



Joan Of Arc

Reviewed by Jonathan Romney

Just as Joan of Arc claimed to be guided by divine voices, French director Bruno Dumont has always followed promptings entirely alien to the usual logic of European art cinema. Starting out as an austere realist (*The Life Of Jesus*), Dumont's subsequent career has ranged from theological minimalism (*Humanity, Outside Satan*) to knockabout quasi-sitcom farce (his two *P'tit Quinquin* miniseries for TV).

Arguably his most outré film, however, and the one most likely to test even faithful viewers, was 2017's *Jeanette: The Childhood Of Joan Of Arc*, an evocation of Joan of Arc's childhood set to an abrasive metal/dance-music soundtrack and inspired, like this sequel, by the writings of early 20th century poet Charles Péguy. Featuring a very different — and more palatable — musical score, *Joan Of Arc* is in some ways a more conventional drama than its predecessor, although is still intransigently individual. Yet even with a subject as eternally popular as Joan, it is hard to imagine the film making waves with a mainstream audience or bringing new revelations to Dumont's long-term followers.

The story begins in 1429, with Joan (Lise Leplat Prudhomme) clad for battle as she leads the French army against the invading English; it ends two years later with her at the stake. While Dumont is covering ground familiar from a host of Joan films, his approach is entirely his own. The action begins on a windswept stretch of sandy heath, where nobles and hard-bitten soldiers in armour debate the course of the conflict with Joan, who resists their doubts with a steely glare. Later, Dumont evokes the war sparsely with an extraordinary equestrian ballet, as the French cavalry go through their pre-battle paces. Sometimes shot directly from above as the horses form elaborate patterns, it is a mesmerising sequence.

Dumont's boldest move, and the one that provides the film's emotive drive, is the casting of 10-year-old Leplat Prudhomme as Joan. She was the younger Joan in *Jeanette*, and more than lives up to the role's iconic dimensions, partly because of her seraphic looks and clear, defiant gaze, which confronts the men around her like lasers set to full power. Her performance could be called one-note, in that it is consistently forceful and often shouty, yet it has an indomitable power that is quite extraordinary.

UN CERTAIN
REGARD

Fr. 2019. 138mins

Director Bruno Dumont

Production company

3B Productions

International sales

Luxbox, info@luxboxfilms.com

Producers Jean Bréhat, Rachid Bouchareb, Muriel Merlin

Screenplay Bruno Dumont, based on works by Charles Péguy

Production design

Erwan Legal

Editing Bruno Dumont, Basile Belkhir

Cinematography David Chambille

Music Christophe

Main cast Lise Leplat Prudhomme, Jean-Francois Causeret, Fabien Fenet, Fabrice Luchini, Christophe