



PRODUCTION NOTES

Gainsbourg

A film by Joann Sfar

Starring
Eric Elmosnino
Anna Mouglalis
Laetitia Casta
Lucy Gordon
Mylene Jampanoi

Release date: October 28th, 2010
Running time: 122 minutes
Rated: TBC

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SYNOPSIS

Once upon a time, a young boy, Lucien, walked up and down the streets of Paris, proudly showing off the abominable yellow star pinned to his jacket.

It's 1941.

When this child of Russian-Jewish parents with a cheeky sparkle in his eyes crosses paths with the pro-Nazi French militia, he starts singing *The Marseillaise* alongside them... even though he doesn't quite know the words.

Then something stops young Lucien short – anti-Semitic propaganda featuring a caricature of a Jew. It's an ugly face that resembles him a bit too closely. A face pinned up to be seen and scorned by all.

He wants run away or erase the grotesque face but does neither. The caricature suddenly comes to life, pops out of the wall and starts to follow the boy. From that point on, the ugly face will never leave his side. It will be his shadow, his curse, his inspiration, his only companion, his alter-ego.

Though he doesn't know it yet, little Lucien will one day be known as Serge Gainsbourg.

This tale recounts the life of a hero. It's about a young boy who goes around occupied Paris spouting out words as though he were putting flowers in a gun barrel. Forty years later, he provokes a major upheaval at a concert in Strasbourg where he is supposed to sing a Jamaican reggae version of the *Marseillaise*. The concert hall is sacked by the military, and the black musicians don't even dare to come on stage. Gainsbourg became a true legend by winning over France with his subversive wit.

It's a tale of conquest. A passionate lover despite his awkward face, Gainsbourg lures the mythic Brigitte Bardot into his bed. He seduces Jane Birkin while taking a swim in his French flag underpants and convinces Juliette Greco to waltz with him barefoot in the wee hours of the morning. These legendary women all, without exception, sing the poetic insanities he writes for them.

It's a tale of duels. The most deadly of them pitting Gainsbourg against his alter-ego, Ugly Face, a bony, feline man/marionette who jealously watches over his love affairs and reminds him of his repressed humiliations whenever he is at the brink of happiness. Ugly Face is a cunning jester, always present to help and hinder the creative process, haunting the poet/singer's nights and never granting him peace of mind.

It's a tale in which Gainsbourg evolves from being a starving painter to the master of the French pop song. His music grabs the narrative reins, transforming a plump wife into a *Hippopodame* (a lady hippopotamus) and an adulterous and passionate evening into a worldwide hit, *Je t'aime, moi non plus* (I love you, neither do I). And so to tell the story of this master of provocation, this manipulator of words and women, of this shy but avid adventurer, let's swap straight talk for wild rhymes and prepare to dive into the Paris of the swinging sixties to take part in a story as audacious as the risks that made little Lucien... Serge Gainsbourg.

A note from the producers

Several months ago, we met a man of enormous talent, probably the most talented and respected comic book artist of his generation: Joann Sfar. But Joann is much more than a comic book artist. He is a born storyteller, a visual artist but also a talented musician. And this is why we so firmly believe in his highly successful mutation into the world of cinema. Amongst the many artistic references that we have in common, there is one for which we share a passion on so many different levels: the life and the music of Serge Gainsbourg. Not so much Gainsbourg the *provocateur*, but Gainsbourg the musician, the artistic icon, the creator, the Pygmalion, the artist of a hundred talents, and in particular, the Gainsbourg of the first 40 years of his life, so productive and yet much less known.

The film we wish to make is much more than a simple “biopic”. We want to make a graphic film, almost expressionist, whose atmosphere will be the exact opposite of a reconstitution of the facts; it will be a vibrant counterpoint, the essence of Gainsbourg’s creative ambition. We believe this is the only way to truly understand and do justice to his complex personality - always adapting and evolving - and his pictorial and musical mind.

Joann wants to make a film that will go well beyond the simplistic version of the media, and draw us closer to Gainsbourg’s own broader vision. Like Gainsbourg, Joann is a man of words, images and musical notes. Which is why we believe so strongly in the Gainsbourg project, the encounter between these two artists and their work.

Marc du Pontavice & Didier Lupfer

A note from director Joann Sfar

Certain artists choose their masters in the same discipline they have chosen. Not me. My master has always been Gainsbourg. And since I didn't want to offend him by helplessly attempting to become singer, I became a cartoonist.

I left Nice for Paris with one goal in mind: to meet Serge Gainsbourg. I figured that since I adored him, he would naturally adore me too. I originally wanted to do a comic book based on one of Gainsbourg's novels, *Evgueni Sokolov*. A month after I moved to Paris, Gainsbourg died.

Great Jewish painters, folk musicians from Eastern Europe - all of my graphic novels have one way or another led me down Gainsbourg's path. My film is very faithful to his life, but it won't be a biopic. It's a real narrative. Paris is like a character in the film. We discover all sorts of nooks and underground worlds as we follow Gainsbourg's footsteps.

There will be no pornography, indecencies or obscenities in my film, but there will be a lot of vulnerable characters who seem to communicate - mainly horizontally - in bed. I don't want my film to hurt anyone. I want Gainsbourg's heirs to be proud of it. Its guiding principle is that it's ultimately the story of a great poet. Gainsbourg always tested the limits, but only a fool would believe cynicism was the motive behind his actions. This is the story of a timid and self-conscious man who protects himself as best he can.

