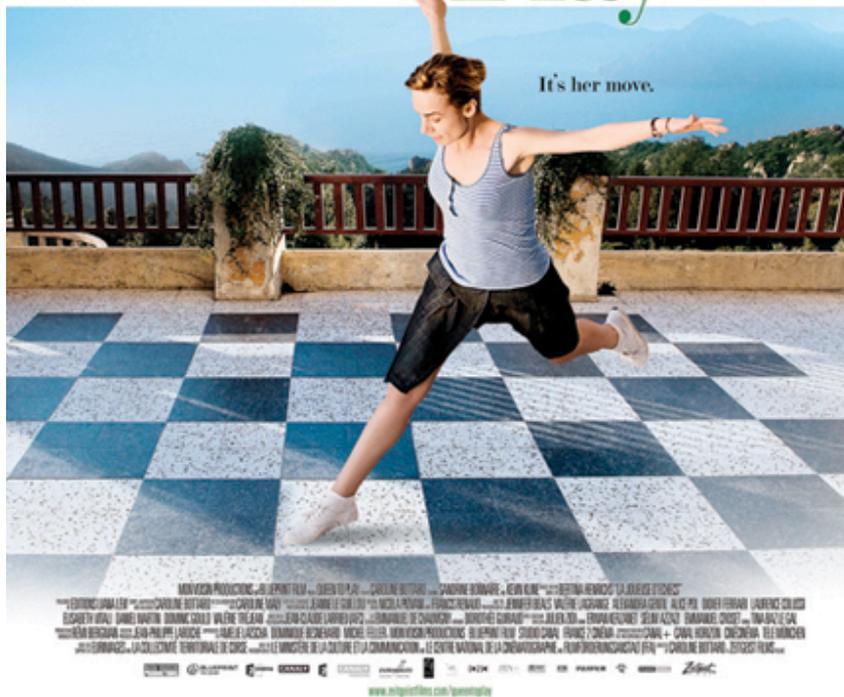




Kevin Kline **Queen To Play** Sandrine Bonnaire



Queen to Play (Joueuse)

a Caroline Bottaro film

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A ZEITGEIST FILMS RELEASE

Queen to Play (Joueuse)

a Caroline Bottaro film

Oscar® winner Kevin Kline (*A Fish Called Wanda*, *The Ice Storm*) and the luminous Sandrine Bonnaire (*Vagabond*, *La Cérémonie*) square off in this stylish and sophisticated dramedy of newfound passions and mid-life triumphs, set on the postcard-perfect isle of Corsica. Lovely, repressed and quietly intelligent, French chambermaid Hélène (Bonnaire) discovers her love for chess when, one day, she comes upon a couple (*The L Word*'s Jennifer Beals and *Marie Antoinette*'s Dominic Gould) engaged in an intense match. This obsession with the game, much to the chagrin of her husband and teenaged daughter, leads her to seek the clandestine tutelage of a reclusive American doctor (Kline, in his first French-speaking role)—a liaison that radically transforms both of their lackluster lives. Based on Bertina Henrichs' acclaimed novel *La Joueuse d'échec* (*The Chess Player*), ***Queen to Play*** is the auspicious feature film debut of French director and screenwriter Caroline Bottaro.

INTERVIEW WITH CAROLINE BOTTARO & SANDRINE BONNAIRE

The film is based on Bertina Henrichs' novel *La Joueuse d'échec* (*The Chess Player*). How did you find the book?

Caroline Bottaro: Bertina Henrichs was a neighbor in my apartment block. She gave me the manuscript to read after she'd just finished it. I was the first person to read it and she wanted my advice before finding a publisher. By page ten, I was absolutely convinced that—aside from some very appealing characters—there was a fantastic subject for a movie in this book.

What exactly motivated you to adapt it for the screen?

Bottaro: It was the character of Héléne, her metamorphosis through her discovery of a passion and the microcosm in which she evolves—this little village, an island. And as the script developed, the story transformed. In the novel, for example, Héléne is not from the mainland—she's native to a Greek island; Dr. Kröger is an old teacher, a closeted gay man. Despite the changes made with the adaptation, I hope the film remains deeply faithful to the novel. I am happy that Bertina Henrichs has said that she sees her voice in the film, as much as she recognizes mine.

Sandrine, you've been on board with the film since the script was being written. What interested you in the project?

