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## Irma Vep

**France, 1996, 98 minutes**

**Director:** Olivier Assayas

**Cast:** Maggie Cheung, Jean-Pierre Léaud, Nathalie Richard, Antoine Basler, Bulle Ogier **Executive Producer:** Françoise Guglielmi **Producer:** Georges Benayoun **Screenplay:** Olivier Assayas **Cinematographer:** Eric Gautier **Editor:** Luc Barnier **Production Company:** Dacia Films **Distributor:** Zeitgeist Films Ltd. **Sales Agent:** Flach Pyramide International

The story's simple: a French manic-depressive filmmaker—played by Jean-Pierre Léaud—has undertaken to film a remake of Feuillade's *The Vampires*. And, as he considers himself, in the best of French traditions, to be a veritable "auteur," he seriously intends to leave his mark on the film by choosing to cast a star of Asian kung-fu films, the superbly feline (eat your heart out Michelle Pfeiffer) Maggie Cheung, in the mythical role of Musidora. Unfortunately, everything goes wrong. Shooting is laborious, pathetic, encumbered with last-minute improvisations, niggling mediocrity and insidious treacheries, to the point where the "auteur" quits, only to be replaced by someone worse than he is.

If *Irma Vep* references Feuillade, it is also an evocation of a film made 58 years later, the very beautiful *Day for Night* by Truffaut, in which Léaud was already playing a soul-searching would-be filmmaker. But this time the observations concerning the French film industry are considerably embittered. In his film, Truffaut was preoccupied by the relationship between life and film, whereas Assayas speculates on whether or not French film has a life at all, surrounded so completely by American supremacy, waning financial support and an increasingly apathetic public. Olivier Assayas proves that French cinema is, indeed, still alive with this caustic and intelligent satire suggesting that if we can still laugh at ourselves, then all hope is not lost . . .

**Françoise Maupin**

**Selected Filmography:** *Désordre* (86), *L'enfant de l'hiver* (89), *Paris s'éveille* (91), *Une nouvelle vie* (93), *Cold Water* (94), *HHH: Portrait of Hou Hsiao-Hsien* (97)

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