



MOSTRA INTERNAZIONALE
D'ARTE CINEMATOGRAFICA
LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA 2021
Official Selection

FULL TIME

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FULL TIME

(À PLEIN TEMPS)

A film by **Éric Gravel**

With **Laure Calamy**

2021 - France - 87 min - 2:39 - 5.1



SYNOPSIS

Julie goes to great lengths to raise her two children in the countryside while keeping her job in a Parisian luxury hotel. When she finally gets a job interview for a position she had long been hoping for, a national strike breaks out, paralyzing the public transport system. The fragile balance that Julie has established is jeopardized. Julie then sets off on a frantic race against time, at the risk of faltering.

INTERVIEW WITH ERIC GRAVEL

Full Time begins with a noise, your leading character Julie's breathing, as she sleeps...

The idea was to reveal the character gradually, from an intimate perspective, in a macroscopic, sensory manner, with this deep breathing that enwraps us, letting us know that we will be right by her side the entire film. Extremely close to her breathing, to the very grain of her skin. Also, it is a moment of calm before the storm. Indeed, *Full Time* is like a long forward thrust and the first scene precedes the constant motion that ensues. We're pretty much in the only point in time when Julie is at rest, in that single and transient moment when she can recharge her batteries. Afterwards, there will no longer be any respite for her.

Through the lens of this woman, alone with her children, I raise the question of the rhythm of our lives and our daily struggles. Just like Julie, I live in the country. I wanted to speak about my neighbors, about the people I see on the train every day who gamble on living far from the capital to have a better quality of life. It's a difficult balance to strike and not everyone manages to find the way to make it work.

Did you write *Full Time* specifically with Laure Calamy in mind?

While I was writing the screenplay, I didn't have a specific actress in mind. But when I started thinking of possible choices, Laure immediately seemed to be the perfect fit. She is an outstanding actress, her





acting range is unbelievably wide; whether it's a tragic or comedic register, she excels. The spark Laure always instils in her roles brought a balance to Julie, keeping the character's bright composure in spite of the difficult spell she is going through. The fact is that we know very little about this woman's life, except that she is in the moment, yet relentlessly thinking of how to make things work from one day to the next. Also, Laure is an actress and a woman who is full of life, which made it interesting for me to put her in the shoes of this woman who is going through a rather chaotic chapter in her life, that Americans would sum up in the expression "the perfect storm" – meaning when you run into every possible and conceivable problem at once and you have to find ways to solve everything.

The professional context is quite important in your film. How did you happen to choose the job of luxury hotel housekeeper?

I wanted my leading character to have a job that is physical; I wanted Julie to be in service, a form of employment where things never stop, even when you have a national strike. And then, I was also interested in the idea of repetitiveness in everyday life, having to repeat the same gestures endlessly at work and at home, as though caught in perpetual motion. This job allows me to show the extent to which Julie is attached to performance and perfection. The position of head chambermaid in a luxury hotel is not simple. There are specific skills and knowledge involved, precise tasks and gestures, and codes one needs to abide by. The result must be perfect, their work flawless. While we were preparing for the film, Laure and a few other actresses joined a housekeeping training session with real room

attendants, who explained and described the gestures step by step. I remember a practical demonstration during which they made a bed perfectly in a matter of minutes and we applauded them. It was like watching a choreography. And these women were passionate about a job well done.

The social context in which your film is set is essential...

Yes, *Full Time* takes place during a massive nationwide strike that spreads through all sectors of activity. Everything starts breaking down everywhere – in the image of what is happening to my leading character. I wanted the individual and collective struggles to follow parallel courses for us to gradually understand that they are connected, that they tell the same story, that one is the consequence of the other. Julie is stuck in a societal blind spot. She belongs to a category

of workers who are the most vulnerable, for whom going on strike or having any form of representation is pretty much impossible. I remembered how, during the strike in Paris in 1995, I'd been very impressed with the way people who lived in and out of Paris showed great solidarity and found ways to function differently in their urban environment – walking, hitchhiking, helping one another. I wanted to show this atmosphere mixing daily struggles and great solidarity. As chance would have it, while I was writing the screenplay, the yellow vests protests began. In the region of Sens, in Burgundy, where I live, I saw the first few roundabouts being occupied. I could feel that things weren't right and that their movement made sense – and this movement included a lot of women who were single mothers and had no official, organized representation. I wasn't surprised to see them there.





