SLACK BAY

(Ma Loute)

A film by Bruno Dumont

France / Germany, 2016, 122 mins, Scope 2.35, 5.1

Official Selection, Competition, Cannes Film Festival 2016

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SYNOPSIS

Summer 1910. Several tourists have vanished while relaxing on the beautiful beaches of the Channel Coast in Northern France. Infamous police inspectors Machin and Malfoy soon gather that the epicentre of these mysterious disappearances must be Slack Bay, a unique site where the river Slack and the sea join only at high tide.

There lives a small community of fishermen and oyster farmers. Among them there is a curious family, the Bruforts, renowned ferrymen of the Slack Bay, led by the father called “The Eternal”, who rules as best as he can on his mischievous bunch of sons, especially the impetuous 18 year old Ma Loute (as his family refer to him).

Towering high above the bay stands the Van Peteghems’ mansion. Every summer, this bourgeois family – somewhat hampered by inbreeding – stagnates in the villa, but not without the occasionally meeting during their leisure hours of walking, sailing or bathing, with the ordinary local people, Ma Loute and the other Bruforts.

Over the course of five days, starts a peculiar love story between Ma Loute and the young and mischievous Billie van Peteghem. Confusion and mystification will descend on both families, shaking their convictions, foundations and way of life.

After *P'tit Quinquin,* the latest film by Bruno Dumont finds once again its inspiration in slapstick comedy, at turns bleak and funny, with the most amazing cast of French actors whose performances take the film to another level.

Further information, links and downloads at newwavefilms.co.uk

CAST

André Van Peteghem	Fabrice LUCHINI
Aude Van Peteghem	Juliette BINOCHE
Isabelle Van Peteghem	Valeria BRUNI TEDESCHI
Christian Van Peteghem	Jean-Luc VINCENT
Billie Van Peteghem	RAPH
Ma Loute Brufort	Brandon LAVIEVILLE
Malfoy	Cyril RIGAUX
Nadège	Laura DUPRÉ
The Eternal (Brufort Father)	Thierry LAVIEVILLE
Gaby Van Peteghem	Lauréna THELLIER
Blanche Van Peteghem	Manon ROYÈRE
The Brufort Mother	Caroline CARBONNIER

CREW

Screenplay, dialogues, direction	Bruno DUMONT
Producers	Jean BRÉHAT
	Rachid BOUCHAREB
	Muriel MERLIN
Co-producers	Thanassis KARATHANOS
	Geneviève LEMAL
Line producers	Muriel MERLIN
	Cédric ETTOUATI
Post production supervisor	Cédric ETTOUATI
Director of photography	Guillaume DEFFONTAINES
Script supervisor	Virginie BARBAY
Editing	Bruno DUMONT
	Basile BELKHIRI
Sound	Phillipe LECOEUR
Sound mixer	Emmanuel CROSET
Sound editing	Romain OZANNE
Costume supervisor	Alexandra CHARLES
Art designer	Riton DUPIRE-CLÉMENT - ADC
Make-up	Michèle CONSTANTINIDES
	Jana SCHULZE
Hair stylist	Mathieu GUERAÇAGUE
Casting	Clément MORELLE
	Catherine CHARRIER
First Assistant Directors	Marie LEVENT
	Aurélia HOLLART
Location manager	Julien BOULEY
Stills photographer	Roger ARPAJOU
Produced by	3B PRODUCTIONS
In coproduction with	TWENTY TWENTY VISION FILMPRODUKTION & PALLAS FILM
	ARTE FRANCE CINÉMA
	WDR/ARTE
In association with	MEMENTO FILMS DISTRIBUTION
	MEMENTO FILMS INTERNATIONAL PICTANOVO
	LE FRESNOY
	STUDIO NATIONAL DES ARTS CONTEMPORAINS
	COFINOVA 12
	CINEMAGE 10
	SOFICINEMA 12
	SCOPE PICTURES
With the participation of	CANAL+ CINE+ ARTE FRANCE CENTRE NATIONAL DU CINÉMA ET DE L'IMAGE ANIMÉE
With the support of	LA RÉGION DES HAUTS-DE-FRANCE IN PARTENERSHIP WITH LE CNC MITTELDEUTSCHE MEDIENFÖRDERUNG MEDIENBOARD BERLIN-BRANDENBURG GERMAN FEDERAL FILM BOARD TAX SHELTER DU GOUVERNEMENT FEDERAL BELGE

BRUNO DUMONT – DIRECTOR

Biography

Bruno Dumont was born in Bailleul, in the North of France, in 1958. He studied and taught philosophy before writing and directing films.

