



FESTIVAL DE CANNES
2019 OFFICIAL SELECTION



OH
les FILLES!

A FILM BY
FRANÇOIS ARMANET

CAST

JEANNE ADDED
JEHNNY BETH
LOU DOILLON
BRIGITTE FONTAINE
CHARLOTTE GAINSBORG
FRANÇOISE HARDY
IMANY
CAMELIA JORDANA
ELLI MEDEIROS
VANESSA PARADIS

WITH THE VOICE OF CLÉMENTINE POÉSY

CREW

Director..... FRANÇOIS ARMANET
Script..... FRANÇOIS ARMANET and BAYON
Cinematography..... GUILLAUME SCHIFFMAN,
ROMAIN CARCANADE, NICOLAS BORDIER
Editing..... FABRICE ROUAUD
Sound..... FRÉDÉRIC DE RAVIGNAN, RÉMI DARU
Sound Editing/Mixing..... GUILLAUME SOLIGNAT
Documentation..... VÉRONIQUE DUVELLE
1st Assistant Director..... MELISSA PHULPIN
Executive Producer..... FRÉDÉRIC BRUNEEL
Associate Producer..... ALEXIA DE BEAUVOIR
Production Managers..... THIERRY CRETAGNE, BERTRAND SOUPEY
Production Coordinator..... ADRIANA TEOFANOVA
Post-production Manager..... LAURENT CANOVA
Production..... INCOGNITA
In coproduction with..... ARTE FRANCE CINÉMA, INA
In association with..... A PLUS IMAGE DÉVELOPPEMENT 7,
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INCOGNITA presents



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OH LES FILLES!

A FILM BY
FRANÇOIS ARMANET

PRODUCED BY **ÉDOUARD DE VÉSINNE**

FRANCE • COLOR • 1H19 • 5.1 • 2K - 1,85 • VISA N°147 817

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What if French Rock were born with Edith Piaf? From sweet sixties pop to today's gender-indifferent anthems, from feminist rebels of the seventies to fashion icons of the social media age, from Françoise Hardy to Christine & The Queens, via Vanessa Paradis, Catherine Ringer, Charlotte Gainsbourg and many more, Oh Les Filles! tells the untold story of French female rock stars.

Narrated by Clémence Poésy, this groundbreaking documentary combines interviews and iconic footage to radically reverse perspectives and give the patriarchy a kick!

Welcome to France, the land where women rock! ■





The rumble of a turboprop plane in a stormy sky, a Cerdan uppercut, the débris of a Constellation, a little black dress. On October 28, 1949, the plane carrying Marcel Cerdan, the «Moroccan bombardier,» toward his beloved Edith Piaf in New York City crashes on the Azores. That evening, Piaf weeps for her boxer-lover as she launches into *Mon Dieu*.

If history book date the birth of rock'n'roll to Elvis's Heartbreak Hotel in 1954, this universal plea sung by Piaf, the Belleville diva, is the baptismal act of rock passion. Everything that has made rock the music of the century is there: bluesy lament, love at first sight, a scream in the night. Body and soul broken in *Rien de rien*, the gloriously sublime *Emportés par la foule*. A *Hymne à l'amour* that is all woman, love and death.

Now French rock lives up to that claim. The up-and-coming artists are women. In an age of transgender questioning, obscurantism and sexist terrorism, they are a wind of politically charged *Vie en rose* blowing up a gale. From Piaf to the new generation of cultural figureheads, a new light shines on the history of the genre.

The only voices to be heard in *Oh les filles!* are those of women—ten iconic French singers from the 60s to the present day: Françoise Hardy, Brigitte Fontaine, Elli Medeiros, Vanessa Paradis, Charlotte Gainsbourg, Imany, Jeanne Added, Lou Doillon, Jehnny Beth and Camélia Jordana.

Alternating interviews with these history-makers and incandescent gigs, all tied together by the voiceover of Clémence Poésy, *Oh les filles!* turns the tables and plays on the reversal of perspectives. Welcome to the land of the *rockeuses!* ■

INTERVIEW WITH FRANÇOIS ARMANET AND BAYON BY SERGE KAGANSKI

Serge Kaganski – For a long time, rock was a guy thing. By focusing on women in your film and broadening the definition of rock, were you aiming to shatter the cliché, retrace the importance of women in popular music and chart the gradual increase in their power in parallel with the spread of feminism?

