

# LUX FILM DAYS

3 FILMS  
24 LANGUAGES  
28 COUNTRIES



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## **BPM — BEATS PER MINUTE (120 BATTEMENTS PAR MINUTE)**

A film by Robin Campillo  
France



# BPM — BEATS PER MINUTE (120 BATTEMENTS PAR MINUTE)

A FILM BY ROBIN CAMPILLO

In France in the early 1990s, when the AIDS epidemic was raging, the militant group Act Up made its presence felt in public life in a number of ways. It campaigned for the political authorities to organise better preventive measures or for easier access to be provided to experimental medicines, or simply sought to shake public opinion out of its indifference at a time when people tended to assume that only those on the margins of society — homosexuals, transfusion patients, prisoners and heroin addicts — could be affected by the disease.

Robin Campillo creates a group portrait, drawing inspiration from his own experience as a campaigner, although he particularly focuses on certain characters whose stories he tells. The life of the group is marked by its staunch desire to take action, the questions it raises, its conflicts, its desire to overcome the general apathy or even indifference, the effervescence of its spectacular stunts and the emotional response to a disease which is ineluctably killing people they know, or even killing them.

## A CAMPAIGNING FILM?

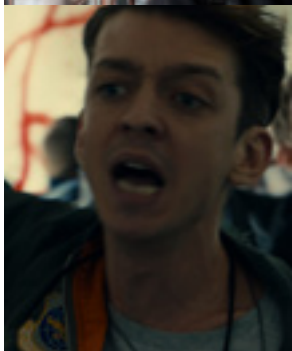
*BPM — Beats per Minute* is a film about a group of campaigners, but it is also, very obviously, a campaigning film itself. It looks back at a campaign that was run by Act Up in France, showing how justified it was and, at least indirectly, how relevant it remains. As one of the characters says in the film, Act Up was not — is not — a support group for AIDS patients, and its actions were intended to show that the epidemic was not merely a public health issue but also had political, economic and social dimensions.

It was political in the sense that the French state had not realised how urgent the situation was and was refusing to adopt prevention policies aimed at high-risk groups as well as at the general public, particularly at youth. It was economic because pharmaceutical companies, which are pilloried in the film, were putting their financial interests before those of people who were ill. It was social because society was responding with indifference when young people were dying, whose only fault was to belong to minority groups or stigmatised sections of the population.

The film's relevance to the present undoubtedly lies in the questions that it asks about the necessity for patients themselves to respond to the disease, about the political dimension of any public health measure and about the difficulty of shaking society out of its indifference towards an epidemic and a disaster unfolding.

## RECONSTRUCTION OF THE PAST

All this is true, but the film should not merely be reduced to its campaigning aspect. It is a reconstruction that goes beyond the documentary dimension and allows the film-maker in particular to constantly move between the collective and the individual, the public and the intimate, militancy and personal emotion. As far as its scenario is concerned, the film very visibly makes a transition from being a group portrait to evoking an intense and passionate relationship between two characters, Sean and Nathan, one of whom is HIV positive while the other is not. The tone of the film undergoes a gradual metamorphosis: in the earlier stages we see the campaigners presenting their demands in spectacular ways, but later there is a greater focus on emotion in response to the suffering of a lover who has to confront the disease, while the last part, which is particularly poignant, is dominated by the constant presence of death.





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At several points, the cinematography helps us to move between these stages by means of the montage and staging, which throughout the film produce a more or less strong sense of dislocation. Whereas cinema generally gives the audience the sense of being directly present at the events shown, in this case the film-maker employs multiple techniques to distance them from the picture, either by the way in which the soundtrack (particularly music) is used, by showing the same events repeatedly from different angles or by unexpectedly slowing the film down or altering its pace.