This hero's life is epic. We should feel the Russian blood coursing through the story's veins. There will be no original recordings of Gainsbourg's songs. No jazzy or kitschy film soundtrack. Everything will be re-done, re-worked, resung, and become larger than life. Original tracks won't be artificially superimposed on new images. The voice, music, and image should all be in harmony. I want to make a film comparable to *Ray* or *Walk the Line*. The film begins in Paris with young Gainsbourg bolting through the rain with his Jewish star on the lapel of his jacket. Panicking at the sound of stomping boots, he hides in an alley to transform his Star of David into a sheriff's badge.

From his early year as a painter to his later career in music, Gainsbourg exhibited an extreme and yet restrained romanticism. He did everything with delicacy. But every so often, he would jump up and pursue something aggressively. We see how much it took out of him to write songs and have to defend them and himself each time he recorded a new album. Gainsbourg had the courage to write what youth was looking for. He is the most classical and modern of songwriters. He reaches incredible heights in his songwriting immediately followed by lows during publicity stints on TV. Every artist experiences the sadness of trying to be funny or likable in front of an audience, when in fact all he wants is an intelligent ear, a friendly smile, and welcoming arms.

Gainsbourg deeply moves me with his courage and his extreme vulnerability. I love the sound his white Repetto shoes make on the floor when he walks. I love the way he doesn't wear socks even when it's cold outside. I love his obsession with cinema, drawing and painting. I love that he gets angry because he cannot achieve the same heights in these graphic languages that he does in his music.

Gainsbourg will not be a historiographic or an anecdotal film. No, this film aspires to recount a modern myth because the figure of Gainsbourg is radically modern. No book or

movie has ever delved into his heroic qualities. There is no one more Christ-like, nor Jewish nor Russian than Gainsbourg.

The film begins in a Parisian apartment with a little boy from a Russian family, where many languages other than French are spoken.

I obviously know Gainsbourg's "real life" like the back of my hand, but I do not want to make a "realistic" or "journalistic" film. I want to create something more like a Russian fable, a modern legend. Those who have read my comic books, *Rabbi's Cat*, *Pascin* or *Klezmer*, will find all of my usual obsessions in my Gainsbourg: love as a remedy to everything, the tragedy and absurdity of Slavic poets, omnipresent irony and supernatural creatures straight out of a Chagall painting.

Serge Gainsbourg created a character for himself. I don't want to go around delving into his personal life to discover who he really was. I couldn't care less about the truth. I love Gainsbourg too much to bring him back to the realms of reality. I want this film to have as much energy as a Sergio Leone Western and as much elegance as Fred Astaire. I want to make a cult film, not a journalistic account of his life. I tell stories through images so my film will be very visual.

This film will be full of lies because I love lies. This is how I go about creating a modest and self-conscious work: lying, always lying. I always do a great deal of documentary research beforehand and then purposefully forget half of what I learned. Then I take my subject and make him into a legendary hero. There have been trashy, poppy and sex-obsessed representations of Gainsbourg. Mine will be Russian, a hero right out of Isaac Babel, Gogol or Dostoyevsky.

I would also like this film to address a foreign audience that may not be as familiar with Gainsbourg. Those who experience the film should not only see an extraordinary destiny unveiled, but also witness a modern archetype. I believe that Gainsbourg is more heroic than Superman, in the sense that the Greeks understood it, because a hero is someone who suffers and gets knocked down, but will still grab burning coals with his bare hands. A real hero is one who offers his audience chunks of scalding, molten lava, like Prometheus did.

I am entirely aware of the load I carry on my shoulders, but I love carrying loads that are too heavy to take on.

Joann Sfar

An interview with Olivier Daviaud (composer)

How did you approach the music in this film?

With humility: this is the first time I have worked on a film soundtrack, it's a film about Gainsbourg and I had to immerse myself in Joann's brand of poetry. He wanted to stay faithful to Serge, while reinventing him at the same time. There are more than 60 musical clips in the film, which left me quite a bit of scope. I reappropriated Gainsbourg's songs, as well as composing supplementary music into which I injected elements from Gainsbourg's music.

How did you free yourself from the weight of Gainsbourg's iconic status?

I did things my way, while trying to achieve a certain universality. Most importantly, I put myself at the service of Joann's script. It is a story and I had to come up with a soundtrack to accompany this story, rather than trying to compose a soundtrack for musicians or for Gainsbourg fans. It's a gamble – I know that it won't win everybody over.

Where did you find your inspiration?

In the song *Initials B. B.*, Gainsbourg used the first movement from *The New World Symphony* by Dvořák. As a reference to this, I used the beginning of *The New World Symphony* before going into *Initials B. B.* in the scene in which Gainsbourg and Brigitte Bardot break up. It's a knowing wink to Gainsbourg connoisseurs, but at the same time, it corresponds to the emotions conveyed in the scene. Gainsbourg was very much influenced by classical composers such as Beethoven, Brahms and Chopin. So in the film, there's a Chopin prelude, Brahms' *Third Symphony* – which Gainsbourg used in *Baby Alone in Babylone* – and a piece by Beethoven which inspired *Marilou*.

Which are the songs which are the most faithful to the originals?

