But I know what the issues are. I know to get in touch with them two months ahead, send them the script, be ready for a bit of bureaucratic back and forth. All of those things. Getting permission to film in a church is similarly a bit difficult in the centre of Paris, especially with

the scenes we were filming, but there was a beautiful one just outside of the city, much more amenable to shooting.

What was that casting process like?

I was really lucky to find Marie [Benati] and Jérémie [Galiana]. For Paul, I wrote him as an English character, in the beginning, it made sense to do my search for Paul in the UK as it's only a short hop over from Paris. I used all the usual platforms that one uses when putting casting announcements out for small indie films. It's amazing how many incredibly talented actors there are out there, looking for good parts to get their teeth into. For Paul, I looked through all the casting sites in Paris too, but of all the showreels of bilingual actors in France I could find, Jérémie, a French-American actor, was really the only one who I thought might work, I wrote to him, said 'Are interested in reading the script?' And he said, 'Yeah, sure.' I sent it to him, and he didn't get back to me until about three or four days before we were doing our last screen tests. I was bringing over three or four guys from London who were all super talented, but Jérémie said, 'I read the script, I like it.' And I said, 'Okay, well, it's a little late, but let's meet for a coffee tomorrow.' I think I knew straight away that it was going to be him when I met him. It was an easy rewrite to have an American Paul rather than English one. Marie was terrific from the start, she just came in during the first round of casting and owned the room and the character so beautifully. Again, we saw lot of great actors, but she stood out head and shoulders above everybody else as the right person to play Paulette. And then when I saw Marie and Jérémie together it was perfect. Marie was doing her walking-whirlwind Paulette, and Jérémie was so attentive to all she was doing, really listening to her, asking us to look at Paulette through Paul's eyes...

How do you see Paul and Paulette's relationship evolve? What do they get from each other from recreating these moments in history?

I wanted to write a story that centred the characters' friendship over their romantic involvement with each other. I don't think there are enough films about friendship. Paul comes from a position of the naïve outsider. He arrived in Paris with dreams of being something and the reality isn't quite as rosy as he thought it would be. And Paulette...she's obviously got a taste for these dark things. Paul is drawn to that when he sees it. I knew they had to bring something to each other, and I knew that there was something there that was driving Paulette all along the way, as we find out in the film. We externalise the things that we don't necessarily want to talk about; the game is a way for her working through her own personal trauma. For Paul, he's drawn to this strange game, and the darkness of it. But mostly, he's drawn to Paulette, and probably would follow her into any game. The balance of the relationship changes a little bit along the way. Paulette realises that she's got a bit of an ally in Paul, somebody who's open and accepts her for who she is. And of course this complicates her emotions, she's not used to trusting other people... She's using the game to work through her own things. Paul's using the game as a way of getting closer to her, but ultimately he's going to learn that his infatuation isn't the most important thing in this relationship.

How did you choose the historical moments you selected?

The Marie Antoinette scene came pretty early on; this girl walking five steps, getting on her knees, lifting her hair, repeating the exercise... That was an obvious place for a foreigner to meet a French girl with morbid sensibilities, my starting point. And then I spent quite a bit of time just reading up, looking for objects and places... Working out how I'd take them

from there to Hitler's bathroom. I built a deck of cards of French historical tragedies. I realised quite quickly it would be interesting for the games to follow their real chronology, knowing that the closer they got to recent events, the more uncomfortable things would become. I suspected that for some people, they'd be crossing the line when they get to Hitler's bathtub, but it might be elsewhere for other people. I did juggle a couple of things a little, in a way that took the characters from one place to the next more naturally, and so that it felt like they were upping the stakes a little each time.

What about the ending at the Bataclan? Were you nervous about including this?

I didn't have the ending in the Bataclan apartment immediately, but once that fell out onto the page, it was just obvious that's where it had to go, because that's where you know everybody's going to feel like 'He's gone too far.' You put it down on the page, and then you think, 'Shit.' It has to be this. But there's a responsibility that comes with it. Living in Paris, you know people who were there, friends, or friends of friends. One of the apartments we filmed in was on the same street as the restaurants that were attacked that day. I hope we walk the line of treating it with respect and sensitivity. It's where Paul realises he's gone too far...that's important of course. So far, we had a little cast and crew screening and the Parisian audience reacted well to it. I shared the scene with a lot of friends during the writing process. How do you show it? How do you show the impact? When they pass the building, we cut to the aftermath, the flowers on the street... Unlike the rest of the sites the characters visit, Paul visiting the apartment was the one place we didn't cut to a photo. In the apartment, it had to be something else. And that ended up tying in with some of the other ideas. I knew we'd be using these sound effects, the click of a camera to cut to the photos. The click of a camera can be a violent thing, especially when observing tragedy, the voyeurism of it... Taking someone's pain, and making it permanent for others to see... The sound of the camera transforming to the sound of guns at the end, it seemed like the right way to say, 'We're not going to just look anymore. We're going to feel it. This is something emotional, something real.'