## JUMPS IN TIME



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A particular feature of the film is its use of numerous flashbacks (or brief departures from historical chronology), which tend not to be noticed on a first viewing because they are carried out so naturally. For example, at the very beginning of the film we find ourselves in the midst of an action where the campaigners are preparing to interrupt an official AIDS conference. The camera is located within the group at shoulder height, and only very little of the scene can be seen from the fringes of the action. The next sequence then shows the debriefing of the action, where there is some disagreement among the campaigners as to the approach used, as the conference speaker was covered with (admittedly false) blood and briefly handcuffed. The montage enables us to see this scene in a wide shot from a distance. The cinematography seems obvious, but the effect of repetition distances the audience (and the campaigners), and the distancing allows debate and reflection.



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However, this distancing is not necessarily intellectual and may, on the contrary, have a strong emotional impact. After the action at Melton Pharm's laboratories, we follow the group in an underground train carriage as they relax after the events (the campaigners have been forced to spend several hours at the police station). At this point, Sean rhapsodises about the beauty of the sky at sunset, adding in a most melancholy tone: 'There are times when I realise how much AIDS has changed my life', but then he immediately bursts out laughing and so does everyone else. However, the laughter does not dispel the emotion evoked by what he has just said, which was full of intimate emotion and which his irony is simply intended to defuse with regard to the others.

It is this constant interchange between the intimate and public spheres, between action and personal emotions, between the present, the past and a terribly uncertain future that is made possible by the cinematography. For example, a very beautiful scene inextricably links the present of the campaigning to the character's longing to have a future and to the melancholy with which, one feels, the film-maker looks back to a moment in the past, which is irrevocably over and gone. This moment sees Nathan attending the Gay Pride march with Sean, who is disguised as a pom-pom girl. Nathan trips and falls to his knees, and his gaze (and that of the camera) lands on a patch of earth, which impersonally speaks the words 'I want you to stay alive!'. This moment is shown in slow motion and the soundtrack suddenly becomes muffled, effacing all the sounds and all the music from the surroundings. The camera shows us Sean dancing, then Nathan's smiling face. The patch of earth's words naturally speak intimately to Nathan, who wants his companion to survive, but the slow motion simultaneously represents a moment when time stands still and is frozen, and one also senses the imprint of the memory fixed in the character's head (and that of the film-maker). The whole sequence is very fluid, giving a mixed and carefully judged impression in which the euphoria of the present moment is mingled with the melancholy of the past moment, requiring little emphasis.

## PACING

The film's title, *BPM* — *Beats per Minute*, clearly alludes to an unusually rapid heartbeat. Indeed, the first impression given by this film, which has a running time of more than 2 hours, is indeed that of the furious pace of Act Up's actions, which succeed one another very quickly, in the same way as the campaigners are seen quickly walking and entering the offices of Melton Pharm, where within a few seconds they squirt false blood over the walls. That impression is certainly correct: the film-maker shows the multiple aspects of the activities of Act Up by means of a suitably paced montage depicting militant actions, assemblies and debriefing meetings, the work of committees, scientific explanations about medicines that might be able to fight the virus, speeches at educational institutions or personal relations, whether between friends or lovers or involving conflict between characters. The film adheres to the same principle as that which governs the meetings that are shown, where speeches are not applauded — approval is shown merely by people clicking their fingers — in order to avoid prolonging the meetings: the film is in a state of emergency, just like the people who are fighting the epidemic.

However, this impression is partial, and Robin Campillo makes effective use of changes of pace and, if the film seems to bounce along at the tempo of the music in the clubs where the characters dance the night away, within the same sequence it can make a transition to a far more melancholy song, which is the film's theme tune.

Similarly, while the camera seems to be constantly on the move to accompany the campaigners' actions, it stands still at several points, whether to register a moment when Sean and Nathan are on holiday visiting a deserted beach seen in a wide shot, or to silently show the hundreds of bodies of demonstrators lying in the streets of Paris to symbolise the ravages of the epidemic, or lastly to show Sean's actual death, an individual death which is very moving for the audience just as it affects Nathan, but also a collective death whose political meaning will be underlined by one last action by Act Up.

The strength of the film undoubtedly lies in this approach, with its constant juxtaposition of the collective and of the individual, which is its way of inextricably linking the most intimate sphere to the most political.