Sandrine Bonnaire: I was already friends with Caroline from when she co-wrote a Jean-Pierre Améris film I was in, *C'est La Vie*. She gave me twenty-odd pages to read and I really liked it. I encouraged her to pursue it and I followed the project at every stage. This story, which seems so simple, really appealed to me because it tells a truth about life: Whatever your social origins or education, you can change your own destiny. If you decide to pursue a passion, anything is possible. There's a line in the film that really sums up this theme: "If you take risks, you might lose, but if you don't take risks, you always lose."

Héléne suddenly discovers a consuming passion for chess—a game that was totally foreign to her—and this passion turns her life upside down.

Bottaro: Initially, Héléne doesn't think too much about her life as a married woman. I didn't want her to be a Madame Bovary who dreams of another life. Seeing the sensuality of the American couple playing chess on the hotel terrace, she develops a passion for the game, as if a man had made her lose her head. Why this lightning bolt, for this woman, at this point in her life? Like Montaigne, I have to simply say: "Because it was her, because it was me."

Bonnaire: Héléne is not an unhappy woman, nor is she submissive. She has chosen to follow her husband to live on that island. For a while, she's needed to find her bearings in this new environment (where she doesn't know anyone), but she made the choice for love. And over time, her day-to-day existence has become a little humdrum. When she discovers this couple, lingering over a game of chess in the sunshine, she's surprised. The lightning bolt is also about how attracted she feels towards this man and this young woman who appear to love each other so much. She is touched by how they take their time, how they savor their happiness at being together. The trigger isn't the game of chess but the intimate gentleness that comes from this couple. From the bedroom, she watches them fall all over the chessboard. The film is more about sensuality and love than it is about the game of chess.

Isn't this moment of crystallization on this idealized image also one of the pleasures of cinema? Being fascinated by an image?

Bottaro: Yes. Héléne watching these lovers playing chess on the terrace is deliberately subjective. I wanted this vision to be an idealized image. It's the moment that triggers everything that happens to Héléne, who, in addition to aspiring to the sensuality she perceives with this couple, identifies with this woman who is physically so different to her. Héléne sees this woman again in a dream, puts on her silk underwear and then puts her hair in a sort of chignon like hers. What fascinates Héléne about this American woman is that she beats her lover at chess. She's the first winner in the film.

How did you come to cast Jennifer Beals for the role of the American woman?

Bottaro: H  l  ne is, like me, of the generation who watched *Flashdance* in their adolescence. What if it were the real Jennifer Beals that H  l  ne recognized, playing chess that day? I thought that possibility was fun. Especially as there are shared elements in the lives of H  l  ne and Beals' young welder/dancer character in *Flashdance*.

H  l  ne's rebelliousness and determination to transform her life is appealing. What gives her that strength?

Bottaro: From the moment she starts playing chess, nothing else matters to H  l  ne—who needs to learn, to perfect her skill and satisfy her passion. She doesn't think twice about it, she just goes for it. That's her strength.

It's of the same order, or of the same disorder, as a love affair...

Bonnaire: Absolutely. A passion is often unreasonable. H  l  ne is living in a bubble and she discovers a completely different world from the one she shares with her husband. This drives her husband crazy—he understands she doesn't want to leave him but that now, there are three of them in their relationship: her, her passion and him.

The game of chess presents many metaphors. In the game, just as in H  l  ne's life, one move leads to another.

Bottaro: It's a nice formula, but these parallels are serendipitous because I have to say that I didn't know then and I still don't know much about the strategy of chess. To prepare for the shoot, I talked to the French Chess Federation, I went to some tournaments and I met many players. All the games in the film are specially conceived by talented players. But the aspects that interested me most are the looks, the little gestures, the silences and the attitudes. They talk about war, two armies taking on one another. The intimate tension between the two players is palpable. For H  l  ne, this tension that she perceives in the American couple is what makes her want to play. For her husband, the tension is unbearable. After seeing H  l  ne play with Kr  ger, he says to her, "It's worse than if you were cheating on me." His wife is having an affair with a world from which he feels excluded, a world he has no sense of.

One of the great qualities of the film is how it captivates those in the audience who don't know anything about chess. You simply get caught up in it...

Bonnaire: Yes, it's a very tense film, very absorbing. One is kept in suspense by this woman's furious energy, by her will to learn and to win the game. It's also a challenge to herself. She says, "I'll get there at any price." In any case, H  l  ne has character. You can see it from the start, when she dares to ask for a raise from Dr. Kr  ger, whose house she cleans.