Je t'aime... Moi non plus. We used Gainsbourg's version. Along with *Valse de Melody*, it's one of the rare moments where we use the original version. However, I did reinforce the sound of the strings – we went to Sofia in Bulgaria to record a string orchestra, who recreated the string part from the original song.

Why did you choose Dionysos, Emily Loizeau and Nosfell to cover some songs?

I wanted certain pieces to have a strong identity. In *Nazi Rock*, I wanted a rock 'n' roll band that could create a sense of uneasiness, and I found this in Dionysos. For *Love on the Beat*, I needed a human beatbox – noises, shouts, miaowing – that would convey more violence than Bambou's version of the song. Nosfell ticked all the boxes. As for *Aux armes et caetera*, I asked K2R Riddim – in my opinion, the best reggae rhythm section in France – and Tyrone Downie, Bob Marley's keyboardist, to accompany me to give the piece a reggae tonality without mimicking Gainsbourg's version. For *Qui est "in", qui est "out"*, I called on Emily Loizeau and Jeanne Cherhal. We wanted something crazy, something amusing, and to give the impression of rowdy teenagers with the voices of established singers. The musicians of Zone libre were brought in for *L'Hôtel particulier*, because we wanted pure and hard rock and an earthy sonority to emphasise the violent heart attack scene. Gonzales played two-thirds of Gainsbourg's piano pieces - he has a

unique touch and we really needed someone good for the instrumental pieces. However, the hands playing the piano onscreen are mine.

What did you expect from the cast?

I expected them to sing as though it came naturally to them. We didn't want them to lip-sync to the original tracks or to have a singer dub their voices. We wanted it to look realistic and natural. The key to this was Eric Elmosnino. In the same way that he had to become Gainsbourg without imitating him, he had to sing in the way that Gainsbourg did without aping him. Fortunately, Eric is an excellent singer, a fact even he didn't know until he started taking lessons. So we knew from the beginning that we were safe. We had a Plan B in case he really couldn't sing, which was always going to be a possibility, but the film wouldn't have turned out the same. We had him work on five songs, and we listened to him at the end of three weeks. He wasn't necessarily very much like Gainsbourg, but he evoked such incredible emotion – his voice gave us goosebumps. All the other actors – Laetitia Casta, Sara Forestier, Anna Mouglaïs, Lucy Gordon, Philippe Duquesne, Yolande Moreau and little Kacey who played the young Gainsbourg – also managed to achieve this realism, which means that the audience don't question what we see onscreen.

How did you adapt to the vocal capabilities of the cast?

Quite easily because they are all quiet talented. I had to lower the key of *Antoine le casseur*, a track that Gainsbourg never released, for Philippe Duquesne, because he had a lower voice than I expected. I had a little scare with Anna Mouglaïs, because I thought that the duo *La Javanaise* would be in a key too low for her voice, but it turns out that she actually has a sublime voice in the lower range. Laetitia was quite like Bardot, so I didn't really have to do anything there. We only rehearsed *Bonnie and Clyde* in a studio because the song was interspersed with dialogue, so we had to work on acting and singing at the same time so that this flowed.

Which are the songs which were performed live during the filming?

Le Canari est sur le balcon, which Lucy sang live on stage. She had a very sweet voice, so it was a nice little moment during filming. I was playing the piano for *Bonnie and Clyde* behind the set: Laetitia and Eric had the music played for them through earpieces, and I had to watch what they were doing on a monitor to get the timing right. However, most of the songs were recorded in advance, because the conditions on set were too difficult for us to record live every time. It took a few days to get each song perfect. So they were lip-syncing during filming, but to their own voices.

An interview with Christian Martí (Production Designer)

What instructions did Joann Sfar give you for set design?

At first, nothing in particular. He gave me Russian paintings and films like Murnau's *Nosferatu*, Carné's *Les Enfants du paradis* and Fellini's *Amarcord* as points of reference. On my part, I also watched expressionist films, I watched and rewatched Hitchcock's *Rebecca*, I looked for inspiration in collages by Prévert, and most important, from Gainsbourg's lyrics. We began by looking for a "spine", a general concept which we could apply to all the sets, although we weren't completely agreed on the set design until we sat down with each other to discuss it – Joann wanted a minimalist and rather monochrome film. So I started working with Christian Gambiasi, the head decorator, to come up with a palette of colours which matched the paintings given to me. Joann drew storyboards from the viewpoints that he wanted, and I worked on making the set according to these drawings. He repeatedly told me and Guillaume Schiffman, the Director of Photography, that he trusted us because he didn't have any previous experience in film.

What did you pay the most attention to?

The film wasn't meant to be a straightforward reconstitution. Each object, each colour had to represent a period in Gainsbourg's and his state of mind. I had to take great care not to let what we had chosen to recount of Gainsbourg's universe become a soulless anecdote. We had to become intimate with him.

Which parts of the set design are completely from your imagination?

The attic that Gainsbourg used as a studio. We built it and invented all the rooms in the Éclair Studios in Épinay-sur-Seine. That set was meant to be the backdrop to a tumultuous event in Serge Gainsbourg's life: it was there that he decided to give up painting and to burn all his paintings. He never did burn his works in real life. Joann did some watercolour paintings, which we enlarged and repainted onto canvasses. We then made around ten copies of each, as we did with all the furniture and accessories, so that we could film the fire scene several times. With Claude Vincent, the head set builder, we did trials and chose materials that were able to resist the flames for long enough to assure the safety of the cast and crew.

