BPM
(BEATS PER MINUTE)

(120 BATTEMENTS PAR MINUTE)

A film by
Robin Campillo

Starring
Nahuel Pérez Biscayart, Arnaud Valois,
Adèle Haenel & Antoine Reinartz

OFFICIAL SELECTION
COMPETITION
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

Running Time: 144 minutes

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Synopsis

Early 1990s. With AIDS having already claimed countless lives for nearly ten years, Act Up-Paris activists multiply actions to fight general indifference. Nathan, a newcomer to the group, has his world shaken up by Sean, a radical militant.

An Interview with Director, Robin Campillo

Q: What did Act Up-Paris mean to you before you made this film?

A: I joined Act Up in April 1992. In other words, 10 years or so after the start of the epidemic. As a gay man, I had lived through the 80s in fear of the illness. In the early 90s, I came across a television interview with Didier Lestrade, one of the founding members of the association. He spoke of an "AIDS community" composed, according to him, of people stricken with the illness, their close relations, and the medical staff facing the epidemic, who were for the most part unsupported, within a general lack of concern from society at large. This speech broke a silence that had lasted for over a decade. That was when I decided to join Act Up. From the very first meeting I attended, I was struck by the group's exultant effervescence, given that we were in the toughest years of the epidemic. People spoke freely. Gays who had been subjected helplessly to the epidemic in the 80s became, collectively and publically, key players in the fight against AIDS. And with them, other people touched by the illness, who could tackle the epidemic from their personal experience as drug users, former prisoners, hemophiliacs, etc. They were taught about the illness, the technical nature of medical-speak and political discourse in a collective empowerment effort. But above all, Act Up consisted of individuals with strong personalities who in other circumstances would have had little reason to meet. The movement's strength most likely came from the electricity that sparked between groups of people who were learning to forge a common discourse despite their differences. I was a rank and file member of Act Up, but rather active. I participated in the medical committee, and especially, I took part in numerous actions, some of which inspired the movie. It's important to understand that at the time, even talking about condoms in high schools and pleading for needle exchanges for drug users wasn't standard at all. Homophobia was essentially the standard. We've forgotten; indeed once society evolves in the way it has since then, there tends to be a sort of collective amnesia about how things were before.

Q: How would you define the film? Is it an autobiography? A reconstitution?

A: The movie is clearly fiction. And even if I tried to reconstruct many of the debates and actions that took place at the time, I freely arranged them to serve the narrative instead of sticking to how they actually happened. Here and there, one may recognize some character traits of different known figures that marked the group's history. The inspiration to craft the characters mostly came from the tensions that opposed people rather than directly from a particular person or another. I also wanted a new generation to be confronted with this story, as well as work with the personality traits of the actors I had chosen. This allowed me to entirely avoid the temptation to mimic real people. Philippe Mangeot, a former Act Up member who collaborated on the screenplay with me, and I agreed that it was important to bring to life the musicality of the voices and the intensity of the debates that took place during the meetings. Once we struck that balance,

I'd let the personalities flesh themselves out unfettered by the constraints of an imitation. They were naturally swept up by the mechanics of the Act Up collective, without compromising their singularities.

Q: How did you go about the casting within this framework?

A: Sarah Tepper and Leïla Fournier, my casting directors, and I sought to replicate Act Up's diversity. We took the time to put together a heterogeneous cast, a mix of professional film and stage actors, people from the circus and dance world, but also people we discovered on Facebook and in nightclubs. Actually, it seemed quite logical to me that in a film about a group that makes visibility one of its weapons, the majority of the actors should be gay themselves, and openly so. It's important to bear in mind that the gay community still isn't finished with AIDS. My actors have only known the "cocktail" or combinationtherapy era. They live in a time of preventive treatments. Nevertheless, they still have to live with the sinister, ubiquitous presence of the epidemic. Twenty-five years have passed between the film's story and today. Exploring this lapse of time was fascinating.

Q: Do you consider BEATS PER MINUTE to be a period film?

A: Rather than making a picturesque account of the past, I prefer to focus on the connection between the past and the present. In the clothing, for instance, there's a familiarity that I myself recognize. The way jeans and bomber jackets were cut has slightly changed over the years, and it has an effect on how bodies move, which very quickly gave me the feeling of going back in time. In this respect, the question of the communication techniques they used was central. BEATS PER MINUTE returns to a time period without cell phones, without the internet and social networks. An era with fax machines and French Minitel terminals. A time when organizations didn't have, like today, the possibility of massively broadcasting their images, and where television played a dominant role – which largely influenced the way Act Up set up and organized their actions. With the internet and social networks, today we can easily have the feeling of belonging to a common sensibility or struggle, but this type of coming together is difficult to truly embody. At the time the film takes place, to come together, people had to physically get together, face one another and confront ideas. Act Up-Paris is one of the rare associations to have gathered all of its members on a weekly basis in a meeting open to the public, open to everyone.