Bottaro: I was very touched when, after a screening, I was told that people were caught up in the story "as if it were an action film." Indeed, I'd tried to make sure something was happening all the time, even as I was careful to ensure there were neither spectacular effects nor twists. H  l  ne is moving forward imperceptibly, and because she has to overcome all these little obstacles, she ends up making a huge leap forward.

H  l  ne discovers a game where the only female figure—the Queen—is an incredibly formidable piece, the most powerful on the board. H  l  ne is just like her.

Bottaro: And yet this isn't really a feminist film. Nor a film that is anti-men. It's the point of view of a woman, who shows that people's lives aren't predetermined. The fact that she's been a maid for years doesn't mean her life has been reduced to that and it's over. Thanks to her passion, this woman from a modest background manages to break through all individual and social barriers. Finding oneself goes beyond a social function or identity.

You don't show the husband as a negative person—he has his good sides, we see him become more loving, and reproach himself for not having encouraged his wife.

Bottaro: I don't like the vision of a binary world where everything is black and white. I wanted all the characters to be complex and the story to be subtle.

Being alone in the world still encourages a certain conservatism in terms of traditions, like machismo for example.

Bottaro: Yes, I wanted to let that emerge discreetly in the film. Just as if you come from somewhere else, you're more or less accepted, but whatever happens you remain a foreigner for the rest of your life. The fact they are both isolated brings H el ene closer to Kr oger. They are two little islands of solitude that meet on one big island.

H el ene's 15-year-old daughter also feels isolated due to her mother's social status.

Bonnaire: Yes, the child has an inferiority complex. She doesn't dare tell her boyfriend, who comes from a nice middle-class family, that her mother is a maid. Once again, as Caroline says, it's very difficult to change people's mentalities. But H el ene accepts her social status—she doesn't feel it's dishonorable to do cleaning. It's her job and her passion is separate. She is aware that what she's now doing is destabilizing her family and could break up her relationship but she doesn't feel guilty. Until now, everything she's done has been to suit her family—she's raised her daughter, looked after her husband. And in the end, this change does everyone good. Very quickly, her daughter encourages her to go back to playing chess with Kr oger, because she herself has evolved thanks to having read *Martin Eden*.

Bottaro: The mother-daughter dance scene shows how they have managed to come together and understand one another within their own individual evolutions. The daughter realizes her mother isn't just a cleaner; this dance reveals something about her past. During adolescence, you just want to be like everyone else. It's normal that this girl is in opposition to her mother, who ends up revealing she is her own woman.

There's also a wonderful relationship between H el ene and Kr oger. It's an attraction that goes beyond the simple pleasures of chess. How did you want to set this up?

Bottaro: There had to be a real complicity between them. What happens goes beyond their differences in age and social status, beyond their situation of employer and employee.

Bonnaire: There is an interesting symbolism in their relationship, which is made a reality by the presence of the chessboard that marks a social frontier between master and servant, between mentor and student. Between the man and the woman too, because the narrow width of a chessboard encourages a certain intimacy between two players.

Bottaro: Initially, Kr oger is intrigued, then touched and finally totally seduced by this cleaning woman whose name he barely remembers in the beginning and who has the audacity to ask him to teach her to play. It is she that interests him. The chess is secondary to him; indeed, he put his chessboard away a long time ago.

Bonnaire: H el ene feels attractive, and wants to be more and more pretty. Having this man look at her makes her feel important and more self-confident. She blossoms. And their attraction for one another adds to the passion of the game. Their conversation becomes more strategic, like the moves of a pawn on the chessboard.

Bottaro: When Kr oger tells her, "I didn't miss you but I'm glad you're here," obviously, H el ene understands what he's getting at and she answers, "Me, too." At that point, they are equal. They both know the rules of the game. They both know how to maneuver so as not to be found out, so as not to be beaten by one of their opponents both on the chessboard and on the chessboard of love. This alchemy that I wanted to create between H el ene and Kr oger when I was writing was hugely enhanced in shooting, thanks to the skill of the actors. Right from the first scene between them, when she asks for a raise, Sandrine's look carries extraordinary power that makes one feel, right then, that she's stronger than he is, that he is going to give in to her on everything and that she will end up beating him at chess. I hadn't foreseen that look and it was a surprise, a gift. And there were a lot of those.