Often working with non-professional actors and mostly filming in the Calais region where he lives, he has, to date, directed eight feature films and a TV series, all of which mix dark realistic drama with a work on the forms of cinema. His feature films are *La vie de Jésus* (1997), *L'Humanité* (1999), *Twentynine Palms* (2003), *Flandres* (2006), Hadewijch (2009), Hors Satan (2011), and *Camille Claudel 1915* (2013). *L'Humanité* and *Flandres* were both awarded the Grand Prix at the Cannes Film Festival, while *Hadewijch* won the FIPRESCI prize.
P'tit Quinquin (2014) was Dumont's first foray into TV series and into comedy. Dumont has since been working on a sequel.
Slack Bay / Ma Loute, is his latest feature film, presented in official competition at the Cannes Film Festival in 2016, and a further investigation of comedy by one of France's most original filmmakers.
Since *Ma Loute,* Dumont has been working on a musical comedy on the early years of Jeanne d'Arc, called *Jeanette* and set to be finished in 2017.

Filmography

La vie de Jésus */ The Life of Jesus* (1997)

L'humanité */ Humanity* (1999)

Twentynine Palms (2003)

Flandres */ Flanders* (2006)

Hadewijch (2009)

Hors Satan (2011)

Camille Claudel 1915 (2013)

P'tit Quinquin (2014)

Slack Bay */ Ma Loute* (2016)

Director's Notes

After *P'tit Quinquin*

I wanted to make a comedy, without finding the right note, the right tune. I put this idea on one side for a long time; I made some other films, tackled some other genres. Then Arte asked me to direct a series. I had a free hand to do whatever I wanted, so I decided to embark on a cop comedy, but in my own, somewhat experimental way. I had the intuition that the drama had to drive the humour. So I started with what I knew how to do, what I was familiar with, adding a burlesque, even grotesque dimension. The success of *P'tit Quinquin* gave me confidence, and I wanted to prolong this experience in the cinema, making the most of the narrative and pictorial advantages offered by the big screen. I wanted *Slack Bay* to be both cinematographic and deeply funny. I also wanted to move visibly further away from the supposed naturalism that people have always conferred onto my work.

Memories of Slack Bay

While I was looking for a comic story that could take place on the Côte d'Opale– the region I know well and where I live – I came across some old postcards, in particular some showing the "Passeurs de la baie de la Slack", the local folk who ferried middle-class people from one bank of the Slack river to the other at the start of the 20th century. That was the starting point of *Slack Bay*, what triggered everything: the Bruforts on one side, the Van Peteghems on the other, the love story, and the mysterious disappearances. When I started on the screenplay, I filled in the gaps between these postcards. Unlike *P'tit Quinquin*, which I wrote without knowing if it would be clearly funny, I was now aware of what I was doing, of the comic power of the situations I was thinking up. Comedy supposes a machinery, a mechanism of immediate effectiveness; it is less incantatory and is different to drama, and thus more difficult to create.

The challenge of a period film

The story unfolds in the course of summer 1910. The start of the 20th century marks the emergence of the bourgeoisie, of industry, capitalism, and therefore class struggle. We are dealing with a founding narrative, a primitive film about our age. As spectators today, we know that this world will be turned on its head, that World War I will break out four years later. For the first time, I had to recreate a landscape that has disappeared. The postcards of Slack Bay from that time helped in this. Since the story quickly goes off the rails, I wanted a setting that embodies this folly. I remembered the Typhonium in Wissant, a house built in a neo-Egyptian style at the end of the 19th century, itself a "folly". I wrote the screenplay with that residence in mind. The owners were reticent about welcoming a film shoot. At first, they refused, but then agreed a year later. We filmed the exteriors at the Typhonium, and the interiors in another house that is just as whimsical, dreamt up by some English people in a Tudor style. The final composition of the sets is thus truly fanciful, but not without being drawn from the real.

Light of the past

Filming in digital allows you to go further than 35mm, but the grain of the image doesn't necessarily help for filming the past. Today's spectators have an image of the past – or at least what they think the past looked like – and you have to take that into account so they can believe what they see on the screen. In this case, I wanted to find the colours and warmth in the image corresponding to the time of the narrative. As a reference, I thought about the Lumière brothers' *Autochromes*, but at the same time I didn't want to slip into imagery. It was all a question of balance between the present and the past. Digital also brings hyper-definition to the image, instilling a sort of hyperrealism on this picture of a bygone age, a genuine modernity which, to some degree, gives it the feel of a very current story.