Which was the period of Gainsbourg's life that required the most research on your part?

The years of his first marriage. We did a lot of research, but found very little information on this period of his life. He never talked about it in any interview, and he only had a couple of photos from the bourgeois life he led during those years.

Which are the parts that are historically correct?

The most detailed research was on the musical instruments. Each of them had a sonority that went hand in hand with their design, and they had to express richness or poverty. Jean-Philippe Reverdot, our Prop Master, spent several months looking for the instruments which appeared in the film one by one, and when he didn't find them, we had them made according to archival documents. For other accessories, we knew that

Gainsbourg was obsessive, almost to the point of fetishism. So we studied every documentary, every film and every photo, and set designers Isabelle Girard and Françoise Doré hunted down these items assiduously. Again, whatever they couldn't find were made specially.

What was your source of inspiration for Dali's bedroom?

We actually had all the information we needed about the décor from an interview that Gainsbourg did. He described how the drawings of masters were just scattered on the floor, and he said that the black astrakhan-covered walls made quite an impression on him. Because Dali was a megalomaniac, we imagined that he was living in one of his paintings. Valentina Laroca, our set decorator, created paintings in the style of the painters Gainsbourg mentioned, and our sculptor Arnaud Beauté reproduced objects that were in Dali's paintings in bulk. All of this was installed at the Royaumont Abbey and a large part of the walls were covered in black astrakhan fabric, but we left the gothic pillars because we felt that they conveyed Dali's baroque side.

What are the key elements to the townhouse on rue de Verneuil?

After visiting Dali's house, Serge was impressed by the black walls and he applied the same concept to his townhouse. We chose, as meticulously as he would have done, a black with texture, and settled on a beautiful watered silk so that the black would have a certain depth. Black is a rather immaterial colour, almost invisible, and here it creates a luxurious setting. It is the luxurious backdrop for Gainsbourg's collections.

How did you go about making certain interiors opulent, but not too claustrophobic when on screen?

You only need very few things to convey opulence – richness can be expressed in the choice of objects, the stands on which they are displayed and the way they are positioned. Choosing the setting is a very subtle process and Joann and Guillaume were in charge of making these choices during filming. I really like the work that Guillaume did for this film. His lighting and framing, in particular, greatly embellished our work.

The light changes, according to the scene, to create different atmospheres. How did this influence your work?

I discussed the use of colour as a way of creating atmosphere with Joann and Guillaume Schiffman: colour was often used to denote certain periods in Gainsbourg's life and to his state of mind at the time. For example, the cold yet sensual colours used on the cover of *Love on the Beat* provided inspiration for Madame Arthur's cabaret. The metallic mauve colour expresses this precisely, and the lighting is used to reinforce this element. On the other hand, dull monochrome tones were used for the years of occupation.

How did you work on the deformed perspective?

By analysing Joann's drawings and his comics, we gathered that he had a rather expressionist style, which translated into exaggerated perspectives and oversized objects. We worked on distorting the perspective on some architectural lines, on oversizing volumes on certain axes and on exaggerating or reducing their proportions, depending on the point of view.

Which was the most unlikely set?

We had faith – nothing seemed impossible to us – and Joann trusted us. This is the reason why, instead of filming in Jamaica, we rebuilt Jamaica instead... on a beach in Berck in the north of France.

An interview with Pascaline Chavanne (costume designer)

What kind of style did Joann Sfar want?

He wanted everything to be really stylised in order to highlight the women in the film. This was very important to him. I put together an file for him, covering all the eras in the film. What was difficult was tracing different worlds, marked by some strong personalities, without this affecting the historical reconstitution. The file referred to the real-life protagonists of this story, but also to the worlds resembling the period and Gainsbourg's world. From this starting point, I came up with some very neutral designs. As Joann himself draws and is almost a form of writing for him, he replied with sketches. It was fantastic. I never thought that I would work like this, and it's the reason why I loved this project – there was this instant richness.

What kind of research did you do?

We went to the INA [National Audiovisual Institute], we went to all the image libraries, we looked at fashion magazines, old copies of Vogue. We also used documents cited in Gilles Verlant's biography of Gainsbourg, and we read up on the migration of Russian Jews to France in the 30s and 40s in order to recreate his parent's world... and then we dropped everything: Joann realised at the fittings that 1930s clothes didn't suit Dinara Droukova at all. He wanted her to be a mother who never aged, because Joann himself lost his mother at the age of three, so he had this image of an eternally young and beautiful mother. He brought this idea into this story, and therefore this applied to the costumes too. More generally though, he wanted beauty of each of the women to give off a sense of poetry, even if this was detrimental to the realism of the film. The idea was to give an illusion of the period, but through the poetic vision of Joann.

Did you use any vintage items for the costumes?

No, we made everything ourselves, even for the extras, and often several of the same costume. Joann designed the outfits, then we reworked the designs, made the costumes and aged them, so that they would look worn in.

How did you interpret the personality of Gainsbourg's first wife?

Gainsbourg's first wife was probably force to be reckoned with, so we expressed that by putting her in a corset, tight skirts and 12 cm heels.

What did you have in mind for Juliette Gréco?