Can you talk about the costumes? They are so vivid on screen...

My costume designer Joanna Wojtowicz, she's from the vintage, retro world in Paris. I wouldn't say I move in those circles, but I'm adjacent to them. They're good friend that I hang out with a little, friendships based in a deep respect for each others work. They've helped me out a lot with music videos and short films. And Joanna's from that world. She's got an incredible eye for costume, colours, materials. And everything married together well, the locations, the costumes, the colours... I think Joanna had more trouble dressing Paul. She told me that for inspiration, she had to Google 'basic straight white male'!

How did you aim to shoot Paris?

It's just my vision of Paris. Why would I shoot the mobile phone stores and the cruddy chain cafes, when there are so many beautiful cafes and great streets? And of course, the story lends itself...it takes us to Père-Lachaise cemetery, and it takes us to the Human Zoo, they're great locations. And then the other thing I'll say is that Isarr and Marius, the DoPs, they're really good at pushing me. I might come to them and say, 'Listen, I've got a great apartment to shoot in' and show them pictures. And they'll go, 'I think you can do better' and that's so important, because when you're shooting without a lot of money, decent cameras and a good set of lenses are one thing. But really the thing that's going to make it look good is having great locations. We were looking for locations eight months in advance, trying to

find those apartments, banging on doors of estate agents saying, 'Have you got anything available that's really decayed, that we might be able to shoot in in a few months?' And that's how you find the Bataclan apartment...just finding those old traces of where the paintings or photos were hanging on the walls, and you just go, 'Yeah, that's got life in it.'. Walls that have history...

Can you talk about your music choices for the film?

Marc Tassell is a good friend. I met him years ago. He's an Englishman who's been in Paris for 40 odd years. He's a painter, musician, a handyman and painter-decorator, he has two business cards, one reads "Brilliant all-rounder", the other reads "Everybody loves me". Cheeky, but both work because they're true. He wrote all of the songs in the film (11 or 12 in total), apart from *Thieving boy*, and The Motels' track *Total Control* at the beginning. He had sent me some of his songs around the time we met, 10 or 12 years ago, I found them really weird and interesting and very poetic. The second I had the idea for Paul and Paulette, I knew his music would be right for the film. I went to his house and I said, 'I'm writing a film. Here's a hard drive. Can you put everything you've ever written onto it?' So I wrote the script with his songs in my earphones. And those songs really worked their way into the fabric of the film. You see him performing in the cabaret scene. Even the third song in the cabaret scene doesn't sound like the rest of his tracks...it's actually from another one of his bands that he played with in Paris, a disco electronica track called *Love Fight*. His work walks that line of darkness and poetry, and at the same time, it's fragile. It's very homemade, like our film, so it just felt right. Here's an interesting detail that shows just how 'handmade' everything was, I mentioned Marc was a painter and decorator. He built Hitler's bathroom for us, based off of the Lee Miller photo. He built it single handedly, with a budget of a few hundred Euros, over the course of a couple of weeks while we were shooting. I should also mention Julien Decoret who composed the original soundtrack, all the music that doesn't have lyrics in it. I've been working with him for quite a few years. He did the music on a few of my short films. He's got a couple of great bands, Joon Moon, and Acoustic Resistance, that I directed music videos for, he always has a few great projects on the go, he moves between different genres, always driven by a very pure passion for music. One of those people you can't help but love collaborating with.

BIOGRAPHIES

Jethro Massey - Writer & Director

Jethro Massey is a British-French filmmaker based in Paris. He's drawn to the poetic and the absurd, and loves digging up the past to investigate the world around him today. He studied Russian, hitchhiked from Moscow to Vladivostok then moved to Paris to start his career, a journey that has taken him from the backstage of the Bolshoi to the deepest villages of the Mali filming with tribal shamanic clowns. In 2015 he founded Film Fabric, a London-based production company, for whom he has produced and directed over 300 commercial films, in over 30 countries, for some of the world's leading brands. His short films and music videos have travelled the festival world, picking up a few shiny objects along the way for their aesthetics, storytelling and originality.

FICTION FILMOGRAPHY

2024 *Paul and Paulette Take a Bath* (producer, writer & director)
Feature fiction, 108 minutes, 4K, prod: Film Fabric

World Premiere at the Venice Biennale as part of the Settimana Internazionale della Critica

2020 *Never Apply Salt to Attract a Potential Lover*
(producer, writer & director)
Short fiction, 21 minutes, 16mm, prod: Film Fabric

Winner of "Best Silent Film" at FIC Silente (Mexico), "Best Comedy" at ISAFF (St Petersburg), "Best Production", "Best Original Score" "Best National Film" at the Metropolis Film Festival (Italy) "Best Italian Short" at the Assurdo Festival (Italy), amongst other awards. The film has been an official selection at the Festival de Film Court en Plein Air à Grenoble, and 30 other festivals.