François Armanet – It started with producer Edouard de Vésinne asking me to make a film about French rock after he saw the documentary on background singers, *Twenty Feet From Stardom*. I immediately thought of my old friend Bayon. When I started at *Libération* in 1981, there were two figureheads: Serge Daney for movies, and Bayon for music. Bayon put rock into a daily newspaper for the first time in France. We go back a long way, as they say, and have a very solid connection. We started by wondering what angle to bring to this history of French rock. There are our musketeers—Bashung, Manset, Christophe, Murat—and we prowled around those names before we had the idea of taking the female angle. It was more original, and the female scene nowadays is way more interesting than male rock.

SK - Did Me Too also play a role in that choice?

Bayon – We had the idea way before the Weinstein affair, but by the time we were ready to shoot, the Me Too tornado had blown through. Actually, we soon thought that Me Too could help the movie. Our initial idea did not have a Me Too angle, just an appreciation of female rock. We wondered if rock might not be more interesting seen from a point of view that nobody has ever used before. The point was to silence a certain kind of French rock to allow another, less conventional voice to be heard. Female rock'n'rollers seemed a good vector for that.



Photo © Sonya Serr 2019 - Incoercible Films - ARTE France Cinéma - INA

SK – You have opened rock out to every category of popular music, along the lines of the music pages in *Libération*, which soon broke down barriers between anglophone rock and French-speaking pop.

FA – Our slightly provocative starting-point was a question: what if it wasn't Elvis who invented rock'n'roll, but Edith Piaf in 1949 when her lover, middleweight champion Marcel Cerdan, died? When she sings *Mon Dieu*, it is a scream in the night, an absolute sonic shock, universal gospel, blues...

B – And a major happening. According to legend, this song was written for Piaf earlier in the day by Charles Dumont, her lover. Cerdan dies and that evening she sings her incantation to the heavens. There is a dramatic break that is very rock'n'roll and brings to mind the release of *Heartbreak Hotel* by Elvis. Like Elvis, Piaf produced a sensorial shock that created a before and after. Moreover, one of my obsessions is to convince the authorities to convert the house where Piaf was born in Belleville into a French Graceland.

SK - Piaf inventing rock'n'roll is both a legitimate and arbitrary theory, which coincides with that of US critic Nick Tosches, who

says rock was not born with Elvis, but died with him. He says that the golden age of rock was the 1930s-40s with bluesmen and r'n'b singers performing in segregated places outside of the white mainstream entertainment industry and the general public's view.

B – We might add Willy DeVille, who says that rock'n'roll is a French invention because it comes from *bourrée* and *rigodon*, exported across the Atlantic by the Acadians, and subsequently mutating in the swamps of Louisiana in contact with the blues.

FA – It's all about the French Indians, the so-called Balajo Apaches! To ground the film in the legacy of Piaf is not such an exaggeration. In the chorus of women that we chose for this film, there is an obvious resonance between Piaf and Camélia Jordana, and between Barbara and Jehnny Beth. Everything stems from a mindset or urge where connections are made quite naturally. In the light of that mindset, you immediately see what's rock and what isn't. Françoise Hardy is rock.

SK - The film shows the evolution of showbiz as reflected by evolutions in society. Following this thread, the singers evolved from being manipulated puppets through a process of gradual empowerment. One might inflect that kind of preconceived narrative by suggesting, for example, that the Gainsbourg-Birkin couple may have symbolized male domination but it was first and foremost a mutual love story and a shared artistic success.

FA – The film does not make things out to be black and white. Lou Doillon is very clear when she says she grew up surrounded by strong, independent women, who all devoted their lives to men. When she saw Catherine Ringer from Les Rita Mitsouko or Muriel from Niagara on TV, it was a shock. Suddenly, it wasn't a woman behind a man, but a woman equal with a man, or even in front of him.

B – In production, I was very keen to eradicate any trace of masculinity, so the Gainsbourg clips were an annoyance. I wish we wouldn't have shown even one male drummer but, of course, that was impossible, so I watered down my demands. Savages, Jehnny Beth's group, is an all-girl band. They are amazons. That was perfect.

