



WOKING FILM CLUB

# The Main Feature

Season 44 – Issue 5 – Screening 14 November 2024

## *The Taste of Things (La Passion de Dodin Bouffant)*

France, 2023, 134 mins, Cert 12

Director

Written by

Trần Anh Hùng

Trần Anh Hùng from the novel *La Vie et la passion de Dodin-Bouffant*, gourmet by Marcel Rouff

Jonathan Ricquebourg

Toma Baqueni

Trần Nu Yên-Khê

Cinematography

Production Design

Art Direction and

Costume Design

### Cast

Juliette Binoche

Benoît Magimel

Emmanuel Salinger

Patrick d'Assumçao

Galatée Bellugi

Jan Hammenecker

Frédéric Fisbach

Eugénie

Dodin Bouffant

Rabaz

Grimaud

Violette

Magot

Beaubois



The director of tonight's film, Trần Anh Hùng, was born in 1962 in Da Nang, Central Vietnam. He moved to Laos at the age of five, and when he was 12, he and his family emigrated to France following the fall of Saigon at the end of the Vietnam War in 1975. The family lived in the Paris suburbs. His parents are tailors - interviewed in The Guardian in 2011 at the time his film *Norwegian Wood* appeared, he said 'When we came here, the next day they started to work making clothes for the French army'.

Trần was studying for a philosophy degree in Paris when he saw a film by a Vietnamese director 'that showed me it wasn't impossible'. He quit the course and enrolled in film school, where he stayed two years. Perversely, he dropped out again when his finals were taking place. 'I didn't want to have a diploma,' he says, 'because I knew that if I had it, my parents would ask me to work. And then I would be a cameraman for TV, then I would earn a lot of money and have an apartment, a girlfriend ...'. As it was, rebellion took him to a job at the Musée d'Orsay bookshop, where he worked for four years while writing five scripts, before making his first shorts (1989-1991), during which he met Trần Nu Yên-Khê (b. 1968, Vietnam) who became his wife and his most loyal collaborator in various capacities on all of his films (either as an actress, set designer, art director and/or narrator).



Trần is not a prolific film maker. His first feature film was *The Scent of Green Papaya* (1993, which the club showed in 1997 with a reaction score of 6.73<sup>1</sup>) which tells the story of a Vietnamese servant girl who observes lives within two different Saigon families: the first, a woman textile seller with three boys and a frequently absent husband; the second, a handsome young pianist with his fiancée. It won the Golden Camera award at Cannes, and the César for best first work. This was followed by two further films about

life in Vietnam, *Cyclo* (1995) and *The Vertical Ray of the Sun* (2000). In contrast, *I Come with the Rain* (2009) is a thriller; *Norwegian Wood* (2010) is a romantic drama based on a Japanese novel; and *Eternity* (2016) is a romantic historical drama based on three women over a century in France.

His latest film is a historical drama set in the 1880s about the relationship between cook Eugénie (Juliette Binoche) and her gourmet employer and lover Dodin (Benoît Magimel). It is described by The Guardian 'as the most rapturous hymn to culinary art since such beloved gourmet outings as *Babette's Feast* or *Eat Drink Man Woman*'. Interviewed by that newspaper earlier this year, Trần said about *The Taste of Things*: 'I wanted to make a movie about art and I chose food, because this art is very concrete. For me, cinema is something that needs to be very sensual, very physical.'

Trần wanted to make a film about the meaning of food in the country that he migrated to when he was 12. 'In France, a meal is where people gather – they talk, not only about food but about culture. In Vietnam, we don't talk much around the table, but in France, you always see parents asking their children, "What have you read recently?"'.

In the interview, Trần also points to the systematic, formal history of French food culture. 'They defined everything – how to set a table, how many glasses, how many forks.' That's why Dodin in the film is known as 'the



Napoleon of the culinary arts' – because he codifies, establishes culinary protocols. In that sense, he's a version of Auguste Escoffier, who formalised modern French cuisine in his 1903 book *Le Guide Culinaire*. 'Before that, it was quite a mess. Today you know that you need 20 grams of this and one kilo of that. But at that period, a recipe looked like a poem and you had to be able to interpret it.'

The BFI describes the film as 'a gentle love story and a paean to the pleasures of a carefully prepared meal. Benoît Magimel and Juliette Binoche have a delicate chemistry as Dodin and Eugénie, a wealthy gourmet and his stoical sous-chef. Dodin is renowned throughout the world for the exquisite menus he invents; Eugénie helps him bring these ideas to life, working methodically in the cellar kitchen while Dodin hosts his wealthy guests in the salon above. The pair have lived and worked together, and occasionally slept together, for more than 20 years'.

Juliette Binoche will be well known to club members, starring in – for example – *Three Colours Blue* (1992), *The English Patient* (1996) and *Chocolat* (2000). Benoît Magimel appeared in *The Piano Teacher*

<sup>1</sup> I was pleased to see that one of the references in the Wikipedia entry for *The Scent of Green Papaya* is to the film notes of our very own club. Ed

(2001) and starred with Juliette Binoche in *Children of the Century* (1999) and then formed a relationship with her until 2003. They have a daughter together,

Michael Hipkins

Sources: <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2011/mar/03/tran-anh-hung-norwegian-wood>  
<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2024/feb/04/tran-anh-hung-the-taste-of-things-juliette-binoche-benoit-magimel>



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Club website: [www.wncc.org.uk](http://www.wncc.org.uk). Prefer to leave your comments on the film and your score online rather than on paper? Email to [reactions@wncc.org.uk](mailto:reactions@wncc.org.uk) by Wednesday 20 November 2024  
Discs of previous shows are available to hire for a modest fee.