The roots of burlesque
My primary cinematographic reference point was Max Linder, with his sensibility as a French comic with a bourgeois appearance, a little awkward, which is, after all, contemporary with the action in the film. I also looked at the work of Laurel and Hardy, whose physical comedy I particularly like, the bungling, trips and pratfalls. The duo made up of Inspector Machin and his deputy is on exactly the same lines, in terms of their physique: the little guy and the fat one, their clothing, the black suit and bowler hat, on top of which Machin is always falling over, rolling about, even flying through the air. What's more, all the characters in the film are falling over and tripping up, before bouncing back, or even rising up in the case of Valeria Bruni-Tedeschi in the miracle scene. It's throwback filmmaking in the sense that the first films were farces and comedies that often put a comic twist on situations or actions belonging to bourgeois culture.

The deliberate blurring of genres
It's a question of embracing all human complexity, the duplicity of people who are capable of doing the best and the worst, and thus make a film that is at once funny, touching, scary, poignant, and suspenseful. The history of cinema is the history of the separation of genres, whereas I want to make people laugh and cry. I love Italian comedy, the great films of Dino Risi and Ettore Scola, *Down and Dirty* (*Brutti, sporchi e cattivi)*, which succeeds in combining the comic and the tragic, where the very worst inspires laughter, which then acquires a form of nobility. I played the duality card knowing that the coming together of the Bruforts and the Van Peteghems would definitely be explosive. I then bound these opposites with a romantic subplot that I made additionally complex by adding an incongruous dimension. I added an additional layer with the police investigation, which brings suspense and mystery to the narrative. To me, *Slack Bay* is nonetheless intended to generate a comic reaction. I was sure that the social aspect would not hold out long to the mounting sense of grotesque.

Beyond niceties
Cinema can go beyond the reasonable; it makes the forbidden possible. The Bruforts are man-eaters, preying on the bourgeoisie, and the Van Peteghems are incestuous, linked through interbred, degenerative marriages. Both families are monstrous, each in their own way. As a filmmaker, I push these extremes to the limit. The result might have been horrible, unbearable even, but instead it's funny because the comedy is fed by the tragedy. I deliberately magnify the characteristics into the grotesque in search of the cathartic function that cinema used to have, and seems to have somewhat lost since it became pure entertainment. *Slack Bay* goes beyond social and moral niceties, and transgresses taboos to better serve the comedy and give it a real basis. I wanted to find laughs in serious situations, the shadowy zones that I have previously explored in the dramatic idiom in my previous films. I just had to find the right distance to do it. Jubilation is cleansing.

The start of the trouble
When I started to write the screenplay, Ma Loute fell in love with a girl, but I soon thought that wasn't very original and wasn't interesting. I've always made movies to explore what I didn't know, so I chose to set up what I'd call a romantic mystification to ask the question of gender, and to bring an extremely contemporary and ambiguous note to a period film. It's not a homosexual love story either. Ma Loute has no doubt about the

identity of Billie, whom he genuinely thinks is a girl. The trouble arises from the androgyny, this body which contains opposites. What's more, Billie is continually changing: at times a girl, at times a boy. Film is the ideal place to embody this blurring without applying a moral judgment. When Ma Loute finds out the truth, he hits Billie, but it's not an act aimed against a person of his sex – rather against the person who mystified him. Ma Loute remains disturbed by Billie up until the end and he acts in consequence. The desire is still there, the blurring is deliberate.

Musical romanticism

Music has a capacity to astound that cinema does not. Here, it underscores the romantic dimension of the film because it mainly comes in during the scenes of the relationship between Ma Loute and Billie and transforms it into an extraordinary amorous adventure. I wanted something unusual. I came across a Belgian composer from the end of the 19th century, Guillaume Lekeu (1870-1894), whose scores express the nostalgia of great, very powerful, very orchestral music that evokes Wagner or Mahler, and also heralded a certain modernity. That corresponded to what I was looking for in *Slack Bay*: a grandiose and immediate emotion. I have made a lot of films for which the emotion comes after watching them. I used little or no music. Today, I can elicit more of an immediate pleasure in the spectator directly in the theatre; in any case, I hope I achieve this. Moreover, *Slack Bay* seems to be my most accessible film for the audience. It's a sort of clarification of the previous films. That's nothing to do with the music. In fact, the whole soundtrack has a kind of outrageous expressionism that underpins the images. I've never used sound effects so much in a film.