That brings to mind the "blind" game scene—one of the most beautiful sequences in the film. A fantasized game where the language of the game replaces words of love...

Bonnaire: Yes, through mentally moving the pawns, they would like to allow themselves to tell each other of their love, but.... For me, H el ene starts to reveal her feelings a little, not openly as the queen would do, with the freedom to go straight to her goal on the chessboard, but indirectly, like the bishop, sideways, diagonally. She has always been able to head right for her goals but in the quest of her passion, something stops her from revealing her feelings.

Bottaro: What happens between them at that point is about pleasure, desire rendered finer. For a long time I sought to fulfill their relationship and I felt that it had to be linked to their way of

communicating: Through chess. You can't imagine those two together in bed. If H  l  ne was reduced to an adulterous woman, everything would fall apart—the singularity and sensuality of their relationship would no longer exist. The day I experimented with one of those so-called “blind” games, where two players compete without a chessboard (just by naming their moves out loud) I felt such emotion that I realized that's what I had to do. To me, H  l  ne and Kr  ger make love in that scene, but in a very unusual way!

At that moment, H  l  ne feels a sensual pleasure with Kr  ger....

Bottaro: Yes, indeed, that “blind” game is an echo of her seeing the American couple playing on the terrace at the start of the film. But here, H  l  ne has passed over to the other side of the curtain and become the heroine in her own story.

As a director, what was your strategy in transforming this story into images?

Bottaro: I wanted this film not only to be realistic (where you constantly see H  l  ne's daily life), but also subjective—where you are part of her internal world and in her dreams. Overwhelmed by her own passion, subconscious images emerge and H  l  ne becomes obsessed with them. Suddenly, she sees the floor tiles turn into a giant chessboard and all the pieces turn black. Does she really see Jennifer Beals at the end of the film or is she a ghost? The direction was all about the tiniest details—for example, the choice of how transparent the curtain in the hotel should be. Or removing the sound of Kr  ger's footsteps and clocks when he appears, to create the sensation that all time stops around him.

Indeed, there is a certain oddness about Kr  ger's character.

Bottaro: Kr  ger's character was honed through the many versions of the script. I had the idea at one point that he'd never leave his house and that H  l  ne would be the only person that visits him. Then I wanted him to emerge in each of his scenes in an unexpected and mysterious way; his sets had to be timeless and ghostly. To me, he could be seen as much as a real person as the perfect partner invented by H  l  ne. I very much had in mind Rex Harrison's character in *The Ghost and Mrs Muir*.

The tournament scene follows that logic...

Bottaro: Yes, that scene was a real nightmare to conceive. We had to believe that Kr  ger was at home playing the same game as H  l  ne at the tournament; that he is there, with her in thought, influencing her game by telepathy. Thanks to some very careful preparation, the actors' talent and skill of my editor, Tina Baz, the spell works. And, one doesn't doubt the reality of the situation. It's one of the scenes in the film of which I am most proud.

Sandrine, how did you tackle your character? You make her appealing from the start.

Bonnaire: It was a painstaking task that progressed inch by inch, playing with small concrete things like tiny gestures and emotions, looks and little nothings. To define the character at the start, Caroline and I wanted H  l  ne to wear slightly austere clothes, have her hair tied back and flat shoes, implying a certain kind of approach. We figured this woman has forgotten herself a little in the routine of daily life so she doesn't take the time to look in the mirror when she puts her hair up. Simple things, which can seem like mere details but are very efficient.

How did you know Sandrine Bonnaire would be the ideal actor for this character?

Bottaro: The idea to use Sandrine came with the desire to make the film. We had the time to get to know each other and each phase of the making was nourished by what I discovered about her—things I wanted to show. The film became inseparable from my desire to make a kind of portrait of Sandrine. In addition to their clear social origins, H  l  ne and Sandrine share an unshakeable will and tenacity, and a huge capacity for concentration. H  l  ne blossoms thanks to chess and the attention she receives from Kr  ger; Sandrine's career has been marked by roles and encounters with directors. They are each very feminine and they are spontaneous, and thoughtful, intuitive and cerebral.

Bonnaire: It's funny because after I saw film, I realized it is kind of like the tale of my destiny, told by someone who knows me well. The last scene on the prow of the boat is a deliberate nod to the opening credit sequence of Pialat's *A Nos Amours*. In a way, a circle is closed!