Q: This embodiment in the public meetings is what allows you to transform political discourse into a film subject…

A: Embodiment is one of the key aspects of the film and reaches beyond the meetings. Central to Act Up's strategy was to concretely show the illness – the AIDS-inflicted body – in confrontation. During the action against Melton-Pharm, the pharmaceutical lab, Sean

says to the director: “This is what people sick with AIDS look like; this is a sick body, if you’ve never actually seen one…” Appearing in flesh and blood when one has been relegated to invisibility is one of the most significant political subjects there is. Here, embodiment is both a political stance and a cinematic choice.

Q: So the film is about representing the illness?

A: At Act Up, the sick lived their illness, and at the same time represented their illness. For instance, everyone who participated in Act Up actions knew that there were times when they had to overplay their anger. But as the action was taking place, the anger became real. And yet, there is a moment where one stops enacting. When the illness becomes too serious, Sean can’t act anymore. Suddenly, this representation itself seems scandalous. The illness forces him to return to the solitude that the group had helped him overcome. In the end, Sean lives his illness in a tunnel of solitude: it defines him. The hospital scene when Sean watches the news segment of an action on television reminds him that although the actions took place for him, they will henceforth take place without him.

Q: Sean is, nevertheless, accompanied by Nathan in his solitude. What is the meaning of this love story within the story of the activist group?

A: Why do people get attached to one another? We often forget that authentic love is coupled with artificial constructs. Indeed, that’s what we call romance. Nathan falls in love with Sean, for Nathan has fallen in love with the group. This doesn’t take away from the unique desire he feels for Sean. There’s a sentence that didn’t make its way into the film, but which strikes at the heart of his motivation: “Maybe the reason I’m in love with him is because he’s going to die.” Nathan doesn’t know it for sure, nor do I, because it is impossible to unravel the reasons for his desire. And on the other hand, perhaps Sean is with Nathan because it suits him to have someone with whom he can share his experience as a sick man. It’s practically what he tells Nathan when he apologizes for having fallen in love with him in particular. But no matter the reasons, or the strategies, it is all a part of what we indeed call love.

Q: Between the couple and the political group, another collective dimension emerges: the family. The biological family, represented by Sean’s mother, and one’s chosen family, depicted by the activists…

A: I always prefer speaking about “community.” The biological family is one, which at a certain moment we leave to join other communities. In truth, there is fraternity in the group. I wanted the biological family to return at the very end of the film, but also that the fragility of its bonds be felt: one single person to whom no reference had been made up until that point. What interested me was the impermeability between the mother and the group. Amongst Sean’s friends, the mother only knows Max. It’s as though she has

been on a parallel path. In reference to gays, the subject of a "biographical rift" often comes up. It's certainly less the case today. But it was very much in the forefront during the AIDS era. At the same time, I like the fact that this woman who doesn't know anyone suddenly has the feeling that these people are her own family, without giving any thought to biological aspects.

Q: The film ends with euthanasia. Do you believe that Sean died of AIDS?

A: The movie leaves an open question about the stage of the illness. Naturally, Sean's condition worsens during the course of the film. But what mattered to me when he arrives at the apartment was to show him in the aforementioned tunnel: this point of no return, when the connection with the outside world is at its most tenuous. For him it is a question of getting it over with. There were a number of clandestine euthanasias during the AIDS era. Perhaps now the time has come to speak about it.

Q: Eastern Boys was a movie with chapters and each chapter had a different register and style. BEATS PER MINUTE also has a varied side to it, each sequence is manifold…

A: I never know how to define myself when people speak to me about "genre" films. What interests me are modifications in state, perspective and scale. The way a character tips over from one emotion to another, the theater of reality itself is transformed in color and register. I strive for a cinema where the audience doesn't have a compass, where things aren't definitely mapped out and everything can shift at any moment. For example, the action that takes place at the high school ends on Sean kissing Nathan as a provocation, then immediately spills over into a joyously naïve nightclub scene; then from the club, the couple glides directly into bed. In fact, I played with bringing the night club lighting into the bedroom so that the audience would be lost in the blurred lines and boundaries, leading them into experiencing moments of pure sensation. From the beginning, I had envisioned the film as if floating down a river. I had Heraclitus' saying in mind: One never bathes twice in the same river. I wanted the audience to feel that it was the same matter, the same flow, and that from this flow the most diverse emotions surface. In the last part of the film, in the terminal stage of the illness, this flow is interrupted. The present is now a prison.

