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L'eau froide

Cold Water

FRANCE, 1994

92 minutes ■ Colour/35mm
 Production Company: **IMA Films**
 Executive Producer: **Françoise Guglielmi, Elisabeth Deviosse**
 Producer: **Georges Benayoun, Paul Rozenberg**
 Screenplay: **Olivier Assayas**
 Cinematography: **Denis Lenoir**
 Editor: **Luc Barnier**
 Art Director: **Chantal Poupaud**
 Sound: **Herve Chauvel**
 Principal Cast: **Virginie Ledoyen, Cyprien Fouquet, Laszlo Szabo, Jean-Pierre Darraoussin, Dominique Faysse, Smail Mekki, Jackie Berroyer**

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Christine and Gilles fall in love in the cultural-economic no-man's land of suburban Paris, where the present is bleak and the future worse. Gilles' father dominates him and "protects" him from adulthood; Christine's parents are divorced and she is the battlefield between them. The two shoplift some records and, when Christine is caught, her father has her institutionalized for "emotional disturbance." Released after a day of valium and counselling, she decides at a party to visit a friend in the country and wants Gilles to come with her. He must decide whether he is ready to grow up.

The film is set in 1972, but little has changed: recently, French youth staged massive protests about the lack of possibilities after school. But *L'eau froide* is about more than social malaise. Director Olivier Assayas, who has had many films shown in this Festival, takes a tough, confrontational, far-from-optimistic approach. Given the temptations – teen love, dysfunctional families – Assayas steadfastly avoids sentimentality and melodrama, instead engaging our emotions with a clear-headed approach to the material.

He keeps the focus on Christine and Gilles (the two leads are astonishingly good), his constantly moving camera capturing every detail of their background. Indeed, that moving, often hand-held camera imparts a good deal of the emotional instability of the protagonists. The sound track has been as

carefully created as the images, with music kept at a minimum until the party – when the young couple believes escape is possible – and then rock music of the period floods the screen.

Assayas has consistently produced work of great emotional power with a minimum of artifice. Last year's *Une nouvelle vie* immediately comes to mind, but *L'eau froide* is, in many ways, a more courageous film, if only in its ability to chronicle unflinchingly the reality of both his own generation and the desolation of contemporary suburban youth culture. This is an important film from a major young director.

■ **Dimitri Eipides**

Olivier Assayas was born in Paris, France in 1955. He wrote screenplays for five films, including two for André Téchiné, and in 1990 published "Conversations avec Bergman." Films include: *Désordre* (86), *L'enfant de l'hiver* (89), *Paris s'éveille* (91), *Une nouvelle vie* (93), *L'eau froide* (94).

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