

Le Souffle au Coeur

("Murmur of the Heart"; aka: "Dearest Love")

France / W Germany / Italy : 1971 : dir. Louis Malle

: Nouvelles Éditions / Marianne / Vides / Franz Seitz : 118 min

prod: Vincent Malle & Claude Nedjar : scr: Louis Malle : dir.ph.: Ricardo Aronovich

[Benoit Ferreux](#)

Lea Massari; Daniel Gelin; Marc Wincourt; Fabien Ferreux; Michel Lonsdale; Ave Ninchi;

Gila von Weitershausen; Micheline Bona; Henri Poirier

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω □ ∅ Z ☺	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001 review:

"Fresh, intelligent, affectionately comic tale of bourgeois, sensuous Massari and her precocious [*sic*] 14-year old son (Ferreux), builds to a thoroughly delightful resolution. Wonderful performances. ***1/2"

Speelfilm Encyclopedie review:

"Intelligent fourteen-year old looks on with ironic curiosity at the bourgeois milieu of the fifties, to which his young Italian mother also remains an outsider. After the teasing of his elder brothers and first shy advances, she is to initiate him sexually in a chance moment of tenderness. Relaxed and on-target milieu sketch is rather superficial, but receives spontaneous vitality from all the actors and is

refreshing in its non-traumatic handling of incest. ***1/2 ”

The Good Film and Video Guide review:

“A memoir about growing up in 1954, with Benoit Ferreux playing a boy not unlike the director himself, a bourgeois youth who, because of a heart complaint, is sent to a sanatorium where his mother (Lea Massari) decides to seduce him¹. Since she looks more like an Italian movie star than a mother, a subject distasteful to many is made almost palatable, and it’s an unsurprising conclusion in a film obsessed with sex – which is what makes it, *faute de mieux*, the best film on adolescence we’ve yet had. ** ”

Excerpts from **Movies of the Seventies** profile of Louis Malle:

“...Many memories of his rebellious schooldays came to be fictionalised as the common-stock of his films about adolescence, and indeed it must have been his own heart complaint and images of convalescence with an English nanny that helped fill in the inner adolescent secrets so charmingly encapsulated in “**LE SOUFFLE AU COEUR**” (1971, “Dearest Love”). For Malle, this was his “first” feature, since it involved no collaboration and he wrote the screenplay himself; until then his career had seen many switches in direction.”

“...From [1969] on his work has seemed dogged by realism, and Malle acknowledges that he learned “precision, discretion and... a taste for truth and authenticity” from Bresson. But from Jacques Tati he also discovered the importance of an acute sense of observation, and a very personal use of dialogue that is kept to a minimum. “**LE SOUFFLE AU COEUR**” mixes professionals and Malle’s preferred non-professionals to bring to life dreams of a teenage boy’s incestuous sexual fantasies about his mother, and it is this subject-matter that caused it to be withdrawn from entry in the Cannes Film Festival. Profoundly ambiguous when it is realised that the gestures and actions of love-making are the same as maternal love and love for a mother. Malle’s technique separates the world into child and adult: the adult world is one of hypocrisy and preconceived values; in the eyes of the child (often filmed looked directly into the camera) lies a judgment of the adult’s decadence...”

¹ Nonsense

Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89

review:

“A suspense film. Will the young hero sleep with his mother or not? Delicate comedy of manners about growing up in the France of the Dien-Bien-Phu days. The lifestyle of the upper middle class is both satirised and loved. ***”

The Time Out Film Guide review:

“Although it stirred up a double vein of controversy – from those outraged, and those disappointed – Malle’s film is less about incest and its implications than about the frustrations of bourgeois convention. The year is 1954, and the period is effortlessly caught in the opening sequence as two schoolboys swing down a street in Dijon, rattling collecting boxes for the wounded of Dien-Bien-Phu in the intervals of rhapsodising over Charlie Parker, whose latest record they airily steal while making the shop owner fork out a donation., “pour la France, monsieur”. More than anything else, the film reminds one of Truffaut and the joyous spontaneity of “**LES QUATRE CENTS COUPS**” as 14-year old Laurent (a stunningly natural performance by Benoit Ferreux) agonises over the problem of how to lose his virginity in the face of a tight family circle which cramps his style while ignoring his needs. He finally makes it when convalescing at a spa from a heart murmur brought on by scarlet fever, and his mother – who has hitherto treated him as a baby, while seeking escape from her own unhappiness in an extra-marital affair – obliges (after a quaintly old-fashioned courtship) in a moment of pure, liberating joy. Tender and funny rather than daring or provocative, it’s a film as graceful and elegantly teasing as the best of Eric Rohmer.”

Video Movie Guide 1993 review:

“Director Louis Malle’s story of a sickly French teenager and his youthful, free-spirited mother in the 1950s gets off to a wonderful start, then runs out of steam in the second half as the two check into a health resort. Still, it has charm, wit and style to spare. Not rated, but Malle’s treatment of a single act of incest may raise American eyebrows, although the subject is very tastefully handled. In French with English subtitles. *** ”

The Virgin Film Guide review:

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[no listing in “Classic Foreign Films from 1960 to Today”, “The Critics’ Film Guide”,

“Halliwell’s Film Guide”, “John Willis’ Screen World 1971 Film Annual”, “Rating the Movies (1990)”, “The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television”, “TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995” or “Variety Movie Guide 1993”]

Perhaps the exclusion of this important work by a prominent international film-maker from so many mainstream film guides amounts to another vote of displeasure on his choice of subject matter, although one will find his later “**PRETTY BABY**” in most of them.

NB – elder brother Thomas is played by (presumably) Benoit’s own brother.

See also “**BADKONAK-E SEFID**” and “**BASHU**” - both recent Iranian films, and subject index under **ARAB WORLD / MIDDLE EAST**.