

MK2 FILMS PRESENTS



FESTIVAL DE CANNES
2024 OFFICIAL SELECTION
CANNES CLASSICS

FOUR NIGHTS OF A DREAMER

A FILM BY
ROBERT BRESSON

1970 – FRANCE – DRAMA – NEW 4K – FRENCH – 82'

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FILMS

SYNOPSIS

In Paris, Jacques saves Marthe from a fateful leap off the Pont-Neuf. As they open their hearts, they agree to meet each other again. Over the course of four nights, Jacques finds himself falling deeply. But what does Marthe think about Jacques?

After decades away from the silver screen, Robert Bresson's romantic FOUR NIGHTS OF A DREAMER is finally back in a newly restored 4K version. Considered as the French master's most accessible and most personal work, this poetic and dreamy exploration on love and fantasy is a must-see for any film lover.

The restoration was made by mk2 Films
under the supervision of Mylène Bresson,
at Eclair Classics (Paris) and L.E. Diapason,
with the support of the Centre national du cinema et de l'image animée (CNC)

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

"To say that it's an adaptation doesn't do justice to the film. It's a far cry from being a mere adaptation. Strangely, this is my third or fourth adaptation (...). This time, I went much further in forgetting what we've read and instead focusing solely on the momentum provided by the reading. (...) I completely eliminated literature when it comes to the boy's love. Whenever I can strike out dialogues, I replace them either with an action or a gesture. How can a boy in love confide his feelings to the wall of his room or to the street? It was through the open tape recorder, repeating the name of the one he loves. (...) On the other hand, there's something I attached great importance to, which is the girl's love for her tenant, her mother's tenant (...) this love is born through a partition wall, it doesn't arise from having seen the tenant. Maybe if she had seen him, she wouldn't have loved him at all; it was born in her imagination. In other words, she ends up making love with someone she has never seen because for months, she heard that person, she imagined him. And that's something that isn't in Dostoevsky.

Of course, I kept the essence of it because he (the boy) is so lovely in Dostoevsky, maybe that's not the right word, so interesting and true, deep and right. He's someone who doesn't dare to approach women and suddenly comes across a woman he can approach, and naturally, he falls in love instantly. But he holds back his love, he can't tell her. The girl, sensing that there's a love there, doesn't want it because she's still in love with someone else, whom she hopes to see again, and she does everything she can to embarrass him. In the end, this love becomes an illusion. The film's hero indeed takes it for an illusion. It's one of the most tragic endings I've ever created, perhaps too ambiguous for people, but extremely tragic for me (...).

I don't want any theatricality in the gestures, I don't want any theatrics in the words. Words, for me, don't have the same function as in theater. (...) Words and gestures are the very essence of theater. For me, they're not the essence ; they're provocateurs. And the essence of films for me is what these words and gestures provoke."

From *Les arts du spectacle*, February 9, 1972

ABOUT 'FOUR NIGHTS OF A DREAMER': AN INTRODUCTION

It would be wrong to reduce Robert Bresson to stark minimalism. The French director, who has won several Cannes awards (*A Man Escaped*; *The Trial of Joan of Arc*; *Money*) and who died in 1999, created a blazing piece of work, focused on the textures of voice and bodies. *Four Nights of a Dreamer* is a melancholic exploration on failed love and confirms Bresson's intense and romantic style. This rare film, created by the adored and yet discreet filmmaker (13 features in 40 years), is finally on view. It'll no doubt delight cinemagoers around the world.