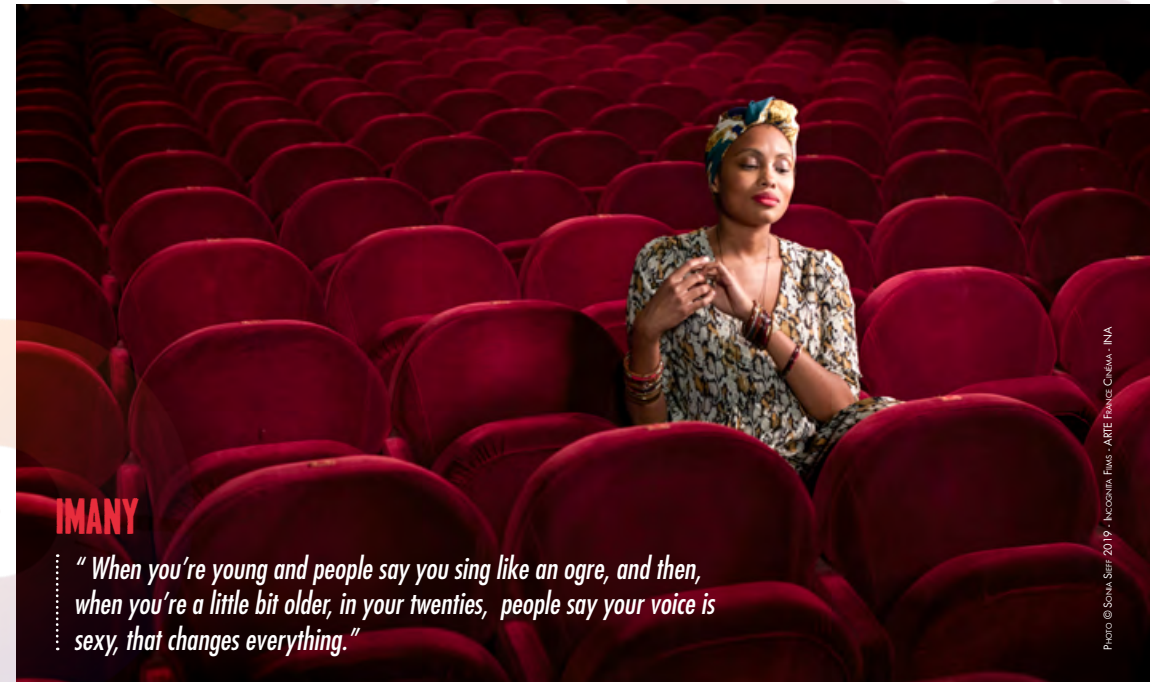
FA – The film questions the meaning of feminine, feminism and gender issues. We started out exploring the emotion and impact of the music and

we wound up transfixed by the power of their words. We got a real schooling. Beauvoir wrote, «Individually, feminism is a way of life; collectively, it is a combat.» All our interviewees embody that magnificent line in their own way. They question the transformation of so-called male values into so-called female values and vice-versa, and they put men in their place.

B – The structure of the film turned out to be unpredictable. The main lesson we learned is that the interviewees structured the film by giving it an opening onto something else. On stage, they invent a third way, a sort of human replicant that is a hybrid of masculinity and femininity, which escapes all the constraints and conventions of the genre. Girl or boy, who cares! If the music's got it, if the gig's a blast, gender is not an issue. In that respect, they made the movie.

SK – **The androgynous, queer third way has always existed in rock, if one casts one's mind back to Little Richard, Mick Jagger and David Bowie, but it was always driven by men.**

FA – Historically, we have gone from female performers, coached by men, to women who control every aspect of their persona, no longer defining themselves in relation to men or gender clichés. There were a lot of unplanned connections between contributors to the film. Each interview was



IMANY

"When you're young and people say you sing like an ogre, and then, when you're a little bit older, in your twenties, people say your voice is sexy, that changes everything."



BRIGITTE FONTAINE

"On stage, you must stand out. You must have a distinct silhouette. I wore very tight clothes and shaved my head. It stood out. I don't like the word woman. I prefer chick or female. Signing the pro-abortion Manifesto of 343 Sluts was a no-brainer. I nearly died at each abortion."

one-on-one, and they all took place over a period of several months, but what they said resonated in the words of other interviewees. Unscripted, they each added a few brushstrokes to complete the big picture.

SK - One striking similarity is the complexes they had when they started out: Françoise Hardy thought she was too androgynous; Charlotte Gainsbourg regretted looking more like her father than her mother; Lou Doillon was in awe of her older sisters; Imany was told she had the voice of an ogre...