Full Time also plays with the rhythm of the day and above all that of the night.

My story had to take place in the fall or at the beginning of the winter, this moment of the year when you're in the full rut of work, your summer vacation far behind, and the nights get longer. Living far from your place of work means leaving early and coming home late. Establishing Julie's departures and returns home when it's dark outside allowed me to convey the very long days, to broach the child-care logistics issues as well as the downsides of life in the country. This relation to time also gave me the possibility to have the sun rise and set in public transportation, thus easily structuring days that succeed one another at an increasingly fast pace, without losing track of the story.

Music plays an important role in your film, conveying a particular sort of tension...

Full Time is a sensory film. Through the creation of a musical backdrop echoing Julie's stressful daily life, we get closer to becoming a genre film. I knew from the writing stage that I wanted an electro soundtrack, whose repetitive beat would reflect the character's inner throbbing, the tempo and the repetitiveness of her own life. It's like her inner music, a succession of waves transporting us into her experience. I really wanted to work with an artist from the electronic music scene who would bring their own signature sound to the mix and Irène Drésel's music intrinsically carries this tonality. I first edited the film without the score, solely following the character's rhythm. This way, Irène ended up with a blank page to work with, without my imposing a tone of any kind, giving her the freedom to orchestrate her signature sound, quite organically, as she would for a concert. From this process emerged a true collaboration, which created a sensation, a musical continuity and seamlessness throughout the film.

In the way you filmed and directed, you are always extremely close to your main character...

I wanted the camerawork to be lively, detecting her every movement, dashing and dodging, rendering her frame of mind. I wanted to be with her as though it were an action film, as close to her as possible, with great freedom of movement, from the smoothest to the bumpiest, whether in tracking shots or zooming in and out. I often restricted the field of vision to her. This way, everything that surrounded her became off screen sensory matter. I also used long focal length lenses quite a bit, especially when she is in the streets. It was a simple means to add density to the city, and make Paris more anxiety-inducing. For this is how Julie feels about being in town, instantly receiving its full-blown violence every time she steps off the train. This also explains why she wishes for another life for her children. She wants to maintain, regardless of the cost

for her, her safe harbor in a more peaceful territory where the prevalent rhythm is less dehumanized. I wanted the viewers to understand that without judging her.

Paris is filmed in a rather unusual way, sharp and metallic although it is essentially a mineral city.

In truth, the urban surroundings I filmed aren't typically Paris, and could have been any other large city. I drew my inspiration from the way New York was filmed in certain 1970s movies. Paris hues are in orangish-gray tones, while my decision was to make them colder and cruder, as this corresponds well with the state of mind Julie is in the minute she sets foot in this hostile territory. I also used this visual approach in the sequences that take place in the luxury hotel. At first, I meant to use a wider variety of colors, changing from one room to the next, but the cold tones ended



up imposing themselves here as well. It was a way of shifting the perception of this place, which should be warm and cozy, to show it from the perspective of those who work there.

Full Time is also about filming a character in constant motion...

She's a warrior. For her every means is acceptable, which sometimes includes small arrangements with the truth. Julie is an everyday heroine and I wanted to show all of her facets. We see her with her children, her colleagues, her friends, in her job interview. Each time, she isn't quite the same woman and it is the sum of these women which tells us who she is. She has her own shortcomings, can be her own worst enemy, and can be tenacious to the point of obstinacy. She is both strong and fallible. As an actress, Laure is highly physical, and you can feel her stage experience in the

way she occupies the space. We constantly worked together on the rhythm of her movement but we didn't limit ourselves to that as the rhythm of the film encompassed more than that. In fact, the film includes a lot of scenes, and the editing involves a lot of ellipses, so the energy and the psychology of the character had to remain consistent between sequences. Because of the messes she has to deal with, Julie must constantly be one step ahead, planning for the future; just like a chess player, she is always several moves ahead.



ABOUT
ÉRIC GRAVEL

Éric Gravel is a French Canadian screenwriter and director living in France for the past 20 years. He made many short films within the international film movement Kino before making his feature film debut in 2017 with the French film *Crash Test Aglaé*. *Full Time* is his second feature film.

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