In his book *Notes on the Cinematograph* published in 1975 in France, Robert Bresson wrote: 'Let feelings lead to events, and not the other way around.' This injunction may come as a surprise coming from a filmmaker often described as being a formalist. Despite its presentation at Cannes's Directors' Fortnight in 1971, *Four Nights of a Dreamer* wasn't available to watch for a long time, which brought it the status of a 'cult' film. Bresson's Socratic approach is, on closer examination, a melody of bursting emotions. It is inspired by Fyodor Dostoyevsky's short story *White Nights*, and embodies all of the voluptuousness of Bresson's cinematography, both in the moral and aesthetic sense. As is often the case with him, the story revolves around the obsession with love (*Pickpocket* and *Mouchette* are two great tales of passion). On a winter's night, in Paris, Jacques (Guillaume des Forêts) prevents an unknown woman (Isabelle Weingarten) from jumping into the river Seine. They meet up the following evening in the same place, the legendary Pont-Neuf. Night after night, Marthe opens up about the heartache which has soothed the idea of death to her; Jacques, a dandy painter belonging to a different era, tells her about his painful romantic reveries. Using flashbacks and ellipses, Bresson captures the daily accounts of these two lone souls, diluted in their own time and city.

PARISIAN BLUES

Right from the opening sequence, Bresson flays the idyllic image of the capital as the lover's cradle. The City of Light becomes a catalyst for the melancholy of its characters. The dim foggy Pont-Neuf and thick Parisian nights are fractured with colourful signs and the blurry lights of the Bateaux-mouches riverboats. Rarely has Bresson's stripped-down direction so gracefully touched on pictorial pointillism with such vivid chromatic range. This evanescent aesthetic is largely due to the work of Pierre Lhomme, the outstanding DOP, who went on to make another film about idle youth two years later, *The Mother and the Whore*, by Jean Eustache. The later was a great admirer of Bresson, giving actor Jean-Pierre Léaud's character the line: 'I like a woman, for instance, because she's acted in a film by Bresson'.

Just like an abstract painter, Bresson choses to present his actors in their environment, embracing outdoor spaces; he who has so often used enclosed spaces, the crushing verticality of doors and frame within a frame (*A man Escaped* is the perfect example of this). He invents new forms and delights in creating visual rhymes between enclosed spaces and the city. Jacques' multicolored paintings are somewhere between abstraction and figuration. Not only do these reflect his ambiguous relationship with the world (choosing to represent fantasy or reality?), but they echo the city's impressionist lights. Paris is of interest to Bresson, only as an emotional canvas.

FRAGMENTS OF A LOVER'S SPEECH

Four Nights of a Dreamer encapsulates brilliantly French writer Stendhal's concept of the crystallization of love. Jacques and Marthe fantasize about an idealized person in the hope to lay their fingers on a dreamlike perfection that will bring meaning to their lives. Bresson distills hints of this duplicitous world in his direction, but without ever mocking his characters. It isn't without reason that the river Seine, with its blue reflections, becomes the backdrop of their discussions. A distorting mirror in which their sentimental illusions are crushed. It isn't without reason either, that Bresson, a stickler for breakdowns, adds fleeting glances to create movement within fixed frames. These movements underline the pattern of an unstable and cruel desire. Pleasure is taken from the glare of others, to be seen and desired, love becomes an intoxicating and dangerous ritual.

But these characters aren't entirely fooled by this game of love and chance. It is apparent in Bresson's use of sound, which he considered as important as images. Instead of giving Jacques a classic voice-over, Bresson has him record dry monologues on a voice recorder, which he listens to repeatedly. And in the style of writer Marguerite Duras, the voice becomes alien. It puts heightened emotions at a distance, rather than immersing us into a tormented psyche. This process is unique to Bresson: overlaying both the emotion and its analysis. With Bresson, 'I love you' is said tonelessly, stripped from any acting to better reach the essence of an emotion or body, and to touch its intensity.

THE BODY, AN OBSCURE OBJECT OF DESIRE

The awareness that love is an illusion, this desperate romanticism, doesn't dampen the film's eroticism. Instead, it is fed by an underlining drive for life that can be found for example in the sensuality of the nude scene, unsettling because of how it emerges amidst such sparseness. Marthe removes her nightgown in front of a mirror while we hear Marku Ribas's (who plays the guitarist on the riverboat) haunting song *Musseke*. Bresson mostly films her looking at herself from behind or at an angle, with barely noticeable up/down panning motions, in a half-light which suggests rather than is revealing. For what's at stake here isn't the intrusion of an outside gaze on this body, a voyeuristic intrusion, but rather the character's discovery of her own lust. All of a sudden, her hands and legs seem to mutter in ripples on her skin, that she is a being of pleasure.