Q: There is however a very pronounced difference: the one that distinguishes the Act Up meetings from the rest of the world…

A: The weekly meeting is like a brain: people speak in a banal setting bathed in neutral light. What matters here is the power of political speech: concepts are envisioned and pieced together verbally…and then we see them come to life. This is what occurs from the start in the long opening scene where the activists argue about the handcuffing action that took place earlier, much as though they were arguing over the perception of the more or less successful staging of something. An imaginary confrontation is played out within

the walls of the real amphitheater. Their exchanges, their words construct their strategies, discourse and representations. And they also bind together the group itself. In the first debate, Sean reminds Sophie the reasons why Act Up is confronting the French AIDS prevention agency (AFLS). Naturally, Sophie knows the reasons why, but here, the repetition of his words is a way of shaping and defining the group, as well as who they are within the group. He uses whatever it takes, whether it be bad faith, humor, or by force.

Q: How did you go about filming the meetings?

A: Jeanne Lapoirie, my cinematographer, and I elaborated a method: shoot a scene in extenso and in its continuity as quickly as possible with three cameras. The lighting wasn't completely adjusted, the sound engineer was fretful, but we went with it. From there, all the problems became apparent. And we started correcting from that point with tiny adjustments, from one take to the next. This brought about a certain fluidity. When a sequence is that long people, and in particular the extras, give into the scene, they no longer react as though they're being guided. The actors in the beginning might at first make mistakes with their lines; those stumbles interest me. I can then take advantage of the whole range of rushes that this method affords: both the accidents from early takes and the efficiency of the final takes. And at the editing stage, I can shape the scene, switching from erratic moments to moments when the words and gestures are sharper and better mastered. Using this method has the other advantage of freeing me from a frame-control fetish. For my first feature film, They Came Back, I was obsessed with controlling the image. With Eastern Boys, I came to terms with the fact that I had to let go, indeed a bit like the main character in the film: I decided to let myself be carried away by the film, rather than trying to control it.

Q: "BEATS PER MINUTE" indicates a musical tempo or cardiac rhythm. From the very title, you emphasize the role played by music.

A: Well, I have to be honest, not everyone loved house music and not everyone ended up in nightclubs after an action took place. But this musical "hold-up" allowed me to touch on a specific moment in time. I can't help but think that this music, both festive and ominous was somewhat the soundtrack to this period. In reality, only one song comes directly from the era: What about this love by Mr. Fingers. The rest of the music was composed by Arnaud Rebotini, who had already worked on Eastern Boys. Arnaud is a DJ, has an encyclopedic knowledge of 1990s music, and owns all the instruments from the period. As a result, his music conjures house music when we listen to it. Yet he also this ability, which is a characteristic of electro today, to travel from one music to another, suddenly sprucing up a bucolic piece with techno elements, playing with these transformations that I was hoping to depict. There is, however, one exception: Smalltown Boy by Jimmy Somerville*. One of my first memories of Act Up was a magnificent concert given by Somerville for the Act Up association at the Cirque d'Hiver

performance hall. Smalltown Boy dates back to 1984; it therefore is more connected with the early years of the epidemic. It's one of the first openly gay songs in the history of pop music. For my generation, this song was an important galvanizer and unifier.

Q: Was there a matter of urgency in making this film today?

A: Choosing to make one film over another at a particular moment is clearly because there is a need. I wanted to tell this story because I felt as though it hadn't yet been told and needed to be done in a way that reached far and wide, beyond nostalgia. I do not believe that cinema can have a direct impact on politics. It isn't about claiming to remedy something that isn't working today. And I say this without any nostalgia: it's unimaginable to miss the sheer violence of those years. In the film, there is the implicit sadness of having lost those people whom we admired, whom we loved, and with whom we laughed. But I think even more about those of us who have survived, and who are still fighting against this illness today.

*The song Smalltown Boy was written by Steve Bronski, Jimmy Somerville and Larry Steinbachek, and released by Bronski Beat in 1984.