People will certainly remember the Sandrine Bonnaire-Kevin Kline partnership...

Bottaro: One cannot love movies and want to make them without loving American cinema. When you send a script to Kevin Kline and he replies four days later that he wants to meet you as soon as possible, you don't quite realize what's happening but that's the pleasure of movie making. Kline is an extremely physical actor, and his talent has enabled him to excel equally in the theater and mainstream films. For him, this film is a challenge because it's the first time he's acted in a foreign language, and in a new register. I directed him to perform in a restrained way that adds to his charm and increases his "foreignness" tenfold.

Bonnaire: Moreover, we had to memorize the chess games together. Very soon, we felt like we were partners and we had fun when he was practicing with me to find the rhythm, the right breathing for his lines, and how not to speak them word-for-word so as not to alter the meaning. During takes, Kevin tried little improvisations, different ways to make some gesture, and I'd respond, joining in, which was a real pleasure. Caroline allowed us a certain amount of freedom in our acting because she knows exactly what she's looking for from her actors. She uses everything available to serve the scene. She is also looking for coherence between the actor's personality and the character they are playing, which makes for some original casting decisions. The choice of Valérie Lagrange illustrates that.

Bottaro: An actor carries around their personal experiences, that, to my mind, can be seen on the screen. For example, the tattoos you see on Valérie Lagrange's hands tell a story that adds to her character. This hotel manager could have been traveling to India a lot during the 1970s. Why not?

Francis Renaud is increasingly making his presence felt...

Bottaro: Francis touched me both as a man and as an actor. He has a lot in common with Sandrine—they could have been brother and sister in another story. When a man and a woman live together for a long time, they begin to resemble one another and there's some of that with Ange and Hélène. Francis doesn't simply play the nice guy who's slightly out of touch. Even if you can see that deep down, he's really sweet, and also gives off a kind of tension that brings a lot to the character. You wonder what would happen if things started to get out of hand between them.

Why the choice of Nicola Piovani for the music?

Bottaro: I was really pleased to meet Nicola during the making of the film. I love his music in Nanni Moretti's films; he was a fan of my script and of Sandrine. He understood that I wanted a soundtrack that would be a character in the film. His melodies, which are both low-pitched and light, corresponded perfectly to my desire to say things without seeming to.

This is one of the first films produced by Dominique Besnehard and Michel Feller. What was it like to work with them?

Bottaro: Great! Dominique and Michel allowed me to fully realize my dream. They were both very present, and very respectful of the film I wanted to make. But before settling with Mon Voisin, this project had some pretty dramatic ups and downs. Five years went by, several producers pulled out. I knew I was going to finally make the film the day Dominique, who had been my agent, told me, "We've known each other for twenty years, Sandrine will always be my little movie buddy. It's your first film, it's my first production—let's do it!"

Bonnaire: First times are always wonderful!

SANDRINE BONNAIRE SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

As actress, unless otherwise noted

- 2009 **QUEEN TO PLAY** by Caroline Bottaro
- 2008 **L'EMPREINTE DE L'ANGE** by Safy Nebbou
UN COEUR SIMPLE by Marion Laine
- 2007 **JE CROIS QUE JE L'AIME** by Pierre Jolivet
- 2006 **HER NAME IS SABINE** (as director)
Official Selection, Directors' Fortnight, Cannes 2007
- 2004 **INTIMATE STRANGERS** by Patrice Leconte
- 2003 **RÉSISTANCE** by Todd Komarnicki
- 2001 **C'EST LA VIE** by Jean-Pierre Ameris
MADemoiselle by Philippe Lioret
- 1999 **THE COLOR OF LIES** by Claude Chabrol
EAST-WEST by Régis Wargnier
- 1998 **VOLEUR DE VIE** by Yves Angelo
SECRET DEFENSE by Jacques Rivette
- 1997 **DIE SCHULD DER LIEBE** by Andréas Gruber
- 1996 **NEVER EVER, aka CIRCLE OF PASSION** by Charles Finch
- 1995 **A HUNDRED AND ONE NIGHTS** by Agnès Varda
LA CÉRÉMONIE by Claude Chabrol
Best Actress, Venice 1995; and Best Foreign Film, 1997 L.A. Film Critics
- 1994 **SECRETS SHARED WITH A STRANGER** by Georges Bardawill
JOAN THE MAID II: THE PRISONS by Jacques Rivette
JOAN THE MAID I: THE BATTLES by Jacques Rivette
- 1992 **PRAGUE** by Ian Sellar
THE PLAGUE by Luis Puenzo
- 1991 **LE CIEL DE PARIS** by Michel Béna
TOWARDS EVENING by Francesca Archibugi
- 1990 **LA CAPTIVE DU DÉSERT** by Raymond Depardon
- 1989 **MONSIEUR HIRE** by Patrice Leconte
- 1988 **QUELQUES JOURS AVEC MOI** by Claude Sautet
- 1987 **LES INNOCENTS** by André Téchiné
JAUNE REVOLVER by Olivier Langlois
UNDER THE SUN OF SATAN by Maurice Pialat
Palme d'Or, 1988 Cannes Film Festival
- 1986 **LA PURITAINE** by Jacques Doillon
- 1985 **POLICE** by Maurice Pialat
LE MEILLEUR DE LA VIE by Renaud Victor
VAGABOND by Agnès Varda
Best Actress and Best Foreign Film, 1986 L.A. Film Critics
- 1984 **BLANCHE AND MARIE** by Jacques Renard
- 1983 **A NOS AMOURS** by Maurice Pialat

