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***Mauvais Sang* (Bad Blood)**

Dir. Leos Carax. 1986. N/R.

120mins. In French, with subtitles.

Denis Lavant, Juliette Binoche, Hans Meyer.

It's a movie lover's dream to spend much of the day in screening rooms, as I usually do, but I was reminded this week of a major drawback of my profession: The agony induced by reviewing too many bad movies at once. Two flops are the most I can stomach during one issue. So after choking down bland, boring ramen noodles (*Crocodile Dundee in Los Angeles*) and inedible Spam (Tom Green's *Freddy Got Fingered*), I turned to Leos Carax's *Mauvais Sang* (*Bad Blood*) with relish. The works of impudent French auteur Carax can be over- or undercooked, but they always offer something tasty to chew on.

Sang, which Carax shot in 1986 after his triumph at the 1984 Cannes Film Festival with *Boys and Girls*, is no different. A noirish treatise on tortured young love, *Sang* is stunningly filmed—the scenes resemble a series of exquisite still photographs—and captivating in its complexity and depth of feeling. This film, which has not been released in the U.S. until now, showcases the elements Carax expands upon in his later efforts, *Lovers on the Bridge*, shot in 1991 and released here in 1999, and 2000's *Pola X*.

Sang teams the mangy Lavant and the ethereal Binoche (who would later

costar in *Lovers*) as Alex, a talented young thief, and Anna, an insecure creature who is kept by the elderly grifter Hans (Meyer). After Alex decides to cast off his belongings—including his adoring girlfriend (Julie Delpy)—to do some serious soul-searching, he is taken in by Hans, who is an old friend of his recently deceased father and is planning a big score.

Carax's concerns are the great, savage human concerns: love and hate, life and death. *Sang* is as showy as any of his films (though Binoche's performance is marvelously subtle and delicate). But it has a dark sense of humor in dealing with these grand themes—Hans intends to steal the retrovirus that causes a syndrome that attacks those who love without feeling—and thus it succeeds where the very earnest *Lovers* and *Pola* fail. Carax certainly intends to shock with his films, and *Sang*, set in a dimly lit, feverishly sexy Paris, can be ridiculous. Yet unlike the creators of so many mindlessly audacious flicks now, Carax actually has something to say about the world around him. His works are a buffet for starving filmgoers—and critics. (Opens Fri; Cinema Village.)

—Nicole Keeter

FLY GIRL Binoche is a sheltered French miss who learns to spread her wings in *Sang*.

