



Ma mère

Christophe Honoré

FRANCE/PORTUGAL, 2004
French

110 minutes ■ Colour/35mm

Production Company: **Gemini Films/**
Madragoa Filmes

Executive Producer: **Paulo Branco**

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Screenplay: **Christophe Honoré,**
based on the novel by Georges Bataille

Cinematographer: **Hélène Louvart**

Editor: **Chantal Hymans**

Production Designer: **Laurent Allaire**

Sound: **Jean-Claude Brisson**

Principal Cast: **Isabelle Huppert,**
Louis Garrel, Emma de Caunes,
Joana Preiss, Jean-Baptiste Montagut

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In *Ma mère*, gifted writer-director Christophe Honoré creates a moody, ethereal adaptation of Georges Bataille's much-debated work of the same name. Bataille's much-debated work, consumed with transgressive sexuality and the casual abrogation of conventional morality, is difficult to film; the story is deeply literary, period-specific and seemingly static. Honoré has brilliantly isolated the elements of the book that still have the power to shock us and disengage our moral certainties.

Honoré also has the extraordinary gift here of Isabelle Huppert in the lead role. Easily the most daring actress of her generation, Huppert has found a signature role as the mother in question and it fits her like a glove. At once nurturing and highly sexual, her complex moral choices are not only credible, but somehow perversely inevitable.

Ma mère takes place in the Canary Islands, where the film's family shares a home. The mother Hélène, cool and in charge, and her teenaged son Pierre (Louis Garrel), a pious Catholic back from boarding school, discuss his father's infidelity; the next they hear, he is dead in a car crash. Hélène launches into a wild series of parties, gradually involving her son in her drug- drink- and, especially, sex-fuelled nights out.

When she mysteriously goes away, her son is left in the care of her mistress Réa (Joana Preiss) and Hansi (Emma de Caunes), an icy blonde sadist with whom he falls in love. As the film evolves, we realize that this is a period of initiation for

the young man until his mother can return and fully bring him to sexual maturity and adulthood.

To say that the film is perverse would completely miss the point. With *Ma mère*, Honoré has created a complete and separate universe, one governed by its own moral rules, totally understandable and totally divorced from the silly strictures – represented in the film by a group of British tourists – of conventional behaviour. The result is a daring and profound vision of our deepest selves.

■ **Noah Cowan**

Christophe Honoré was born in Brittany and is an established writer of films, plays, children's books and novels, including "La Douceur" and "Scarborough". His screenwriting credits include co-writing Jean-Pierre Limosin's *Novo* (02), which played as part of the Festival's inaugural Visions programme in 2002. His first feature as a director was *Dix-sept fois Cécile Cassard* (02); *Ma mère* (04) is his second feature.

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