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'Conviction' - an intense French court drama now available online

By Sophie Braccini



Ten years ago, Jacques Viguiet was judged for the second time for the murder of his wife because the prosecutor had filed an appeal after his first acquittal. This movie, although fictionalized, is based on that true story. Fascinated by the trial where he sat as a spectator at the time, film director Antoine Rimbault decided to explore the French judicial system in the film "Conviction" that is now being offered online by the Orinda-based International Film Showcase. This detailed exploration of a system and the passionate quest for truth by Viguiet's lawyer and a regular woman is a brilliant cinematographic coup.

During an interview at a European film festival Rimbault explained that he stayed as close as possible to the real proceedings of the trial, using verbatim the transcripts for all the debates. He created one fiction character, Nora, who becomes obsessed with the fight. All the other characters are real, and their real names have been used in the movie. Filming the debates in court and outside for the counter-inquiry, Rimbault, a young director, has been able to construct a riveting thriller.

As a spectator at Jacques Viguiet's trial, accused of murdering his wife, Nora is sure he is innocent. There is no material proof, and the wife's body was never found. She reaches out to Eric Dupont-Moretti, a very well known French criminal defense lawyer. Together they lead a fierce fight against injustice.

Dupont-Moretti is well known in France for his tireless fight to protect the presumption of innocence and the benefit of the doubt. Here, he works to debunk

manufactured proofs and demonstrate that the only elements against Viguiet are the police and other stakeholders' convictions. One of the last scenes of the movie is the lawyer's final address, an eloquent piece of rhetoric where Dupont-Moretti addresses each of the jurors in the eye and asks them to decide for themselves what is justice.

It is chilling to see the judicial system ready to crush a man with no hint of material proof.

Actor Olivier Gourmet worked with Dupont-Moretti to get as close as possible to the lawyer's state of mind during the trial. As an interesting aside, this famous defense lawyer was appointed French Minister of Justice in July of this year.

Gourmet is a subtle and powerful actor and forms a great duo with Marina Fois, who plays Nora. Fois has had a very unique career in France, where she was able to portray a wide array of characters from the most truculent to the most dramatic. Here, her own obsession to prove Viguiet innocent can prove just as insane as the passion of those accusing him.

The film is available to be rented online on the IFS website. Details can be found at <http://internationalshowcase.org/> (IFS founder Efi Lubliner recommends to use a Chrome browser to access the site more easily.)

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