'Life must not be rendered by a photographic reproduction of life, but by the secret laws in the midst of which we can sense models move' writes Bresson in his *Notes on the Cinematograph*. These 'models' are none other than the young actors chosen by Bresson. He intentionally wears them down through endless takes to drain their energy and attain a ghost-like presence. Paradoxically, in *Four Nights of a Dreamer*, this atonal depersonalization results in something very sensual. Marthe's physical epiphany is matched only by the impassive features on her face; Bresson's way of expressing the almost Christ-like solemnity of this sensual discovery. Far from being an exercise in style or a stance, Bresson's pared-down approach is a place where things blossom. When he films at length Jacques looking through the window at something off-camera, Bresson is saying: faces are unfathomable landscapes; one must take the time to examine them in order to discover their secrets.

Léa André-Sarreau, TROISCOULEURS, 2024

THEY TALK ABOUT 'FOUR NIGHTS OF A DREAMER'

On November 11, 1971, before the premiere screening of *Four Nights of a Dreamer*, director Robert Bresson said in the interview with *Le Monde*: "As sad as the current decline of films may be, we realize that cinema continues to shine and that through it — quite paradoxically and I do not know how — the somewhat tiring arts could embark on a new achievement."

In 2024, *Four Nights of a Dreamer* is back to cinema in a newly restored version. After the past three years of pandemic, this somewhat tiring world greets the film in Cannes. Half a century has passed by, and this film is still shedding a light...

Jia Zhang-Ke, May 2024

*"Who am I? What am I? Nothing but a dreamer,
Having lost the blue of my eyes in the fog,
And I loved you, to be honest,
Only as I did everyone on earth."*

Sergei Yesenin

When speaking about Robert Bresson's films, one must resort to poetry, for Bresson's films are essentially poems.

"Four nights of a dreamer"
It's a film about the mystery of love,
How accidental an object of desire is,
How time aggravates the pain of longing,
How overwhelming the appeal of one's dream is,
How to see is to be blind; and how to be blind is to see.
It's about red, white and black.
It's about moments
Disappearing in the abyss of eternity.
Metaphysics of love.

Sergei Loznitsa, May 2024

Translated from Russian by Maria Choustova

THEY TALK ABOUT ROBERT BRESSON

"I can pinpoint the exact moment when my cinematic sensibility was galvanized: in April 1969, when, as a film critic, I saw Robert Bresson's *Pickpocket*. *Pickpocket* went from my mind to my heart. It was as if my soul had been deflowered. Strangely, Bresson "delivered" me... I discovered that films could be both spiritual and profane. I was finally free to enjoy both."

Paul Schrader

"Bresson is a genius. Here I can state it plainly — he is a genius. If he occupies the first place, the next director occupies the tenth. This distance is very depressing."

Andrei Tarkovsky

"No one has the precision of Bresson. We can talk about Hitchcock all day as far as leading you the viewer, but Bresson has this elliptical storytelling method. He's one of that special handful that created their own cinematic language and answered to it their whole cinematic career. "

Richard Linklater

"He's an incredibly dynamic filmmaker. I learn a lot every time I watch one of his films. There's a cheap dynamism that you can easily get thanks to the many technological advances, but with Bresson, there's a real dynamism that rests on the most basic relationship between image and sound."

Martin Scorsese

"After every screening of a Bresson film, there was this sensation of limpidity, mixed - since I was now making my own films - with a little jealousy. That someone could achieve such perfection in a film! For me, Bresson is one of the giants of cinema of the last fifty years. Maybe even the only one."

Agnieszka Holland

"What men have done up to now with poetry and literature, Bresson has done with cinema. One might think that, up until him, cinema was parasitic, it proceeded from other arts, and that with him we entered pure cinema."