2020 *Madame Grenier's Toaster* (producer, writer & director)
Short fiction, 16 minutes, 16mm, prod: Film Fabric

Winner of "Best Comedy" and the Critics Choice Award at Harrogate Film Festival (UK), "Best Actress" at Cours, Charlie, Courts (France), "Best Film" at Movie Toast (USA), one of four finalists selected from over 6000 films for the China International New Media Short Film Festival KingBonn Awards, official selection in numerous other festivals.

2017 *Trauma industries* (co-producer, writer & director)
Short fiction, 13 minutes, 35mm, prod: Film Fabric & Local Films

13 awards (including "best short film", "best science fiction film", "best cinematography", and "best director"), selected for over 80 festivals worldwide.

Jérémie Galiana (Paul)

A franco-american actor, Jérémie trained as an actor at the national conservatory for dramatic art in Berlin. Jérémie played the lead opposite Souheilia Yacoub [*Dune 2, Climax*] in Wajdi Mouawad's acclaimed play *Tous les Oiseaux*, a multilingual production which was awarded the prestigious Grand Prix de la Critique award in France. He is currently starring in Mouawad's *Racine carré du verbe être* at La Colline National Theatre in Paris, which, after incredible reviews and a sold out three month run looks set for similar success to *Tous les Oiseaux*.

In film and TV, Jérémie played a supporting role in *Alla Vita* (Where Life Begins), written & directed by Stéphane Freiss, he appears in the TF1 series *Unit 8200* directed by Dan Sachar, in Gilles Graveleau's first feature film, *La Startup*, and in an upcoming feature directed by Julian Radlmaier shooting this August.

Paul & Paulette take a bath is his first lead role in a feature film.

Marie Benati (Paulette)

Primarily a stage actor, Marie has appeared in numerous theatre productions in Paris, such as *Independence Iowa*, *Cyrano de Bergerac*, *les Fourberies de Scapin*, *le Prince de Hombourg*, *Jules César*, among many others. As a theatre director, and co-founder of the Collectif Nuit Orange, she has directed *Les Justes* by Albert Camus, *Le Misanthrope* by Molière, *La Maladie de la Famille M* by Fausto Paravidino and is working on *Bérénice* by Racine in a bilingual French-Arabic version. Her feature film credits include supporting roles in *Les Chapentiers de Babel* (dir. Paul-Anthony Mille), and *Presque* (dir. Bernard Campan & Alexandre Jollien).

Gilles Graveleau (Gilles, Paulette's father)

Gilles is known primarily in France for his role in Alexandre Astier's cult series and feature film *Kaamelott*, playing Rorparzh alongside Serge Papagalli. Aside from his extensive stage experience, he also appeared in and directed episodes of *Homme Femme Faits Divers*, and won numerous acting awards for his role in *Joss*, a short film which he wrote and directed. *La Startup*, his first feature film as director is currently in post-production

Fanny Cottençon (Charlotte, Paulette's mother)

A star of French cinema since she started working with François Perrin in the early 80s, she won the César for best actress in a supporting role for her performance in Pierre Granier-Defferre's *L'Étoile du Nord*. Her hundreds of film, TV and théâtre credits are too many to mention here, but a few highlights include playing alongside Roland Giraud in *Tant qu'il y aura des Femmes*, with Pierre Richard in *À Gauche en Sortant de l'Ascenseur*, and with Catherine Frot in *Ça reste entre nous*. More recently, she has appeared in the M6 series *Scènes de Ménages* alongside Thierry Lhermitte, and now plays a regular role in the series alongside Didier Bénureau.

Laurence Vaissière (Valérie)

Laurence Vaissière is a French actress. Born in France, she grew up in the Netherlands and trained for the theatre in London, New York and Paris, where she is currently living.

Her career has taken on an international dimension, with performances in a cabaret in Norway, the prestigious Champagne Comedy Club in Paris, and has been working in London with Narah T. Coelt and with Jethro Massey in France. She is developing a one-woman show about the tyranny of happiness and invisible violence.

Margot Joseph (Margarita):

Margot Joseph is a 34-year-old actor based in Paris since 2018. Her cultural heritage includes Greek-Georgian ancestry from her mother and Armenian roots from her father, with a proud Assyrian lineage from her great-grandmother.

Margot trained for three years at Cours Florent and two years at the Laboratoire de l'Acteur. She has a background in Armenian national dance and has continued her artistic development with movement and physical theatre courses in Paris. In addition to performing in several Shakespearean plays in English in Paris, Margot recently starred in her debut cinematic work, *Paul and Paulette take a bath*.

CREDITS

Written, Directed & Produced by

Jethro Massey

Cast

Marie Benati
Jérémie Galiana
Laurence Vaissière
Fanny Cottençon
Gilles Graveleau
Margot Joseph

Cinematography

Isarr Eiriksson, Marius Dahl

Editing

Julien Chardon

Music

Julien Decoret
With songs by Marc Tassell

Sound Design

Christophe d'Ornellas
Olivier Leroy
Xavier Thibault

Costumes

Joanna Wojtowicz