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## SOME POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

In addition to the points analysed above, several aspects of the film *BPM — Beats per Minute* are worth further discussion.

- *BPM — Beats per Minute* is unquestionably a historical film about a campaign that today might appear to be over. But what lessons can we draw today from the film and from the campaign conducted by Act Up, an association that remains active?
- What do you think about the action taken by Act Up? Was it necessary? Violent? Spectacular? Misconceived? Essential? Do you understand the debates that motivated the campaigners and that are shown in the film?
- In your opinion, do efforts to fight AIDS (and other diseases) only concern sufferers of the disease or groups of such people? In what way should those efforts be regarded not only as collective but as universal?

les grignoux





## BRINGING FILMS FROM EUROPE TO EUROPEANS

After last year's edition, which marked the 10th anniversary of the initiative, the LUX PRIZE continues to bring together an astonishing variety of genres and tones through films made by talented young European directors. The European Parliament is pleased to present the three films competing for the 2017 LUX FILM PRIZE:

**BPM — BEATS PER MINUTE** (*120 battements par minute*), a film by Robin Campillo, France

**SAMI BLOOD** (*Sameblod*), a film by Amanda Kernell, Sweden, Norway, Denmark

**WESTERN**, a film by Valeska Grisebach, Germany, Bulgaria, Austria

Adopting a sympathetic and intelligent approach, the films deal with topical subjects and reflect on what is going on in Europe at the moment. They show characters who open their eyes to the world around them in order to understand reality and the societies and communities to which they belong. By showing our stories sublimated by the emotions of film, the quality and diversity of European cinema will be displayed, as will its importance in constructing social values and cultural communities. We invite you to see the films during the sixth edition of the LUX FILM DAYS.

## LUX FILM PRIZE

Culture plays a fundamental role in constructing our societies.

With this in mind, the European Parliament launched the LUX FILM PRIZE in 2007. By doing so it aimed to increase the distribution of European films across the continent as well as to encourage a European debate on major social issues.

The LUX FILM PRIZE is a unique initiative. While most European co-productions are shown only in their country of origin and are rarely distributed elsewhere, even within the European Union, the LUX FILM PRIZE gives three European films the rare opportunity to be subtitled in the EU's 24 official languages.

The winner of the LUX FILM PRIZE will be chosen by the Members of the European Parliament and announced on 15 November 2017.

## LUX FILM DAYS

The LUX FILM PRIZE gave rise to the LUX FILM DAYS. Since 2012, the three films competing for the prize have been shown to a wider European audience during the LUX FILM DAYS.

During the LUX FILM DAYS, we invite you to enjoy an unforgettable cultural experience that transcends borders. From October 2017 to December, you will be able to join cinema-lovers from across Europe in watching screenings of the three films in one of the EU's 24 official languages. Do not forget to vote for your favourite film via our website, [luxprize.eu](http://luxprize.eu), or our Facebook page!

## AUDIENCE MENTION

The Audience Mention is the LUX FILM PRIZE people's choice award. Be sure to vote for one of the three films before 31 January 2018! You might get the chance to go to the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival in July 2018 — courtesy of the European Parliament — and announce the winner of the Audience Mention.

WATCH,  
DEBATE  
AND VOTE!



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LUX  
PRIZE  
.EU

**DIRECTOR:** Robin Campillo

**SCENARIO:** Robin Campillo

**CASTING:** Nahuel Pérez Biscayart, Arnaud Valois,  
Adèle Haenel, Antoine Reinartz

**CINEMATOGRAPHY:** Jeanne Lapoirie

**PRODUCERS:** Hugues Charbonneau, Marie-Ange  
Luciani

**PRODUCTION:** Les Films de Pierre, France 3  
Cinéma, Page 114, Memento Films Production, FD  
Production

**YEAR:** 2017

**RUNNING TIME:** 144'

**GENRE:** Fiction

**COUNTRY:** France

**ORIGINAL VERSION:** French

**DISTRIBUTOR:** Curzon Film World Limited  
(United Kingdom, Ireland)

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SILENCE = 100%