Embodying excessiveness

The whole film should give the impression of excessiveness and fantasy. The Typhonium embodies this very well, as do the costumes and props. Everything is from the period, but we added some absurd elements. Once again, it was a matter of bringing out the burlesque from the real. For example, it was the costume that made Fabrice Luchini decide to do the film. He's hunched, twisted in the true meaning of the word. The same goes for Didier Desprès, who plays Inspector Machin: he is entangled in his costume, which is funny. Valeria Bruni-Tedeschi was, on the contrary, very corseted so she would have that very stiff posture, which makes the miracle scene even more powerful. At that moment, she seems to be touched by grace – because even the bourgeoisie can have their moment of grace!

Some very special effects

The temporal reality of a period film requires erasing a lot of things nowadays: Planes in the sky, boats in the sea, etc. The dunes were perhaps the only location that corresponds today to how they looked in 1910. I've sometimes used special effects in my previous films, but nothing compared to *Slack Bay*. That said, the fragmentation of the work involved in special effects suits me perfectly. It allows me to concentrate on directing during the shoot, because I know the backdrop is only provisional and it will change in post-production. Since the real was no longer my source of inspiration, I felt very free. In fact, the complexity of such a big production as *Slack Bay* doesn't scare me, quite the opposite. It was my calmest shoot.

Professional and non-professional actors

I don't view professional and non-professional actors as opposites, I'm not interested in the question of their status. All actors compose their characters, each in their own way. When I chose Emmanuel Schotté to play the police lieutenant in *Humanity*, he wasn't a cop in real life, so he's playing a role. It's not a documentary. I work the same way with all actors, but certain roles require some more complicated fine-tuning and need actors who can go further in terms of nuance or extravagance. In this instance, I needed virtuosos in composition to bring life to the members of the Van Peteghem family. They are very manufactured characters, so "professional" actors make a natural fit. My approach was the same from the start, and it was entirely normal to bring in Fabrice Luchini on a film like *Slack Bay* for the character of André Van Peteghem. I already did the same thing with *Camille Claudel 1915*: I was telling the story of a woman artist, so I went and found another artist, Juliette Binoche, for this role.

The Van Peteghem trio

Fabrice Luchini was the first actor I had in mind for the role of André Van Peteghem. I wanted to meet him early on to be sure he would accept the physical transformation necessary for the character. I told him I wasn't remotely interested in the movies he made; what I was interested in was his qualities as an actor. His craft consists of composing something other than what he is in real life, so I proposed that he become another. He had to be made up and altered physically. I didn't want the spectator to be able to recognize him at first glance. He also changed his way of speaking, he put on an accent. I used the same approach for Juliette Binoche and Valeria Bruni-Tedeschi. I was trying to upset them to reveal something in them. They are acrobats. It was fascinating to have them compose eccentric characters and see them confront their fears. After *Camille Claudel 1915*, I knew that Juliette Binoche could do anything. I could have asked her to play Paul Claudel and she would have managed to be convincing. So I naturally thought of her for the role of Aude Van Peteghem. We took the time to find the right tone between snobbery and exuberance. I had a very precise model in mind, a French tragedian from the 1950s who was incredibly inverted, wrapped up in herself, and thus very funny. Juliette took her composition process a long way. Valeria Bruni-Tedeschi had a more buttoned-down character, which is not necessarily in her nature, even if I could see her perfectly in this role. So I had to neutralize her, even rein her in – which she totally understood and accepted.

In search of Ma Loute and Billie

They are two young people from the North, who I found in that region. Brandon Lavieville, who plays Ma Loute, quickly made the role his own. I'd already hired his father to play the head of the Brufort family. I really liked his face. I had him do some screen tests to make sure he wasn't afraid of the camera, that he had the necessary verve, and that he could act. Billie was harder to find. I looked in Paris, and in the North. It's obviously a complicated character due to his nature. I met transsexuals, genuine androgynous people, boy and girls, LGBT associations, etc. I traveled a lot and went down a classic path, which took seven or eight months until I met Raph. This was the right person, at the same time very masculine and very sensitive, who was 16 at the time of the shoot, and who bore all the ambiguity required for the film.