INTERVIEW WITH KEVIN KLINE

What was your initial reaction when you read the script for *Queen to Play*?

When I received the English version I read it straight through in one go. That's an important sign for me as it rarely happens! It's a very good read...I was immediately captivated by the story and the characters. And I knew that Sandrine was playing the lead. She's a great actress whom I've admired for years; I knew it would be an honor to work with her. What's more, I particularly appreciate love stories that don't follow usual and conventional classic routes. Love stories have been told in a myriad of ways, but I've never read a script where a love affair occurs across a chess board. The path of this woman who comes to realize that something is missing in her life has a compelling quality that attracted me right away. Her search and then the discovery of a blossoming, genuine talent bring self-discovery, a self-redefining epiphany of sorts. I've always admired people who force the hand of destiny, who don't readily accept a limited life, but demand something more of themselves, challenge themselves to attain something beyond what has been offered or what comes easily. I think *Queen to Play* is a film that identifies with fulfillment rather than frustration.

How did you meet Caroline Bottaro?

My French agent, Laurent Savry, sent me the script. I read it and I wanted to meet her. I was intrigued by the idea of acting in French (I've never played in a foreign language before). Sandrine came to New York a few weeks later, with Caroline and the producer, Dominique Besnehard. So we met, and we spent a lovely evening together, but in my heart of hearts I'd already decided.

What was your first impression when you met Caroline Bottaro?

We immediately found a very good communication using a melange of French and English. She struck me at once as intelligent, grounded, witty, responsible and determined. When we discussed the script and her method of working it was immediately clear that we were on the same wavelength. Having already a strong first impression from reading her script, I felt excited about the project very quickly.

It's Caroline's first feature; how did you get on during the shoot?

I've worked with directors from all over the world. America, Romania, Taiwan, France, Germany, England. I prefer "actors' directors": directors who see our professional relationship as a collaboration. Everyone has his or her own style, of course.... Caroline knows what she wants, she has visualized her screenplay, but not, it seems, in a closed way. Her creative process is ongoing throughout the filming. She is open to the surprises which naturally arise from the actors doing it, from their instinctive response to what she's written. I think you have to leave room for the unexpected, the unconscious impulses, for everything that escapes our control. I like to try things out and experiment, I like rehearsing. (I worked in the theater for ten years before I started playing in films, so it must come from that). But there are times when I prefer not to rehearse at all too. It all depends. There's never only one way of working, nor of interpreting a part. As soon as we met in New York I knew Caroline had this open-minded attitude. So it all went very well.

It's the first time you're worked with Sandrine Bonnaire. Which films have you seen her in and what do you think of her as an actress?

I've seen her wonderful performances in Patrice Leconte's *Monsieur Hire*, Claude Chabrol's *La Cérémonie*, Agnès Varda's *Sans toit ni loi*, Maurice Pialat's films *A Nos Amours* and *Under the Sun of Satan*, and more recently in Leconte's *Confidences trop intimes*. I loved that film. It's also another highly original love story. Fantastic! I love Sandrine's intensity, her simplicity and directness, delicacy and mystery. A beautiful actress. But then I have always found her extraordinary!

