

CHAPTER III

LUC BESSON:

HIS BIOGRAPHY, HIS WORKS, AND HIS NOTE

AND

THE MESSENGER THE STORY OF JOAN OF ARC

A. LUC BESSON

A.1. HIS BIOGRAPHY (Yahoo! Movies: Luc Besson – Biography):

Luc Besson was born in Paris on March 18, 1959, and spent most of his childhood living in the idyllic setting of various Mediterranean hide-ways where his parents worked as diving instructors.

Besson's surrounding and family influences made it seem a sure path that would lead him to a similar maritime career. From the age of 10, after encounter with a friendly dolphin, Besson determined to become a maritime biologist, specializing in the study of species.

Besson studied for this life plan throughout his teens until, at 17, a diving accident prevented him from ever diving again. His long-held dream cut short, Besson redirected his sights, deciding that he would become a filmmaker.

Besson dropped out of school to seek work in the French film industry, and started making his own first experimental films in super-8. At the age of 19, he moved to Los Angeles, where he lived for three months working in the American movie industry.

A.2. HIS WORKS (Yahoo! Movies: Luc Besson – Biography):

In 1983, after three years of experience as an assistant director, Besson made his first feature, Le Dernier Combat. Selected for competition in the Avoriaz Science Fiction Film Festival, the movie won two major awards from the festival jury, which included Alan J. Pakula and Jean-Jacques Annaud among its members. It was nominated for a Cesar Award (a French movie award) and went on to win 12 awards around the world.

Besson's second movie, Subway, starred Christopher Lambert in a Cesar-winning performance (one of 13 Cesar nominations garnered by the movie), as a thief on the run who becomes involved with a fantastic subculture of Parisian living in the city's underground. The movie gained Besson an international reputation, and is today regarded worldwide as a cult classic.

Besson's 1988 movie The Big Blue, expressing the dreams of Besson's Mediterranean youth, cast Jean Reno as an Italian diver with an unquenchable love for the sea. Besson's first movie to be made in English, boasting an international cast, was distributed in the U.S. in a version that suffered various unauthorized alteration to its scenes – including a changed ending – and to Eric Serra's score. The intact version of Besson's movie, nominated for seven Cesars, was a huge success throughout most of the world and is one of the top five movie in French history.

Besson's La Femme Nikita was the director's first global sensation, a movie that inspired remakes in both the U.S. and Hong Kong. The story of a feral, drug-addicted girl forced to train as a government hit-woman, made international stars of leads Anne Parillaud and Jean Reno, and spawn a new form of thriller – the neo-noir action movie – an influence that still reverberates throughout world cinema.

In 1991, Besson's Atlantis, hailed by U.S. critics as an undersea Fantasia and an aquatic dream, was filmed in 16 months all around the world. An exercise in pure movie imagery, Atlantis dispensed with dialogue and narrative in order to wed Eric Serra's wall-to-wall score to undersea images, a cinematic translation of the filmmaker's own love for the world hidden beneath the ocean.

In 1993, Besson began pre-production on The Fifth Element, working for over a year refining the script from his own story and – with an international team of artists – visualizing its 23rd century setting and characters. When budget concerns put the project at a standstill, Besson turned his hand to another original screenplay, The Professional.

The Professional returned to the themes examined in La femme Nikita. It started Jean Reno and Natalie Portman in the story of a hit man who is civilized by his parental love for a young girl orphaned by a renegade government agent, played by Gary Oldman. The picture was an immediate worldwide success and garnered Cesar nominations for Best Picture and for Besson as Best Director. Besson also recently won a British Academy Award for producing Nil by Mouth, with Gary Oldman.

In 1999, Besson exchanged future fantasy for ancient history with The Messenger: The Story of Joan of Arc. An epic outing that starred Jovovich as the titular saint. A year in the making, The Messenger: The Story of Joan of Arc is one of the most visually stunning and staggeringly authentic representation of this extraordinary story ever put on movie, packed with the kind of sumptuous and eye-popping images that can only be a product of the mind and camera of Luc Besson.

A.3. BESSON'S NOTE ON THE MESSENGER: THE STORY OF JOAN OF ARC:

There is no doubt that Joan of Arc is one of the most captivating and mysterious figures in history. Her significance as a role model, historical figure and dramatic character has fascinated everyone from scholar and historians to a new, hip generation of young people championing 'girl power.' The story of this teenage peasant girl who asks her King to let her lead the French army to victory against the English resonated with Milla Jovovich and screen-writer/ director Luc Besson, known for such thoroughly modern movies as The Fifth Element. He now puts to work to bring a classic French tale to life.

Jovovich said that Luc was interested in making a movie about Joan because he is French, and it is a French story from French history. It is very interesting to make an American movie about a French legend by a French man, because who else could do it better? (The Production Notes 7). Luc Besson himself also says, "It was a question of trust. Based on the experience we had before, the people from the studio trusted me. I am French, it is French history. I was really happy to have this trust with me" (12).

Besson said that people's image of Joan of Arc has traditionally been very one-sided dimension. The idea of shattering that image appealed to screen-writer/ director Luc Besson. That is what very intrigued him; to see that she is a human being (The Production Notes 7).