Act Up-Paris

Act Up-Paris was created on June 26th 1989 upon the occasion of an upcoming Gay Pride parade during which fifteen or so activists then staged the first "die-in" lying down on the street without uttering a single word. On their t-shirts was the equation: Silence=Death. And a pink triangle – the badge imposed upon homosexual men deported during WW II, but turned around with its point upwards – representing their resolve to be a strong opposition to the epidemic which had decimated thousands of gays. Act Up-Paris was born, replicating the model of Act Up-New York, founded in 1987.

Act Up's origins stem from anger at the medical, political and religious establishments whose passivity and prejudices were, and still are today, at the heart of this epidemic's human disaster. The same anger is what drove those who were stricken to fight against the silence and make themselves visible. Indeed, the point was to make the illness visible, make the sick visible, and no longer allow institutions to decide our fate. This is what Act Up-Paris is all about. . No more blurred images, no more anonymous accounts or testimonials, no more disembodied representations: Like Act-up New York, Act UpParis carried the voices of HIV positive men and women, using a powerful visual culture with terse slogans and symbolic images, in events that attracted widespread media coverage.

For 20 [sic] years*, Act Up-Paris has fought on all fronts in a war against AIDS. Some may consider this only a metaphor. But numerous members of our association decidedly feel that way. AIDS and its complicit (f)actors – everything that contributes to the epidemic's propagation – are our enemy. We fight and resist against this virus that attacks our bodies. For in this complex war, we had to regain mastery over our own lives. Strategies had to be elaborated to gain access to and conquer areas of knowledge that had been confiscated by the medical profession and to contest this professional body's overarching power. We had to oppose them firmly and with clearly stated requirements. People needed to be mobilized, educated; information had to be organized. Civil disobedience and acting within the very limits of the law was necessary in order to make our voices heard. The ceaseless "zaps" (quick actions), sit-ins, protest marches, lobbying campaigns, and media stunts were and still are ways to alert and inform the general public as well as put pressure on the powers that be. Act Up-Paris has consistently used civil disobedience as a tool. Act Up has never used physical violence. When others had weapons, we had our placards. And when they took our signs away, we still had our bodies: Sick bodies that the police barely dared touch. (…)

One of the particularities of an activist group like ours is occupying public space, not just with words, images and posters plastered in the streets, but with our own bodies. Thus, whether during protest marches or zap actions, our bodies are our weapons, notably for each die-in, where we lie down on the ground to symbolize the people who have died of AIDS. The symbolic violence of such demonstrations, much like the use of false blood or sperm, or even the ashes of Act Up members killed by AIDS, is our answer in a direct reflection of the sheer violence dealt out daily by the public powers to which we are confronted.

About the Director

Robin Campillo

Robin Campillo was born in Morocco in 1962. In 1983, he went to study at the IDHEC (now called "La Femis"), where he met Laurent Cantet, with whom he has collaborated since the late 1990s as editor and co-screenwriter for the films Time Out (L'emploi du temps), The Class (Entre les murs), Foxfire Confessions of a Girl Gang, and most recently The Workshop (L'Atelier), selected for the Un Certain Regard section of the 70th Cannes Films Festival. In 2004, he directed his first feature film, They Came Back (Les revenants). Eastern Boys, his second feature film, received the Orizzonti Prize for Best Film at the Venice Film Festival, and was nominated at the 2015 César Awards in the Best Film and Best director categories

About the Cast

Nahuel Pérez Biscayart (Sean)

Born in Argentina, Nahuel Pérez Biscayart first enrolled in Buenos Aires' Fine Arts school before participating in private acting workshops. He quickly went on to perform in a number of stage plays and appear in movies on the big and small screen in Argentina. In 2008, at only 21, he won the Rolex grant, which brought him to New York where he joined Kate Valk's troupe, The Wooster Group. Returning to Argentina in 2008, he was noticed in Pablo Fendrik's Blood Appears (La sangre brota), which was chosen for Critic's Week at the Cannes Film Festival. In Paris to promote the film, he was contacted by Benoît Jacquot who gave him the leading role in Deep in the Woods (Au fond des bois), which had its world premiere at the Locarno Film Festival in 2010. In 2014, he appeared in Rebecca Zlotowski's Grand Central. The film was in the Cannes Un Certain Regard Official Selection. Nahuel Pérez Biscayart then went to Belgium to shoot All Yours (Je suis à toi) by David Lambert, for which he received the Best Actor award at the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival. In 2017, he made a strong comeback in French cinema, with the leading role in Albert Dupontel's Au revoir là-haut, which will be released in the autumn, and BPM (BEATS PER MINUTE), by Robin Campillo, appearing in the Official Competition at Cannes, where he plays Sean, a charismatic figure of Act-Up Paris in the early 1990s.