How was your relationship during the shoot?

Really very good. She was very patient with me and very helpful. We had a lot of fun together. Working with her was a joy, she's wonderful! We laughed a lot.

How would you describe your character?

My description of Kröger would be far too subjective. I can say how I see him, but I won't be at all satisfied with my description and I would prefer that the audience have whatever impressions they have of the character without my tedious explanations. In any case, so much of it is out of the actor's exclusive control: that is the nature of film. I can generalize and say that my first impression was to see Kröger as a malcontent, a misanthrope, a recluse. He is someone who has pushed away the rest of the world to find a sort of "haven of peace." He has closed many doors behind him, and now someone is pushing open a door or two. The film doesn't tell us much about what this retired American doctor does in Corsica, we don't know much about his past, he remains mysterious... Kröger is secretive. He can be arrogant too, and he doesn't seem to give a damn about what people think of him, which makes playing him very enjoyable. A character like Kröger is a wonderful gift for an actor. It's liberating!

How did you "encounter" your character? Do you think you have things in common with him?

Well, my process, if you can call it that, starts with encountering the character on the page, in the text, which becomes a sort of blueprint. But then I suppose I encounter him through a process of discovery during the filming, from scene to scene, moment to moment, situation by situation. It's through wearing all these different masks that an actor can discover things about himself. But I'd rather not say too much about what we have in common other than that our names begin with K. And that we both like to teach, and that we learn from teaching. *docendo discimus*, as they said in ancient Rome.

This is the first time you've acted entirely in French. How did you prepare?

I did say a few lines in French in Lawrence Kasdan's *French Kiss*, in brief scenes with François Cluzet and Jean Reno, but I've never played a whole part in French and I had to work on it a lot. Several people helped me: two different coaches in New York, and then my dear friend Claudio Todeschini, with whom I had worked before in France, who was with me throughout the shoot.

Do you think that acting in a different language changes your process?

I think it changes everything. It changes the way you express yourself and the way you think.

In your opinion, do American and French actors approach their work differently?

For me it's hard to define a French actor's approach to his or her work simply because its context is different culturally and linguistically. I have finally come to the conclusion that every experience is different. It doesn't matter which drama school you went to, who you learned acting with, whether you come from theater or films, if you're a trained actor or a natural born actor—for me, the notion of acting is personal and it evolves all the time. Let's say we try to redefine it as often as we can, if not each time we act! And it's very different if we're playing Shakespeare, Molière, contemporary drama, a genre film, or a Bottaro film.... What matters is bringing the written idea into its best possible expression on film. Obviously differences do exist, a style, a mode of expression that's European or French. It's a subject we could explore at length but in the end it all comes down to human behavior. In fact I believe the notion of acting is completely individual.

Did you play chess before the film? How do you feel about the game now?

I'd dabbled in chess before, but I really learned it for *Queen to Play*, as Kröger is an excellent chess player. So I had another teacher for that. In fact I had no idea of the true complexity of the game. It's absolutely fascinating! I've read quite a bit about it, and I now think there are two schools. Those who consider chess as a pastime or a simple game and those who see the intellectual challenge. We're not addressing the problem of "who" wins anymore; it's far more complex. It involves the mind and the will. At this level, you need to be extremely strong psychologically, as you don't only play the board, you also play the man—a beautiful way of combining the right and left sides of the brain. But obviously what appeals to me the most is the metaphorical aspect of chess in the film... a game or a love story?

The idea of surpassing oneself is important in the script. Do you believe it's a *sine qua non* condition for fulfillment?

That's an interesting question. I don't know the answer but I like it when Kröger says, "When you take a risk you may lose, when you don't take a risk you always lose!". He knows it's essential to

make this effort, to search. The notion of commitment is also very important for me. I think it's vital to commit oneself in order to advance towards fulfillment and attain a sort of happiness. Whether it's in your work, the practice of an art, a friendship or a marriage, it's a sense of responsibility to yourself and to society. I'm not saying I always get there, but I try.

You filmed in Corsica, which is a stunningly beautiful setting. Did you know the area?

No, it was my first visit. Unfortunately I didn't have time to sightsee or travel. Like Kröger, I was "shut away." There was always a lot of work on set, then in the evenings back in the hotel I rehearsed my dialogue for the next day. The shoot was intense but we shared some privileged moments. We all lived together in the same hotel and there was a very friendly atmosphere. I find that the French have a different attitude than Americans, who are solely driven by the rhythm of the work. The quality of life in France is more important. A glass of wine, a good dinner; these things matter after days like that. I had a wonderful time but I'll have to come back again to discover Corsica—and plan a stay without a film shoot!