B – It's a spectacular dimension of the film. The staging of the interviews, dreamed up by François, with us out of shot and the women in full frame, overexposed, and so on. That created an extraordinarily productive tension because they say way more than we could have hoped for, going back to their origins and exploring how they built themselves up. And they talk about things without affectation or artifice. It's very moving. Jeanne Added recounts how, by multiple twists and turns, evasions and confrontations, she became who she is, neither man, nor woman. If audiences take away from it as much as we did, that will be wonderful.

FA – We should point out that the interviews took place in places selected for their importance in the interviewee's career: Camélia Jordana at Le Bataclan, Jeanne Added at L'Elysée Montmartre, and so on. It was important to find ourselves in a location that was silent but haunted by music and its vibrations. Music is always there, even in the silence and invisibility off-camera.

SK - We could perhaps end on Brigitte Fontaine, who marvelously and humorously blows up all the codes, including those of feminism...

FA – Especially as she provides a superb conclusion to the film.

B – She reasserts the fundamentals. Rock is a big «fuck» to the world, against your parents, social order, and good manners. Don't try to understand because you never will.

FA – The film begins with Edith Piaf singing about death and ends with death singing. Brigitte only cared about the performance part. Talking pissed her off. She performs accompanied by Yann Péchin, Bashing's phenomenal guitarist, and as she herself says, «I have died several times and come back to life. So fuck you.» The lyrics of the track she sings are «Fuck love, fuck death. And words, shut the fuck up.» That's the end of the film. ■



VANESSA PARADIS

“Doing a concert gives me the impression of being the captain of a liner, commanding a huge ship on stormy seas. You need to keep it together so that everyone, even the sea, comes out of there, saying, ‘Wow, what a trip!’ »



PHOTO © SAVA SEIFF 2019 - ANZOVINA FILM - ARTE FRANCE C4444 - INA



JEANNE ADDED

“Rock. No frills. Clear, strong and precise, without ornamentation. I'm not into knots in the hair.”

PHOTO © TOKYO/CLOUTIER - DR



LOU DOILLON

“What I like most about rock, and the English language, is that you can forget gender. You don’t need to say if it’s about a boy or a girl. I feel like it was also a way of showing on stage that you could cover songs by boys.”

Photo © Soha, Sep 2019 - Inconnus Films - ARTE FRANCE



ELLI MEDEIROS

“Music saved me because it allowed me to process everything that was painful. Instead of something destroying me, it passed straight through me toward someone else, and that can help others.”

Photo © Soha, Sep 2019 - Inconnus Films - ARTE FRANCE - INA



JENNY BETH

"When I started singing, I had a tiny voice. I developed a more powerful voice toward the age of 18. I took opera classes and heard a voice for the first time that was powerful, strong and rooted. My teacher told me : "It's a voice that could conquer the world." "

Photo © Soana Sati 2019 - Incontro Fius - ARTE FRANCE CHINA - INA

CAMÉLIA JORDANA

"I have a singular, rasping voice that provokes radical reactions. Either people are touched by it or repulsed. Either way, it has an impact on them."



Photo © Soana Sati 2019 - Incontro Fius - ARTE FRANCE CHINA - INA

CHARLOTTE GAINSBURG

"I think I'm masculine. I had a sense of not conforming to my parents' standards of beauty. It was a burden. I could be ugly or pretty. On stage, I can only be myself. I can't hide behind a character. I enjoy it more and more."



Photo © Soana Sati 2019 - Incontro Fius - ARTE FRANCE CHINA - INA

FRANÇOIS ARMANET

A contributor to *Libération* since 1981, and chief editor from 1998-2002, and to *Le Nouvel Observateur* (1989-1998 and 2002-2019).

Author of the first encyclopedia of kung-fu movies (*Ciné King Fu* (1988) with Max Armanet) and organizer of the first two retrospectives that La Cinémathèque Française devoted to Hong Kong cinema (1990, 1997).

Writer-director of *La Bande du Drugstore* (Berlin Festival, 2002).

BAYON

Journalist (rock-books-film) at *Libération*, since 1978, founder of the Music Section (1981), editor of Arts pages (2010-2014).

Author of bestselling *Gainsbourg raconte sa mort* (1991) 850,000 copies sold.

Author of numerous books, including *Les Animals* (Interallié Prize, 1991).