Arnaud Valois (Nathan)

Arnaud Valois studied at The Cours Florent Classe Libre before landing his first cinematic role in Nicole Garcia's Charlie says in 2006. Two years later, he was cast in Josiane Balasko's A French gigolo, then The girl on the train by André Téchiné. After taking a few years' hiatus, in 2017 he will appear in the role of Nathan in Robin Campillo's third feature film, BEATS PER MINUTE.

Antoine Reinartz (Thibault)

After a Master's degree in management and communication of Social Organizations and Solidarity in Nice, then New York and Nagoya, Antoine Reinartz turned to the acting profession, joining the National Superior Conservatory of Dramatic Arts, in Paris, and graduating in 2014. His first cinematic role was in Tommy Weber's Quand je ne dors pas and The Endless Days of Youth, by Cosme Castro and Léa Forest. He then turned to theater, first in Italy, then in Malmö, Sweden, in Annika Nyman's Six efter René Polleschs Sex nach Mae West, performing in Swedish. He returned to France to join Julie Brochen in Déchirements and also in the French adaptation of The Event directed by Ramin Grey, where he and Romane Bohringer were alone on stage. In 2016, he won his first big cinematic role in Robin Campillo's BPM (BEATS PER MINUTE), in which he plays the role of Thibault, the president of ActUp Paris. He also took part in a Thierry Jolivet creation for the Célestins Theater in Lyon, and is preparing a short film - The Iconic House of Khan – about the Parisian Voguing Scene.

Adèle Haenel (Sophie)

Adèle Haenel began her acting career at the age of 12 in Christophe Ruggia's Devils (Les diables) before being nominated for a César Award in 2008 for Most Promising Actress in Céline Sciamma's Water Lilies (Naissance des pieuvres). In 2010, she played one of the leading roles in House of Tolerance (L'Apollonide (Souvenirs de la maison close) by Bertrand Bonello, which was presented in competition at the Cannes Film Festival. In 2014, she won her first César for Best Supporting Actress in Katell Quillévéré's Suzanne. In 2015, she was in André Téchiné's film In the Name of My Daughter (L'homme qu'on aimait trop) with Guillaume Canet and Catherine Deneuve, and especially, Love at First Fight (Les combattants), by Thomas Cailley for which she won a César for Best Actress. In 2016, she appeared in two films, Les ogres by Léa Fehner, and Luc and Jean-Pierre Dardenne's The Unknown Girl (La fille inconnue), selected for the official competition at Cannes. She was also seen in Arnaud des Pallières' Orphan (Orpheline), which was screened at the Toronto and San Sebastián film festivals. In 2017, she was cast in Robin Campillo's BPM (BEATS PER MINUTE), which is in competition at the Cannes Film Festival. She has also just finished shooting Remise de peine by Pierre Salvadori, which will be released next year. Since her meeting with the stage director Arthur Nauzyciel, who gave her the role of Macha in The Seagull in 2011, Adèle Haenel has led a parallel career on stage. She recently appeared in The Ritual Slaughter of Gorges Mastromas, directed by Maïa Sandoz.

CAST

Sean…….Nahuel Pérez Biscayart
Nathan……....Arnaud Valois
Sophie…….Adèle Haenel
Thibault…….Antoine Reinartz
Max……...Félix Maritaud
Jérémie……...Ariel Borenstein
Eva……...Aloïse Sauvage
Luc…….……...Simon Bourgade
Germain…….. Médhi Touré
Markus……....Simon Guélat
Muriel……...Coralie Russier
Hélène……..Catherine Vinatier
Marco……Théophile Ray
Etienne……...Jérôme Clément-Wilz
Fabien……...Jean-François Auguste
Sean's Mother…….Saadia Bentaieb

CREW

Screenwriter……....Robin Campillo
In collaboration with……Philippe Mangeot
Director of Photography……..Jeanne Lapoirie
Sound Engineers……...Julien Sicart
Valérie Deloof
Jean-Pierre Laforce
1st Assistant Director……..Valérie Roucher
Production Designer…….Emmanuelle Duplay
Costume Designer……Isabelle Pannetier
Editor……...Robin Campillo
Casting Directors……...Sarah Teper
Leila Fournier
Location Manager…….....Julien Flick
Set Photographer……..Céline Nieszawer
Production Manager……..Diego Urgoiti-Moinot
Post-production Manager……...Christina Crassaris

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