We played with the elements of sensuality and surprise with the décolleté on the back of the dress. We didn't want a simple black dress like a monk's robe, like Gréco used to wear, because it's too sombre. Joann wanted to recreate the sensuality of bodies between Gainsbourg and all his women, so we had to show some flesh. So that's how we came up with the cowl neck on the back of the dress, with this fine chain dangling behind.

How did you appropriate the imagery of Bardot?

Joann wanted her to have a feline quality, which is obviously something that Laetitia Casta already has. We designed a playsuit which was like a second skin - she felt like she

was naked when she had it on. This was important for her, because the sensation of being naked changed the way she acted, her gestures and the way she held herself. There was a lot of discussion on the length of her panther coat, and in the end we chose a very short one so that we could see all of her thigh-high boots. Maybe it's not what Bardot really wore, except for the boots, but it corresponds to the images that everyone has of her.

What were your instructions on Jane Birkin?

With Jane, Joann wanted us to stick as closely as possible to reality: the white shirt, the Petit Bateau underwear, the tank tops, jeans. Joann designed the white guipure dress that Lucy Gordon wore in the first scene. It's not exactly the same as the one that Jane wore, but it looks a lot like it. Lucy Gordon had loads of fittings. Jane Birkin had something about her that was completely incredible in the 1970s, sort of a little flame which only she has, and Lucy just channelled something else. The clothes had to emphasise Lucy while giving her something of Jane.

What was your inspiration for Bambou?

Joann wanted to distill the world that she came from: 1980s, drugs, Parisian nightclubs, the night. He imagined her topless in roller skates, just like in the clip. Bambou is a symbol of the 1980s: she is Perfecto, schematic, very synthetic. There are many characters in this story, so they have to be easily identifiable at a glance. They are symbolised by the most representative thing they wore in the period and the crowd that they gravitated towards.

How did you come up with the costume of the creature?

It's a real costume inspired by the beginning of the century, and we made six of them. We struggled quite a bit with this costume, because Joann couldn't articulate exactly what he wanted. There were red herrings, and we made suggestions but there was always something that wasn't quite right, although we didn't know exactly what. In the end, we understood that what Joann had in mind was the little Vampire from his comics. It took us some time to get that.

How did you transform Eric Elmosnino into Gainsbourg?

Eric and Gainsbourg don't have the same body shape at all. And over the years, Gainsbourg changed, and so we had to adjust his costumes and give him a fake paunch to wear at the end. It's not easy to perform a transformation which takes an actor through so much time and space. Only very few aspects of a man's clothes have changed over the years: the width of the lapel, the position of buttons, the cut of a pair of jeans. We had many fittings with Eric. He was the one who was the most complicated to dress. The Gainsbourg look, achieved with his shirt, jeans and slanted jacket, did not come out the same on Eric. We had to adjust everything to achieve Gainsbourg's nonchalance, to make it as realistic as possible. I watched Gainsbourg's films and a lot of television footage to make sure that I got as close as I could to recreating Gainsbourg's clothes and to conveying that his essence. Everything that Eric wears, Gainsbourg could have worn, although not necessarily at the same moment. This was not important for Joann – what was paramount was that we achieved harmony.



Eric Elmosnino is Serge Gainsbourg

Serge Gainsbourg created a character for himself. I don't want to go around delving into his personal life to discover who he really was. I couldn't care less about the truth. I love Gainsbourg too much to bring him back to the realms of reality. I want this film to have as much energy as a Sergio Leone Western and as much elegance as Fred Astaire. I want to make a cult film, not a journalistic account of his life. I tell stories through images so my film will be very visual.



Anna Mouglalis is Juliette Gréco
 Laetitia Casta is Brigitte Bardot
 Lucy Gordon is Jane Birkin
 Mylène Jampanoï is Bambou



About Joann Sfar

August 28th, 1971: Joann Sfar is born in Nice to an Ashkenazi mother and a Sephardic father, a pencil in hand. He very quickly begins to collect comic books and cultivate a bazaar full of quirky characters and funny monsters.

After graduating from high school, he simultaneously pursues a degree in philosophy at the University of Nice (he graduates with honours) and takes classes with Jean-François Debord at the School of Fine Arts in the Morphology department in Paris. These classes take him from autopsy rooms to the Museum of Natural History, where he finds monster-like creatures floating in formaldehyde.

As a teenager, he knocked on the door of famous comic book artists, who would later on become his guardian angels. He also knocked on the doors of publishers, who finally respond in 1994: during the same month, L'Association, Delcourt and Dargaud decide to publish his first comic books.

In just a few years, the young man who had been criticized for his lack of talent becomes one of the leaders of the “new wave” of comic book art along with Christophe Blain, Lewis Trondheim and Emmanuel Guibert. He makes less formal and less commercial drawings and makes the storytelling a priority. Joann and these other leading artists manage to appeal to a much wider audience.

Joann, either alone or in collaboration with other artists, has signed over 150 comic books, some novels and animated films, amongst them a prize-winning video clip for the rock band Dionysos (Annecy International Animation Film Festival 2006). That same year, he received an Eisner Award for *The Rabbi's Cat*. He is also an editor for Gallimard's Bayou collection. Somehow he still manages to find time to play the ukulele, the mandolin, the harmonica, and claims that his violin teacher finds that he has a way with his bow!