Marguerite Duras

"I would never have survived in this God-forsaken world without M. Bresson's realistic lies, for which I will always be grateful until I die - and afterwards."

Aki Kaurismäki

CAST & CREW

CAST

Marthe	Isabelle Weingarten
Jacques	Guillaume des Forêts
Marthe's Lover	Jean-Maurice Monnoyer
Marthe's Mother	Lidia Biondi
The Visitor	Jérôme Massart
The Gangster	Patrick Jouané

CREW

Direction & Screenplay	Robert Bresson
Photography	Pierre Lhomme
Editing	Raymond Lamy
Music	F.R. David, Louis Guitar, Chris Hayward, Michel Magne
Sound	Roger Letellier
Production	Albina Productions, I Film Dell'Orso, Gian Vittorio Baldi
International Sales	mk2 Films

ROBERT BRESSON - FILMOGRAPHY

1982 – MONEY (L'ARGENT)

Cannes 1983 Best Director, NYFF 1983 Official Selection, National Society of Film Critics 1984 Best Director Award

1977 – THE DEVIL PROBABLY (LE DIABLE PROBABLEMENT)

Cannes 1977 Directors' Fortnight, Berlin 1977 Silver Bear, Interfilm Award, OCIC Award

1974 – LANCELOT OF THE LAKE (LANCELOT DU LAC)

Cannes 1974 FIPRESCI Prize

1971 – FOUR NIGHT OF A DREAMER (QUATRE NUITS D'UN RÊVEUR)

Berlin 1971 OCIC Award, Cannes 1971 Directors' Fortnight

1969 – A GENTLE WOMAN (UNE FEMME DOUCE)

Cannes 1969 Directors' Fortnight, San Sebastian 1969 Silver Seashell

1967 – MOUCHETTE

Cannes 1967 Special Jury Prize

1966 – BALTHAZAR (AU HASARD BALTHAZAR)

Venice 1966 Jury Prize

1962 – TRIAL OF JOAN OF ARC (PROCÈS DE JEANNE D'ARC)

Cannes 1962 Special Jury Award, OCIC Award

1959 – PICKPOCKET

Berlinale 1960 Competition

1956 – A MAN ESCAPED (UN CONDAMNÉ À MORT S'EST ECHAPPÉ)

Cannes 1956 Best Director, BAFTA 1958 Nominee for Best Film from any Source

1951 – DIARY OF A COUNTRY PRIEST (JOURNAL D'UN CURÉ DE CAMPAGNE)

Venice 1951 OCIC Award, BAFTA 1954 Best Foreign Actor Award

1945 – THE LADIES OF THE BOIS DE BOULOGNE (LES DAMES DU BOIS DE BOULOGNE)

1943 – ANGELS OF SIN (LES ANGES DU PÉCHÉ)

1934 – PUBLIC AFFAIRS (AFFAIRES PUBLIQUES)

ABOUT PIERRE LHOMME (PHOTOGRAPHY)

In the 1950s and 1960s, the evolution of lighter cameras and budget constraints led to the merging of framing and lighting responsibilities under a single director of photography, creating a new artistic role.

Pierre Lhomme quickly became a prominent figure in this emerging role. His work on the subtle nighttime contrasts in *FOUR NIGHTS OF A DREAMER* (1971), the tenth film by master director Robert Bresson, garnered significant attention. This exceptional work earned him a role on Jean Eustache's *THE MOTHER AND THE WHORE* (1973), a film that left a lasting mark on French cinema. The making of this film was a noteworthy achievement, featuring an unusual ratio of shooting time to film duration and a delicate balance between complete improvisation and meticulous control over the script and staging.

Pierre Lhomme also collaborated with other renowned filmmakers, including Jean-Pierre Melville, Jean-Paul Rappeneau, Marguerite Duras, and James Ivory. He received two César Awards for Best Cinematography, one of which was for his work on Bruno Nuytten's *CAMILLE CLAUDEL* (1988). His influence was significant in the film industry during that era, contributing to the visual and artistic landscape of French cinema in the pivotal years of the 1950s to 1970s.

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