

The Taste of Things [12A]

2023 France/Belgium 135 mins

UK released **14 February 2024**

Director **Anh Hung Tran**

Screenplay **Anh Hung Tran; Marcel Rouff** (novel)

Cinematography **Jonathan Ricquebourg**

Music

Cast **Juliette Binoche** (Eugénie); **Benoît Magimel** (Dodin Bouffant); **Emmanuel Salinger** (Rabaz); **Patrick d'Assunção** (Grimaud); **Galatea Bellugi** (Violette); **Jan Hammenecker** (Magot); **Frédéric Fisbach** (Beaubois); **Bonnie Chagneau-Ravoire** (Pauline); **Jean-Marc Roulot** (Augustin); **Yannik Landrein** (Pauline's father); **Sarah Adler** (Pauline's mother)

Broth, turbot, selected rack of veal, Norwegian omelette. Well no, you are not in a gastronomic restaurant, even if countless details will follow to excite the taste buds of the hungry and the gourmets, but in the new film from Tran Anh Hung, *The Taste of Things*.

Here everything is absolute happiness in the preparation and tasting of the most sophisticated dishes: the freshly picked vegetables arrive from the garden, the pans sizzle, the crayfish are filtered to the nectar, the sauce-making circuits defy the comprehension of the neophyte, and we even learn, among many other cooking lessons, that an American physicist discovered that beaten egg constituted a natural protective barrier for ice. And this is to say nothing of the wines that accompany these dishes, whose beneficiaries sigh with ecstasy as informed gourmets follow the most succulent dishes and then dissect them in words as specialists and historians of gastronomy, evoking, among others, mythical figures of the profession such as Antonin Carême ("the king of chefs and the chef of kings") and Auguste Escoffier. But beware, contrary to appearances and in particular to the first half-hour exclusively dedicated to the ballet in the kitchen of the preparation of a meal, it is not however a documentary since Juliette Binoche and Benoît Magimel are in the kitchen.

"Remember this taste, you will have to compare it with the one it will have after its clarification". In the middle of the 19th century, in the kitchen of the castle of Dodin Bouffant (Magimel), nicknamed "the Napoleon of the culinary arts", happy perfectionism is at its peak under the leadership of Eugénie (Binoche), an exceptional cook, Dodin's right-hand man and his mistress for many years. The food is cut, pounded, fried, filtered, mixed, cooked and repeated until all impurities are gone, but it is also tasted (with the young assistants Bonnie Chagneau-Ravoire and Galatea Bellugi) before being served to Dodin's small circle of gastronomic friends. The philosophy of the place is that "the discovery of a dish is much more important than the discovery of a star". But there is soon a challenge for Dodin: to respond to an invitation and a decadent, high-end meal orchestrated by the chefs serving the Prince of Eurasia with a simple pot-au-feu, as a symbol of French cuisine. And Eugenie begins to suffer from worrying ailments...

Directed with an enveloping gentleness, *The Taste of Things*, an adaptation of the novel *The Passionate Epicure* by Marcel Rouff (published in 1924), is a film of love, total love for cooking filmed and discussed in the most minute details, and of love quite simply between the two (excellent) protagonists. The very harmonious Tran Anh Hung delivers a relatively audacious feature film (special mention to the very good Jonathan Ricquebourg as director of photography) sending the multitude of cooking shows on television back to the stone age. A very special film whose blend of romantic classicism and gastronomic immersion will undoubtedly travel the world as a worthy emissary of French culture and "soft power".

Fabien Lemercier, *Cineuropa*, 25 May 2023 (abridged)
(Translated from French by Margaux Comte)

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Monday 25th March: *Red island* (12A)

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