While his literary world borrows heavily from prominent French Jewish authors such as Romain Gary and Albert Cohen, the intelligence of his drawings makes him an heir to Ronald Searle, Quentin Blake and Hugo Pratt. Not bad, not bad at all...

About the cast

ERIC ELMOSNINO (SERGE GAINSBOURG)

Filmography:

- 2010 - N'AYEZ PAS PEUR** (Judith Godrèche)
- 2010 - GAINSBOURG** (Joann Sfar)
- 2009 - LE PÈRE DE MES ENFANTS** (Mia Hansen-Love)
- 2009 - BANCS PUBLICS** (Bruno Podalydès)
- 2008 - L'HEURE D'ÉTÉ** (Olivier Assayas)
- 2007 - LA VIE D'ARTISTE** (Marc Fitoussi)
- 2005 - GENTILLE** (Sophie Fillières)
- 2001 - LIBERTÉ-OLERON** (Bruno Podalydès)
- 1999 - LA VIE NE ME FAIT PAS PEUR** (Noémie Lvovsky)
- 1998 - FIN AOÛT, DÉBUT SEPTEMBRE** (Olivier Assayas)
- 1996 - BERNIE** (Albert Dupontel)
- 1994 - LE COLONEL CHABERT** (Yves Angelo)
- 1985 - À NOUS LES GARÇONS** (Michel Lang)

LUCY GORDON (JANE BIRKIN)

Filmography:

- 2010 - GAINSBOURG** (Joann Sfar)
- 2009 - CINÉMAN** (Yann Moix)
- 2009 - BRIEF INTERVIEWS WITH HIDEOUS MEN** (John Krasinski)
- 2008 - FROST** (Steve Clark)
- 2007 - SPIDER-MAN 3** (Sam Raimi)
- 2007 - SERIAL** (Kevin Arbouet and Larry Strong)
- 2005 - LES POUPÉES RUSSES** (Cédric Klapisch)
- 2002 - THE FOUR FEATHERS** (Shekhar Kapur)
- 2001 - SERENDIPITY** (Peter Chelsom)
- 2001 - PERFUME** (Michael Rymmer and Hunter Carson)

LAETITIA CASTA (BRIGITTE BARDOT)

Filmography:

- 2010 - GAINSBOURG** (Joann Sfar)
- 2010 - FACE** (Tsai Ming-liang)
- 2007 - THE MAIDEN AND THE WOLVES** (Gilles Legrand)
- 2007 - BORN IN 68** (Olivier Ducastel and Jacques Martineau)
- 2006 - LE GRAND APPARTEMENT** (Pascal Thomas)
- 2003 - ERRANCE** (Damien Odoul)
- 2001 - RUE DES PLAISIRS** (Patrice Leconte)
- 2000 - LES ÂMES FORTES** (Raoul Ruiz)

1999 - GYPSY (Manuel Palacios)

1998 - ASTERIX AND OBELIX TAKE ON CAESAR (Claude Zidi)

DOUG JONES (LA GUEULE)

Filmography:

2010 - GAINSBURG (Joann Sfar)

2009 - GREYSCALE (Ryan Dunlap)

2009 - CYRUS (Mark Vadik)

2009 - MY NAME IS JERRY (Morgan Mead)

2009 - LEGION (2010) (Scott Charles Stewart)

2009 - SUPER CAPERS (Ray Griggs)

2008 - QUARANTINE (John Erick Dowdle)

2008 - HELLBOY II: THE GOLDEN ARMY (Guillermo Del Toro)

2007 - FANTASTIC FOUR: RISE OF THE SILVER SURFER (Tim Story)

2007 - THE WAGER (Judson Pearce Morgan)

2006 - LADY IN THE WATER (M. Night Shyamalan)

2006 - PAN'S LABYRINTH (Guillermo Del Toro)

2005 - THE CABINET OF DR. CALIGARI (David Lee Fisher)

2004 - HELLBOY (Guillermo Del Toro)

2002 - ADAPTATION (Spike Jonze)

2002 - MEN IN BLACK II (Barry Sonnenfeld)

1997 - MIMIC (Guillermo Del Toro)

1992 - BATMAN RETURNS (Tim Burton)

1991 - HOOK (Steven Spielberg)

ANNA MOUGLALIS (JULIETTE GRECO)

Filmography:

2010 - GAINSBURG (Joann Sfar)

2008 - COCO CHANEL & IGOR STRAVINSKY (Jan Kounen)

2007 - J'AI TOUJOURS RÊVÉ D'ÊTRE UN GANGSTER (Samuel Benchetrit)

2005 - MARE NERO (Roberta Torre)

2004 - ROMANZO CRIMINALE (Michele Placido)

2004 - REAL LIFE (Panos Koutras)

2004 - D'UN VILLAGE À L'AUTRE (Costas Natsis)

2003 - EN ATTENDANT LE DÉLUGE (Damien Odoul)

2003 - LE PRIX DU DÉSIR (Roberto Ando)

2002 - LA VIE NOUVELLE (Philippe Grandrieux)

2002 - LA COMPAGNIE DES HOMMES (Arnaud Desplechin)

2001 - LE LOUP DE LA CÔTE OUEST (Hugo Santiago)

2001 - NOVO (Jean-Pierre Limosin)

