

Document Citation

Title	Comedy of power
Author(s)	Lisa Nesselson
Source	<i>Variety</i>
Date	2006 Feb 20
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	51-52
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	L'ivresse du pouvoir (Comedy of power), Chabrol, Claude, 2006

Variety 2/20-2/26/06
COMEDY OF POWER
p. 51, 52
(L'IVRESSE DU POUVOIR)

(FRANCE-GERMANY)

A Pan-Européenne Edition release (in France) of a Patrick Godeau presentation of an Aliceleo, France 2 Cinema, Ajoz Films, Integral Film production, with participation of Filmforderungsanstalt (FFA), Canal Plus, CineCinema. (International sales: Wild Bunch, Paris.) Produced by Patrick Godeau. Executive producer, Françoise Galfre. Co-producer, Alfred Hurmer.

Directed by Claude Chabrol. Screenplay, Odile Barski, Chabrol. Camera (color), Eduardo Serra; editor, Monique Fardoulis; music, Matthieu Chabrol; production designer, Françoise Benoit-Fresco; art director, Catherine Pierrat; costume designer, Mic Cheminal; sound (Dolby), Thierry Lebon, Pierre Lenoir; assistant director, casting, Cecile Maistre. Reviewed at Elysees Biarritz, Paris, Jan. 27, 2006. (In Berlin Film Festival — competing.) Running time: 110 MIN.

With: Isabelle Huppert, François Berleand, Patrick Bruel, Robin Renucci, Maryline Canto, Thomas Chabrol, Jean-François Balmer, Pierre Vernier, Jacques Boudet, Philippe Duclos, Jean-Christophe Bouvet, Roger Dumas, Yves Verhoeven.

By LISA NESSELSON

As often is the case with films in which she appears, Isabelle Huppert is the chief pleasure in legal procedural "Comedy of Power," her seventh outing with helmer Claude Chabrol. Cat-and-mice tale of an examining magistrate on the trail of big cheeses who played fast and loose with company funds is recognizably inspired by a real-life scandal known as the "Elf Affair" (named after the French oil company). While pic may be too subtle and oblique in places for more general auds, it remains enjoyable as a sardonic glimpse of unspoken codes at the intersection of politics and business.

Judge Jeanne Charmant-Killman (Huppert) is an examining magistrate, a profession sometimes referred to as the most powerful in France. She can subpoena people, search premises without warning, seize goods and generally poke her nose into any corner where she believes she'll find evidence of abuse of position, influence, funds, etc.

Politicians and businessmen are in bed together, and Jeanne thinks it's high time somebody barged in and changed the sheets. But one man's dirty laundry is another man's (or government's) conception of standard operating procedure.

Turn to next page



Isabelle Huppert plays a judge, with Pierre Vernier as President Martino in "Comedy of Power" from Claude Chabrol.

Continued from previous page

In opening scenes, multiple secretaries see to the special requests of Humeau (François Berleand). He's obviously an important guy with big weekend plans, but police are waiting outside with handcuffs. The outraged Humeau, who suffers from a skin allergy that obliges him to scratch himself constantly, keeps asking, "Don't you know who I am?"

But France's justice system has little use for presumption of innocence and Jeanne has an awful lot of incriminating evidence that Humeau spent company money on travel, trinkets and pricey real estate for his mistress. Sibaud (Patrick Bruel), the arrogant young wolf who provided Jeanne with many useful leads, conveniently replaces Humeau at the office.

As Jeanne summons Humeau's well-connected associates and go-betweens, the case's notoriety lands her on the cover of magazines. She comes from a modest background in a country that tends to favor breeding over merit, so what seems like imminent victory over privilege-mongers appears doubly sweet.

Meanwhile, Jeanne's taciturn hubby, Philippe (Robin Renucci), a lab technician from an illustrious family, feels like he's living in the shadow of his increasingly famous spouse. He's particularly irked by the bodyguards Jeanne now requires.

The couple's nephew, Felix (Chabrol's son Thomas, in a delectable perf), offers the occasional insight as well as comic relief for his overworked aunt. His comfortable lack of ambition serves as a counterweight to her workaholicism.

Whereas "All the President's Men," for instance, is simply about dedicated professionals bringing down people in high positions, Chabrol's pic deals with the very different French power landscape. Film posits that while ignorance of the law is no excuse, neither is ignorance of the unwritten rules of upper echelon chicanery: Just because Jeanne's on the right track doesn't mean she'll be allowed to keep driving the train.

In "Comedy of Power," the smug wrongdoers are all men and the judges are women. Scenes in which Jeanne questions witnesses in her tiny office at police headquarters are great fun. A string of Gallic character actors offer variations on ethical ambiguity that makes \$800,000 in an envelope or a custom-built swimming pool seem like

the big-business equivalent of the toy in a Happy Meal.

As always, helmer Chabrol delights in the permutations of human stupidity; the score by his son, Matthieu, neatly reinforces the tone. Lensing by ace d.p. Eduardo Serra (in his fifth go-round with Chabrol) anchors the ever-shifting game of one-upmanship in a Paris where even darkish dealings are bathed in natural light.