## Films about food and cooking

I don't know about you, but I find cookery programmes on television unsatisfactory. You see an abbreviated version of how to create a dish which the cook then tastes and tells you (often with their mouth half-full) how wonderful it is. Which brings the question of how a gustatory experience can be brought to the screen when the only senses at play are sight and hearing.

Here's my selection of four films which have made the attempt.



*Babette's Feast*  
(Denmark; 1987; director Gabriel Axel; Danish title *Babettes Gæstebud* – shown by the

club 14 December 1989). Based on a 1958 short story by Karen Blixen, using the nom de plume Isak Dinesen, it's the tale of a Parisian chef (Stéphane Audran) displaced by the 1830s Communard uprising who comes to live as a servant to two elderly sisters in a frugal Christian community on Denmark's Jutland coast. At first she bends to their abstemious life and diet, her services warmly appreciated by her benevolent hosts, Martine and Philippa. But when a stroke of good fortune enables her to leave their service and return to France, she takes the opportunity to treat the community to a lavish, multi-course masterpiece of French cuisine, which the film turns into an

extraordinary set piece that ranks among the cinema's most mouthwatering meals. BFI

*Eat Drink Man Woman* (Taiwan, US; 1994; director Ang Lee; original title *Yin shi nan nu*). Master Chef Chu is semi-retired and lives at home with his three unmarried daughters, Jia-Jen, a religious chemistry teacher; Jia-Chien, an airline executive; and Jia-Ning, an employee at a fast-food joint. Life at the family's house revolves heavily around preparing and eating an elaborate dinner every Sunday. The stability of these meals gives them all strength as they deal with new romantic relationships and disappointments. 'The movie's main appeal - beyond stomach yearnings caused by its cuisine - comes from the actors, who infuse their archetypal roles with comedic appeal'. Washington Post

*Couscous* (France-Tunisia; 2007; director Abdellatif Kechiche; French title *La graine et le mulet*). When visiting a friend in Paris many years ago, she took me to a couscous



restaurant. I thought I had died and gone to heaven. This film stars Habib Boufares as an aging immigrant from the Maghreb living in Sète on the south coast of France who has lost his job in a shipyard and who dreams of converting a dilapidated boat into a family restaurant that will specialise in his ex-wife's fish couscous, a meal that she prepares for the entire family every Sunday. On the opening night his plans are thwarted by his son who, seeing someone in the restaurant he wants to avoid, drives off with some of the food due to be served still in the car.



*The Lunchbox* (2013 – shown by the club 12 October 2020). Lonely housewife Ila (Nimrat Kaur) decides to try adding some spice to her stale marriage by preparing a special lunch for her neglectful husband. Unfortunately, the delivery goes astray and winds up in the hands of Saajan (Irrfan Khan), an irritable widower. Curious about her husband's lack of response, Ila adds a note to the next day's lunchbox, and thus begins an unusual

friendship in which Saajan and Ila can talk about their joys and sorrows without ever meeting in person. 'Gorge into it and savour its lingering aftertaste. *The Lunchbox* holds riches that aren't likely to be forgotten in a hurry'. NDTV

Michael Hipkins

## Comments and reactions to: **The Color Purple**

No of reaction slips received = 26

Average score = 6.77

| Score | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|-------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| ~     | ~ | ~ | 1 | 1 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 8 | 4 | 3 | 1  |

**Fabulous film. Now read the book** *It was well produced but the plot could have been stronger*  
*Such emotions, brought tears to the eyes* *Too long. Too soapy. Too many evil and useless men!*  
**Interesting and enjoyable. Some parts tough to watch. Some parts a bit confusing. Worth watching**  
*A good story spoilt by the OTT Spielberg Hollywood-style presentation. Thanks John for putting the subtitles on for the second half* *Excellent film and acting. Kept interest throughout.*  
**If made today it would have been more realistic/gritty but, allowing for its age, it was an excellent film - poignant** *Great film – but would have been 100% better if from start with subtitles*  
*Second half better than first. I did enjoy the new musical version better in some ways*  
**Different to what I expected. Nice story well told. What a young Whoopi Goldberg!**

| Position | Film              | Average score |
|----------|-------------------|---------------|
| 1        | The Great Escaper | 8.00          |
| 2        | The Color Purple  | 6.77          |
| 3        | Winners           | 6.00          |
| 4        | Barbie            | 5.59          |

## Forthcoming attraction: 28 November 2024 – **Past Lives**



*Plaudits to the principal cast, who do a miraculous job of portraying inner conflict and ecstasy with the merest tilt of a head, or subtle shift of a shoulder.* Observer

*The film's great magic is the way it captures the beauty of lonely cities with a camera that seems to caress their geography.*

Daily Telegraph

*There's a certain tragedy at the heart of this story that no amount of goodwill can soothe: sometimes you don't get over traumas, you just learn to live with them. But Past Lives, a thoroughly grown-up film, is able to accommodate this inconvenient truth.* Irish Independent