2000 - LA CAPTIVE (Chantal Ackerman)
2000 - MERCI POUR LE CHOCOLAT (Claude Chabrol)
1997 - TERMINALE (Francis Girod)

MYLENE JAMPANOI (BAMBOU)

Filmography:

2010 - CLEAN OUT (Barthélémy Grossman)
2010 - GAINSBURG (Joann Sfar)
2008 - MARTYRS (Pascal Laugier)
2007 - LA VALLÉE DES FLEURS (Pan Nalin)
2006 - LES FILLES DU BOTANISTE (Dai Sijie)
2005 - CAVALCADE (Steve Suissa)
2004 - 36 QUAI DES ORFÈVRES (Olivier Marchal)
2004 - LES RIVIÈRES POURPRES II (Olivier Dahan)

STARRING

<i>Serge Gainsbourg</i>	Eric Elmosnino
<i>Jane Birkin</i>	Lucy Gordon
<i>Brigitte Bardot</i>	Laetitia Casta
<i>La Gueule</i>	Doug Jones
<i>Juliette Gréco</i>	Anna Mouglalis
<i>Bambou</i>	Mylène Jampanoï
<i>France Gall</i>	Sara Forestier
<i>Lucien Ginsburg</i>	Kacey Mottet-Klein
<i>Joseph Ginsburg</i>	Razvan Vasilescu
<i>Olga Ginsburg</i>	Dinara Droukarova
<i>Boris Vian</i>	Philippe Katerine
<i>Elisabeth</i>	Deborah Grall
<i>Fréhel</i>	Yolande Moreau
<i>The model</i>	Ophélie Kolb
<i>Gainsbourg's record producer</i>	Claude Chabrol
<i>Headmaster</i>	François Morel
<i>Lucky Sarcelles</i>	Philippe Duquesne
<i>Gypsy guitarist</i>	Angelo Debarre
<i>Phyphy</i>	Grégory Gadebois
<i>Judith</i>	Alice Carel
<i>Les Frères Jacques</i>	Le Quatuor
<i>France Gall's father</i>	Roger Mollien

Directed by

Joann Sfar

Written by

Joann Sfar

Produced by

Marc du Pontavice

Didier Lupfer

Executive producer

Matthew Gledhill

Casting by

Stéphane Batut

Director of Photography

Guillaume Schiffman

Production designer

Christian Martí

Costume designer

Pascaline Chavanne

Special effects by

David Martí

Montse Ribé

Make-up artist

Gill Robillard

Musical arrangements by

Olivier Daviaud

Pianist

Gonzalès

SCREEN INTERNATIONAL REVIEW

By Lisa Nesselson.

Gainsbourg, *Gainsbourg (vie heroique)* is splendidly cast and consistently engaging. Prolific cartoonist Sfar's first feature as writer/director skillfully melds Gainsbourg's uppity inner child, self-destructive behaviour and prodigious talent with a rousing approach to the societal weight of being — and looking — Jewish.

With excellent music, rebellious energy and beautiful naked women to spare, little would seem to stand in the way of the film's success except, perhaps, misguided indifference towards its subject. Eric Elmosnino's incarnation of the chain-smoking iconoclast who died in 1991 at the age of 62 is uncanny.

Heavy on imagined elements as well as documented highlights, Sfar's film boasts a Euros 16m budget (\$23.1m) - substantial for a French first feature – which is all on screen and in the soundtrack. With sales to some 30 countries, including Optimum in the UK, Prokino in Germany and Hopscotch in Australia, *Gainsbourg (vie heroique)* is still awaiting a US deal in the one territory where Gainsbourg is little-known.

Young Serge (Kacey Mottet-Klein) is depicted as a compulsive artist and illustrator who yearns to be a great painter. An irreverent whippersnapper in Occupied France, he is seen contacting Nazi officials to insist on a yellow star of his own. Whether this actually happened or not, it's a fine way to establish that Gainsbourg can't resist flaunting authority and is congenitally incapable of playing it safe - qualities that would distinguish his music, from the simulated female orgasm of steamy ditty *Je t'aime...moi non plus* to his scandalous reggae version of the French national anthem.

Saddled with a hooked nose and prominent ears and painfully aware of his own unattractiveness, adolescent Serge quickly perfected a knack for talking to women, starting with the nude model in his life drawing class. Sfar makes the gutsy decision to give the boy an enormous, clingy alter ego, *La Gueule* or *Ugly Face*, a sort of giant talking potato with legs which lumbers after him. Twenty minutes in, Elmosnino takes over as the adult Gainsbourg and *Ugly Face* grows into a lanky, more elegant sidekick with preying mantis type limbs and a lengthy beak. (Doug Jones is excellent inside the mask and costume.)

The film assumes that viewers can identify key figures in French pop culture circles including Juliette Greco (Anna Mouglalis), Brigitte Bardot (Laetitia Casta), France Gall (Sara Forestier) and Jane Birkin (the late Lucy Gordon, who killed herself in the summer of 2009 and to whom the film is dedicated). Gordon captures Birkin's breathy delivery and breaking glass singing voice while a pulpy, uninhibited Casta is a delight as Bardot, who recorded several indelible hits and starred with Gainsbourg in iconic clips to illustrate them.

