



ON TOUR (TOURNÉE)

Spring
Season
2011

Review by Jason Wood, Little White Lies:

Best known to UK audiences as an actor of ferocious intensity whose performances in films like *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* earned him a call up as a Bond villain, Mathieu Amalric is also a filmmaker with several shorts and a number of accomplished features to his name. He carries off with panache his role as the Renaissance man of contemporary French cinema.

On Tour may have been derided by critics when it screened in Cannes, but it went on to secure a Best Director prize. The nucleus of the negativity was the perception that the film is too freewheeling and digressive. It is, but this approach suits the material perfectly and gives *On Tour* its considerable charm and dissolute character.

Joachim (Amalric), a former Parisian television producer, has left everything behind – children, friends, enemies, lovers, regrets – to start a new life in America. He comes back with a team of burlesque performers to whom he has fed fantasies of a tour of France and, most enticingly, of Paris. Travelling from port to port, the curvaceous showgirls invent an extravagant fantasy world of warmth and hedonism, despite the constant round of impersonal hotels and lack of money.

The show gets an enthusiastic response from men and women alike, but their dream of a last grand show in the capital goes up in smoke when Joachim is betrayed by an old friend.

Inspired by Sidonie-Gabrielle Colette's 'The Other Side of the Music Hall', a candid account of the writer's experiences performing in the provinces as part of a repertory group putting on a scandalous pantomime, *On Tour's* closest cinematic forebear is



John Cassavetes' *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie*. The two films share both a familiarity with the underbelly of showbiz and a pronounced sense of melancholy, specifically regarding their central character.

Like Ben Gazzara's hapless nightclub owner, Joachim has grown accustomed to failure. A man who has made a hash of his personal affairs, Joachim has also made some unfortunate choices in business. An essentially good-natured soul who dreams of regaining the power and prestige he once commanded, he is a prince without a kingdom. Reluctantly directing himself for the first time after a suitable leading man couldn't be found, Amalric is magnetic.

A road movie of sorts that follows its own idiosyncratic itinerary, *On Tour* offers a warts-and-all portrait of the showbiz lifestyle and yet still manages to be tremendously sensuous and at times transcendent. A fleeting nocturnal connection between Joachim and a lonely garage cashier (played by the luminous Aurélia Petit) is incredibly touching, while the film's conclusion at the empty swimming pool of an out-of-season hotel is amongst the finest and most thrillingly executed sequences in recent French cinema.

David Parkinson, Empire:

Plot: Five American burlesque dancers and their sardonic manager (Amalric) take their risqué tour around France.

Review: With its teasingly obfuscated exposition and shifts between backstage vérité and road-movie melodrama, Mathieu Amalric's fourth directorial outing is hugely enjoyable. However, the skirting of the reasons why Amalric's disgraced impresario is back in France with an American burlesque troupe deprives his mid-section bid to rebuild his career of the intrigue that could have made this as significant as its evident inspiration, John Cassavetes' *The Killing Of A Chinese Bookie*. The disrobing routines are saucily amusing, the banter acerbic and the mood is ably captured. But each episode would have packed more punch with more character depth and back story.

Verdict: Amalric's second stab at feature direction marks him out as a talent to watch. A little episodic at times, *On Tour* is still a hugely enjoyable journey.