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Irma Vep

FRANCE 1996, 96 min.

DIR/SCR Olivier Assayas

PROD Georges Benayoun **CAM** Eric Gautier **ED** Luc Barnier **CAST** Maggie Cheung, Jean-Pierre Léaud, Nathalie Richard, Nathalie Boutefeu, Bulle Ogier, Arsinée Khanjian, Lou Castel **DISTRIBUTOR** Zeitgeist Films

Luminous Hong Kong star Maggie Cheung (as herself) is summoned to Paris by director René Vidal (Jean-Pierre Léaud) to play the lead in an insane undertaking—a silent remake of Louis Feuillade's 1916 serial *Les vampires*. And she's constantly left behind rather than catered to amidst the chaos of warring personalities on the set: the witchy production coordinator (Dominique Faysse), a loud-mouthed TV reporter (Antoine Basler) with an anti-art film bias and the mysteriously and aggressively intrusive Mireille (Bulle Ogier), among others, all of whom flit across the screen like phantoms. Olivier Assayas's dizzying, poetic and exhilarating microcosm of modern life was written, shot, edited and mixed in record time (five months), and the sense of breathless speed fueled the finished product. Assayas put his constraints to work for him to create a film that is absolutely up-to-the-minute and liberating, a direct, free-form address to its audience. At the center of it all is the human ballast that keeps **Irma Vep** on course: the confused but tender relationship between Maggie and Zoë (Nathalie Richard, in the film's standout performance). **Irma Vep** is very funny, although the laughs tend to catch in your throat because this is no cozy love letter to filmmaking, like *Day for Night* or *Living in Oblivion*, as the film's final tortured, mindbending images demonstrate.

Kent Jones

Selected Filmography: Olivier Assayas (b. Paris, France, 1955) *Cold Water* (1994), *New Life* (1993), *Paris Awakes* (1991), *Child of Winter* (1989), *Disorder* (1986)

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