



Driving Madeleine

92 min

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A little gem of a movie set inside a Paris taxi

Line Renaud is a much-loved French singer and actor whose life spans most of the last century. Casting her in a leading role at 93 must have posed some challenges, but ***Driving Madeleine*** is constructed to fit around her, rather than the other way around. She sits in the back of a taxi for most of it, with Dany Boon – himself a big star – driving her around Paris. The format is so simple, but so right. Two strangers, one day, all they do is talk, with occasional stops for a sandwich or ice cream. Both lives are changed. Less obviously, this is an encounter between old Paris and new Paris, and the way women’s lives have changed. Charles (Boon) is offered a ‘plum fare’ by the dispatcher. Charles is middle-aged and in debt, which makes him even grumpier than the average Paris cabbie. He crosses the city to a house in a leafy suburb where no-one answers. He blasts the horn, and Madeleine (Renaud) calls from the other side of the road, telling him she’s not deaf. She looks sadly at the shuttered house, suggesting that this may have been her family home – a long time ago. She asks Charles to take her to the other side of Paris.. Fairly soon, she asks him to visit more places off their route. This trip has a significance we do not yet understand. The director, Christian Carion, grew up in Cambrai, in the middle of the old western front of World War I. His farming family would routinely dig up shells during ploughing season. His first major success was *Merry Christmas (Joyeux Noel)*, [HFS, 2006] about the Christmas truce in December 1914. Some of his other movies have an historical bent: here, Line Renaud brings that sense of history, both in the character she plays and the way she plays it. Renaud was a popular singer, from late in World War II. She made a number of movies in the 1950s, then dropped out of film for almost 30 years. She returned in the late 1980s in a string of successful comedies, building a whole new audience, and making more than 20 films in the last 35 years. Boon has directed her in two films, in 2006 and 2008. That may be the origin of this little gem. Madeleine’s story has many twists, going to a dark place. Renaud plays her as a survivor; someone who learned to endure. Her warmth is utterly irresistible, thawing the disconsolate Charles. He can’t see the way out of the forest. She becomes his guide so that we wonder finally who’s driving whom.

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