As Gainsbourg abandons painting, finds success as a songwriter and profits from the freewheeling societal changes of the 1960s, falling for Bardot and Birkin along the way, he continues to be dogged by *Ugly Face* and the nagging hurts he represents. While the film never completely loses steam, it feels far heavier toward the end because Gainsbourg himself grew increasingly dissolute.

Production design spanning the 1940s through the '80s, has the ring of truth and Guillaume Schiffman's photography is a major plus. Nearly every scene is bathed in smoke, but leaving out the cigarettes would be like making *Sid And Nancy* without any drugs.

THE OBSERVER REVIEW

By Philip French

In the 1930s Warner Brothers developed a serious line in earnest, inspirational films celebrating great scientists, liberators and social benefactors, usually played by Edward G Robinson or Paul Muni, dedicated to Longfellow's lines in his "A Psalm of Life": "Lives of great men all remind us/ We can make our lives sublime/ And, departing, leave behind us/ Footprints on the sands of time." But Variety's contemptuous neologism "biopic" stuck, and biography has never had much standing in the cinema – unlike the literary world where, under the larger rubric of "life writing", it's a serious matter both to practise and study.

Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* in the 1940s and the Italian Marxist Francesco Rosi's *Salvatore Giuliano* in the 60s attempted to find an inventive form that would give cinematic biography the status of its literary equivalent. But while popular epics such as *Lawrence of Arabia* and *Gandhi* have won Oscars and provided prize-winning roles, critical condescension has continued almost unabated.

Recently, however, as popular culture has come to be taken more seriously than it was when 20th Century-Fox made colourful showbiz biopics 60 years ago, a succession of movie lives of rock stars have done away with traditional narrative forms. Mostly made by independent film-makers, they've mixed documentary and fiction, fantasy and reality in an attempt to get at complex, vital truths: one thinks for instance of British pictures about Ian Curtis, Ian Dury and John Lennon, as well as Todd Haynes's American masterwork *I'm Not There* in which six different actors play faces and facets of Bob Dylan.

To this category belongs *Gainsbourg*, aka *Gainsbourg (Vie héroïque)*, a portrait of the French singer Serge Gainsbourg (1928-1991). It's an altogether bolder film than *La vie en rose* which brought an Oscar to Marion Cotillard as Édith Piaf, though it too has a central performance, from Éric Elmosnino, that is remarkable both physically and aurally. It's the feature debut of the 38-year-old writer-director Joann Sfar, a comic-strip designer who, like Gainsbourg, was born in France of Jewish parents, and he finds Serge's "Rosebud" in his Jewish background.

In a pre-credit sequence the young child Serge (born Lucien) is rejected as "too ugly" by a little girl on a summer beach. The film then switches to his wartime childhood in German-occupied Paris. There he reacts against his father's ambition for him to become a classical musician, and against the authorities that force him to wear a yellow star pinned to his chest. He mocks and puzzles the French collaborators by the heavily ironic gesture of being the first to turn up and demand his star, before others start forming a queue. But the atmosphere of the time makes an indelible impression. From the antisemitic posters that line the streets two images continue to haunt him: a Humpty Dumpty grotesque and a mocking beak-nosed caricature that becomes his aggressive alter ego. The movie is rather vague in its treatment of the war, as about much else, though it does have a touching episode in which Gainsbourg lives secretly under the protection of a Catholic boarding school in the countryside, which evokes Louis Malle's autobiographical *Au revoir les enfants*, a key work in the cycle of French movies dealing with Jews during the Occupation.

In one of the best early sequences Serge's precocious interest in music, painting and sex come together when he attends a life class where he's supposed to keep his back to the nude model his elders are drawing. He subsequently chats up the model and takes her to a bar for a soft drink, where he encounters an elderly music hall chanteuse and exuberantly sings along with her to her biggest hit, a risqué number called "Coco". After the war the central role is taken by Elmosnino as the charismatic, chain-smoking, heavy-drinking Serge – lover, composer, performer in an ever-changing variety of genres and rebel with a mission to *épater les bourgeois*. His first two marriages don't figure in the film, chief attention being given to his affairs and collaborations with Françoise Hardy, France Gall, Brigitte Bardot and of course Jane Birkin. Laetitia Casta is priceless as Bardot, prancing around Serge's apartment wrapped in a sheet, charming Serge's parents. The late Lucy Gordon is a fetching, playful

Birkin, and there's a highly amusing scene in the late 1960s when Serge's music producer (played by Nouvelle Vague director Claude Chabrol) tells them that their erotic duet "Je t'aime... moi non plus" (here, unlike most of the other numbers, performed in the original version) could land them in jail.

The self-destructive aspect of Gainsbourg is touched on impressionistically. The cops pick him up dead drunk in the street and transport him in a black maria not to jail but to a concert engagement. Most remarkably, we see him record his reggae version of "La Marseillaise" with a Jamaican group (as aggressively provocative in its way as Jimi Hendrix's treatment of "The Star Spangled Banner" at Woodstock). It's followed by right-wing veterans threatening to lynch him before being drawn into joining him in a straight version of the song.

This enjoyable, handsomely designed, somewhat ragged film brings us close to Gainsbourg as a personality. But it won't help anyone to a high score on Mastermind with "The Life and Work of Serge Gainsbourg" as the specialist subject. Nor will an average British audience come away understanding what François Mitterrand meant when he reacted to Gainsbourg's death saying: "He was our Baudelaire, our Apollinaire. He elevated the song to the level of art."