As written in "The Production Notes" of The Messenger: The Story of Joan of Arc, Besson gives a character of the conscience. According to him the conscience is Joan herself. Joan is talking to herself. When she is little, her conscience is eight years old. Her

conscience is beautiful like a King. As Joan endures more experiences, her conscience is older, simpler and has a lot of things to say (8)

For director who is devoted over a year of his life to bringing Joan's story to the big screen, Besson own opinion of Joan, as said in "The Production Notes," is decidedly mixed. "If she wanted to be a good Christian, a good person ... even if her motivation was good, to have her country free, it was wrong to participate in the massacres." Says Luc Besson. "Thou shalt not kill" – that is a commandment. "There is no cause good enough to kill people. You can fight for yourself, your children, but do not say you fight for a god. You can not kill in the name of a god. It is wrong. That is not what they teach you. They try to teach you to live in peace" (12).

B. THE MESSENGER: THE STORY OF JOAN OF ARC

The Messenger: The Story of Joan of Arc is the newest movie version of Joan of Arc. This movie is presented presumably very different from the legitimized history version of Joan of Arc. Though Luc Besson makes all the detail as same as the legitimized history version but he makes it different in the way he presenting Joan of Arc in his movie. According to the writer those differences are influenced by Luc Besson's own opinion about Joan of Arc – as the writer mention before – that he cannot accept her action, her bloody action.

B.1. Production information:

From internationally acclaimed director Luc Besson and all-star cast led by Milla Jovovich as Joan, two-time Oscar winner Dustin Hoffman as The Conscience, two-time

Oscar nominee John Malkovich as King Charles VII and Oscar winner Faye Dunaway as Yolande D'Aragon, comes the The Messenger: The Story of Joan of Arc, about a woman who followed her own path and changed the course of history.

The Messenger: The Story of Joan of Arc is a Columbia Pictures/ Gaumont presentation directed by Luc Besson from a screenplay by Andrew Birkin and Luc Besson himself. Patrice Ledoux is the producer. Director of photography Thierry Arbogast, production designer Hugues Tissandier and costume designer Catherine Letierri faithfully recreate the look and feel of France in the early 15th century. The film is edited by Sylvie Landra.

B.2. The Cast:

1. Milla Jovovich (Czechoslovakian)..... Joan of Arc
2. John Malkovich (American – Charleston, Illinois)..... King Charles VII
3. Faye Dunaway (American – Bascom, Florida)..... Yolande D'Aragon
4. Dustin Hoffman (American – Los Angeles)..... Joan's conscience
5. Pascal Greggory (French)..... Alencon
6. Vincent Cassel (French)..... Gilles de Rais
7. Tcheke Karyo (Turkish – Istanbul)..... Dunois
8. Richard Ridings (American)..... La Hire
9. Desmond Harrington (English)..... Jean D'Aulon

B.3. The Filmmakers:

- **Director: Luc Besson (French)**

- **Screenwriter:** Luc Besson

Andrew Birkin (American)

- **Producer:** Patrice Ledoux (French)
- **Cinematographer:** Thierry Arbogast (French)
- **Production Designer:** Hugues Tissandier
- **Editor:** Sylvie Landra (French)
- **Costume Designer:** Catherine Letierrier
- **Score Composer:** Eric Serra (French)

B. 4. Production design:

Just as some dialogue used in the film came directly from records from the period, realism was the overarching design aesthetic for The Messenger. First, they went to Orleans to get some measurement of the Loire, to get a sense of what it looks like. The set design team worked for months, poring over designs, drawings and books. They undertook enormous research in the library, and worked principally with the museum of Joan of Arc in Orleans.

Most of the sets were recreated with astonishing accuracy. Besson had the real measurements of the Tourelles, the number of ladders, the number of people who died. He recreated the exact same fortress. They made an army with the exact same number of people. Only one or two shots of the film used computer graphics.

Designers achieved similar authenticity with props and set dressing. A mix of real items from the age were used along with reproductions, created by artisans from various regions of France according to documents furnished by experts and historians.

Jovovich's sword also weighed the same as Joan's real sword, which has a place of its own in the mythology of the time. Instead of accepting the sword the king offered her, Joan begged that a search might be made for an ancient sword buried, as her voices told her, behind the altar in the chapel of St. Catherine de Fierbois. It was found in the very spot her voices indicated

B.5. Production begins:

The production involved six months of preparation prior to filming. On June 15, 1998, over 700 cast and crew members gathered in the Czech republic to begin shooting The Messenger.

Filming took place at ruins in the Czech city of Bruntal, about 120 miles east of Prague. The film was also shot in France on location in Ile de France, the chateau country of the Loire Valley, Normandy, Picardie, Poitou Charente and Aquitaine – all chosen because they adhered to the look of the age. Real sites such as chateaux, churches and battlements were also used. Only the jail scenes were done on a sound stage.

From the explanation above the writer can say that Luc Besson makes this movie seriously because he needs time to observe about Joan of Arc at that time. He wants to make his movie to have the exact detail just like what was really happened to Joan. He wants people to see and feel what was happened at that time.