We have seen you in comedies and tragedies; do you have any favorite roles or genres?

No, I've always loved the variety. In the types of roles, styles, settings, and media: Hamlet, Cyrano, Falstaff, Shakespeare, Chekhov, comedy, tragedy, classical and contemporary theater, the cinema.... It's the variety that stimulates me.

Would you like to work in France again?

Yes, absolutely. And it would certainly be easier as I speak better French now. But not Corsican yet, sorry!

KEVIN KLINE SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

- 2010 **NO STRINGS ATTACHED** by Ivan Reitman
- 2010 **THE CONSPIRATOR** by Robert Redford
- THE EXTRA MAN** by Shari Springer Berman and Robert Pulcini
- 2009 **QUEEN TO PLAY** by Caroline Bottaro
- 2008 **DEFINITELY, MAYBE** by Adam Brooks
- THE TALE OF DESPEREAUX** (voice)
- 2007 **TRADE** by Marco Kreuzpaintner
- 2006 **THE PINK PANTHER** by Shawn Levy
- A PRAIRIE HOME COMPANION** by Robert Altman
- 2004 **DE-LOVELY** by Irwin Winkler
- 2002 **ORANGE COUNTY** by Jake Kasdan
- THE EMPEROR'S CLUB** by Michael Hoffman
- 2001 **THE ANNIVERSARY PARTY** by Jennifer Jason Leigh and Alan Cumming
- LIFE AS A HOUSE** by Irwin Winkler
- 2000 **THE ROAD TO EL DORADO** (voice) by Don Paul
- 1999 **A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM** by Michael Hoffman
- WILD WILD WEST** by Barry Sonnenfeld
- 1997 **FIERCE CREATURES** by Fred Schepisi
- THE ICE STORM** by Ang Lee
- IN & OUT** by Frank Oz
- 1996 **THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME** (voice) by Gary Trousdale
- 1995 **FRENCH KISS** by Lawrence Kasdan
- 1994 **PRINCESS CARABOO** by Michael Austin
- 1993 **DAVE** by Ivan Reitman
- 1992 **CONSENTING ADULTS** by Alan J. Pakula
- CHAPLIN** by Richard Attenborough
- 1991 **SOAPDISH** by Michael Hoffman
- GRAND CANYON** by Lawrence Kasdan
- 1990 **I LOVE YOU TO DEATH** by Lawrence Kasdan
- 1989 **THE JANUARY MAN** by Pat O'Connor
- 1988 **A FISH CALLED WANDA** by Charles Crichton
Oscar® for Best Supporting Actor
- 1987 **CRY FREEDOM** by Richard Attenborough
- 1985 **SILVERADO** by Lawrence Kasdan
- 1983 **THE BIG CHILL** by Lawrence Kasdan
- THE PIRATES OF PENZANCE** by Wilford Leach
- 1982 **SOPHIE'S CHOICE** by Alan J. Pakula

Queen to Play (Joueuse)

a Caroline Bottaro film

CAST

Hélène	Sandrine Bonnaire
Dr. Kröger	Kevin Kline
Ange	Francis Renaud
The American Woman	Jennifer Beals
Maria	Valérie Lagrange
Lisa	Alexandra Gentil
Natalia	Alice Pol
Marie-Jeanne	Elisabeth Vitali
The American Man	Dominic Gould
Chess Club President	Daniel Martin

CREDITS

Written and Directed by	Caroline Bottaro
Based on the novel <i>The Chess Player</i> by	Bertina Henrichs
Written by	Caroline Bottaro & Caroline Maly
Original Music	Nicola Piovani
Director of Photography	Jean-Claude Larrieu, AFC
Set Design	Emmanuel de Chauvigny
Costumes	Dorothee Guiraud
Sound	Erwan Kerzanet, Sélim Azzazi & Emmanuel Croset
Editing	Tina Baz Le Gal
Executive Producer	Jean-Philippe Laroche
Co-Produced by	Amelie Latscha, Felix Moeller
Produced by	Dominique Besneard, Michel Feller

2009 • France • 96 mins • Color • In French with English subtitles



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