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Entertainment : Film & TV : Interviews

François Ozon

11 May 2006

François Ozon has created a clutch of critically acclaimed films that effortlessly switch between differing styles and genres. The musical murder mystery *8 Women*, psychological thriller *Swimming Pool* and the story of a disintegrating marriage *5x2* are just three films from a diverse back catalogue by a director who is still young enough to be considered a fresh face.

Ozon's new film, *Time To Leave*, follows the final three months of Romain's life as he comes to terms with terminal cancer. Rachael Scott caught up with Ozon and chatted about his most personal film so far.

Time To Leave is the second part of a trilogy about death, so what was your inspiration for making three films linked to the subject of death?

My own death maybe? No. I'm very interested in people's behaviour when they're confronted with death. To see how they deal with it, try to accept its reality and how sometimes they try to escape it. *Under the Sun* was about the difficulty of accepting that people you love can disappear. This time I wanted to make a film about my own death.

Romain (played by Melvil Poupaud) came across as a selfish person because he didn't tell his family or his partner he was dying.

Is it selfish to do that? I think it's unfair to die so young and his behaviour is a way of reacting to what's happening. But would you do the same thing in his place? I don't know. It depends on your family relationships I think. For him it's more important to be at peace with himself than his family.

It made me question what I would do if I was in the same situation. I asked some of my friends and they all said they would tell their family.

They would tell them?

Yes. I was thinking that maybe I wouldn't. I think it would be quite difficult to accept everybody else's pain as well as your own.

Exactly. I think there was so much of his own pain that if he had to feel guilty for his parents' as well then it would be too much. But actually it's selfish, you are right at the same time, because when they do find out they will feel guilty and maybe it's a way for him to have a kind of revenge.

The whole story is very unsentimental and unmelodramatic.

Because the character is afraid of his feelings and he's not really able to express them. It's the opposite of an American character who cries all the time, where everybody says, 'I love you' before he dies. For me it's more interesting to show this type of character because it's closer to reality.



It's very idealised to imagine that we are able to say exactly what we feel before we die. It's sad, but it's true.

You didn't make him into a typical hero.

No. At the beginning he's not very sympathetic and at the end I think you can like and understand him even if you don't share his reactions.

"It's very idealised to imagine that we are able to say exactly what we feel before we die. It's sad, but it's true."

I think it was easier to like him because he was so good looking and his beauty made his illness less painful to watch.

Yes. I didn't want to make a film about disease and that's why there are hardly any scenes in the hospital. I wanted to show that it's not a scandal, it's a reality we have to accept and at the end he smiles when he's dying.

When Romain says goodbye to his father he looks down towards his father's mouth. I sensed something erotic there. Was that intentional?

It's good that you felt ambiguity, because that's what I wanted. I think Romain has mixed feelings towards his father and I wanted to show that in his father's eyes. I wanted to show that his father doesn't know how to react when his son touches him. I think Romain understands that his father is embarrassed and he realises that he won't be able to tell him what's happening.

Why did you decide to include memories of him as a child?

Because I think when you're going to die your childhood comes back to you. I thought the young boy had a strong face and I wanted to give the audience the opportunity to imagine their own childhood and to imagine themselves in the same situation.

You don't cast men as your lead character very often, usually you work with actresses. Do you find it easier to work with women than men?

Yes, because I think actresses are cleverer. Sometimes with men it's more difficult. I think the great actors are men who accept their femininity and some actors want to fight with the director. Making a film with a female character is a way for me to have distance from the character.



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With men it's more difficult because I feel I'm in front of a mirror and I don't want to look at myself.

"Things are not only white or black, there are many different possibilities in life to change yourself and to change your sexuality."

You've been accused of being misogynistic. How have you responded to that?

I think it was maybe because of one of my first films, *See the Sea*. The film won a prize at the New York Gay and Lesbian Film Festival and it was about two women. One of them is a killer, she's not very feminine, and I think all the lesbians thought it was a film about lesbians, but it was a film about killers. They were very upset because I won the prize and some people said I was misogynistic. But I think it's a false image when you see all the films I've made, but I do love very mean women in my films.

How easy or difficult was it for you to persuade Catherine Deneuve and Fanny Ardant to have that kiss in *8 Women*?

No problem. They loved to do it because they understood it was important for the film, they had a lot of fun and they are big fans of each other. They were both François Truffaut's lovers.

A lot of your characters are sexually fluid. They may start the film being straight and end it bisexual. What are your thoughts behind the sexual re-orientation of your characters?

I think my films speak about identity and people who are searching for their own identity because they don't know exactly who they are. During the film they make a kind of journey and by the end they know themselves better.

I like to begin with a character who is 'A' and at the end is 'B' or 'C'. I want to show that we can change because of different situations. Things are not only white or black, there are many different possibilities in life to change yourself and to change your sexuality.

Your films constantly challenge certain taboos and break them, so where do you get your love for the dark side of human nature?

I think movies are like a therapy for me so I need to go to the dark side to help myself. It's cathartic to explore these kind of situations. I would like to make some films about happiness or beauty, but I need to do darker things first.

"I think the great actors are men who accept their femininity."

A way to be able to experience those things, but without actually doing them?

It's a way to experience things, to imagine myself in different situations. But Fritz Lang said that if he hadn't been a director he would have been a killer, so maybe films help me not to kill people.

Do you have an idea for your next film?

Yes. It's a period movie.

And the third instalment of the death trilogy?

No, not yet. One day if I find the strength to make it because it's a very challenging subject.

Read our review of [Time To Leave](#) and our interview with [Melvil Poupaud](#).

Time To Leave opens in the UK on 12 May 2006

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Time To Leave [2006]

Label: Artificial Eye

Released: 25 September 2006

ASIN: B000GQMM1S

Buy the DVD of [Time to Leave](#) online and save yourself some money to put towards some other gay drama - films like [Juste Une Question D'Amour \(Just a Question of Love\)](#), [Love is the Devil](#), [Ethan Mao](#), [Slutty Summer](#), [Happy Endings](#), [Latter Days](#), [Eating Out](#), [Regular Guys](#) and [Cowboys & Angels](#).

Author: Rachael Scott

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