

Brief encounters

Wanted: a page of Proust * How to book a pop star

My role in the longest film ever

Ronald Bergan

Next month, I will have a speaking role in a monumental movie. My scene will be filmed in the sumptuous lounge of the five-star Hotel du Palais in Biarritz. Built as a palace for Princess Eugenie in the 19th century, the hotel is a perfect setting for the film, a transposition of Marcel Proust's epic seven-volume novel *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*. However, before anyone feels envy or wants to borrow some money, I must stress that I will be among a cast of some 3,000 volunteers from 246 countries who will each read one page of the book. The movie will be 170 hours long.

Veronique Aubouy, who conceived the whole project (titled *Le Baiser de la Matrice*), has already filmed 77 hours of sequential readings from the novel, shown non-stop (nights included) at the La Rochelle International film festival a few weeks ago. They are anonymous readers, in places chosen by themselves – an apartment, the beach, a park, a café, in a train etc – each reading from *A la Recherche* while facing the camera before fading to black as the next person takes over. In all, Aubouy has filmed 742 people since 1993, and yet only three volumes have been completed.

A foolhardy and pointless enterprise or, indeed, *le temps perdu*? Far from it. There is an extremely inviting and intriguing element about this film-fleuve. Something interesting grips one in almost every image – whether it's the background, the looks of the reader and the manner in which they read – some divinely, some haltingly, some dramatically, some incomprehensibly. Amusing and moving at times, the film puts the work in perspective, and reveals something about the reader.

In a way, this could be considered the most successful attempt to film Proust's novel of time, space and memory, a landmark in 20th-century literature. Previous films have been bleeding chunks by directors having only dared tackle one volume such as Volker Schlöndorff's *Swann in Love* (1984), Raul Ruiz's *Time Regained* (1999) and Chantal Akerman's *The Captive* (2000). Various others have tried to bring the whole novel to the screen, only to end in tears.

The involved history of unrealised films of the novel needs a long book in itself. After former actor and producer Nicole Stéphane, who had acquired the screen rights in 1962, approached François Truffaut, he explained in a letter to a friend: "I wrote to the woman producer that no real film-maker would allow himself to squeeze the madeleine as though it were a lemon." Her efforts to get Alain Resnais and Jacques Rivette came to nothing; nor did Joseph Losey's attempt (though the 1972 script by Harold Pinter has been published). Losey tried for years to get finance only to be told by one Hollywood bigwig, "This is the age of Gene Hackman and Barbra Streisand. There are no roles for them here."

The closest it came was with Luchino Visconti, that most Proustian of directors. Eight months were spent writing the script (363 pages long), and another six weeks were spent on scouting for locations. In all, the film was to last four hours and cost an astronomical 5bn lire, but when



One of the readers in *Le Baiser de la Matrice*

Stéphane balked at the price and asked to be given more time to raise the money, Visconti, haughtily and discourteously abandoned the film. Could Aubouy's project be the definitive film version?

Incidentally, it is still open for anyone who fancies themselves a Proustian and who wants to take part in this historic literary and cinematic enterprise. Starting at noon GMT on September 27, I will be among a multitude of people from all over the world, some in the night, some in the day, in front of their web cameras, who will be seen live on the internet. I'm not yet sure which page I'll be reading, and no matter how hard I try to sound French, I know that my English accent will come through. But it won't matter unduly; Aubouy is looking for a multiplicity of accents to lend Proust even more universality. lebaiserdelamatrice.fr

Duffy, a snip at \$15,000

Michael Hann

Pssst! Wanna book a band? Help is at hand, then, for the website for Pretty Polly Productions, a company that books bands for gigs in US colleges, has a helpful list of what acts charge to play. And their "hot availability" list for this autumn makes for interesting reading. In the UK, Kings of Leon are bona fide rock superstars, capable of headlining Glastonbury and selling out the O2 arena; in the States you can get them for less than it costs to hire Orthodox Jewish

rapper Matisyahu, a man who won't be selling out the O2 anytime soon. Duffy (*below*) is a star over here – but on the other side of the ocean she's a genuinely cheap booking, as are the Fratellis.

Pretty Polly's full list (the ones below are just those who are definitely available this autumn) is just as fascinating. Want Foo Fighters at your college? That will be between \$300,000 and \$400,000, thanks. As for the Killers, be prepared to make an offer, because they demand "HUGE \$\$\$". If you can't afford that, you could always get an authentic alternative rock legend for between \$3,500 and \$5,000 ... come on people, support Bob Mould, once of Hüsker Dü and Sugar. He deserves your money.

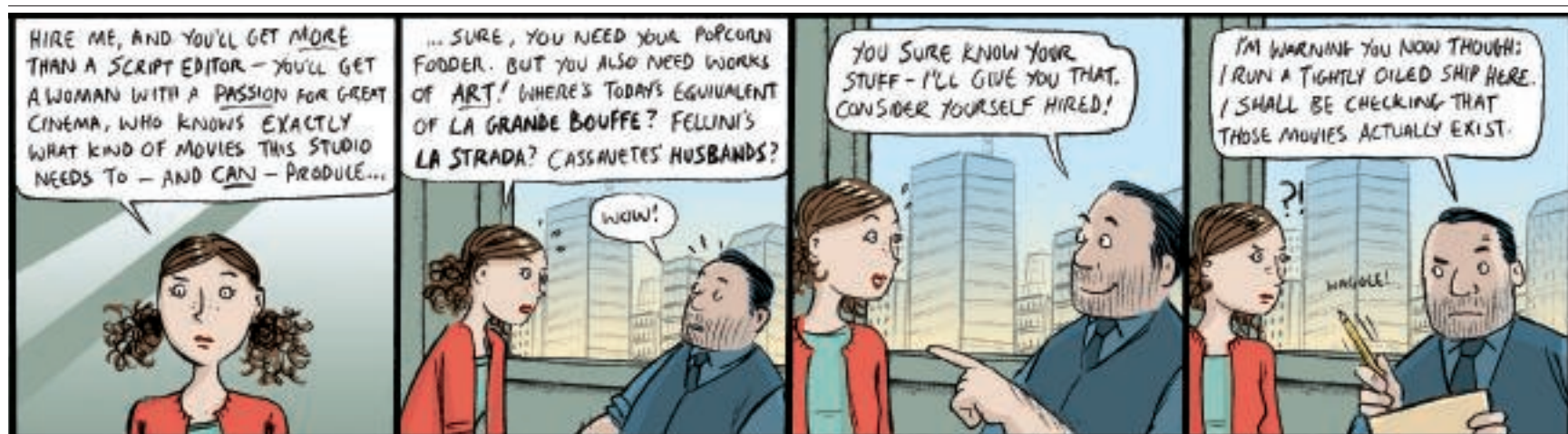
One can't help being sceptical about



some figures, though. Could you really get Bob Dylan to play your campus for \$100,000? We suspect that might be a random figure, picked on the basis that Dylan won't be playing any campus shows, so who cares what the price is? Anyway, you'll have to excuse me, now. I need to tell my wife to get saving up to book the Hold Steady and Drive-By Truckers for my 40th birthday party.

Bloc Party: \$25-30,000
Common & N*E*R*D: \$75-80,000
Damian "Jr. Gong" Marley: \$60-75,000
Death Cab for Cutie: \$75-80,000
Decemberists: \$50,000
Drive-By Truckers & the Hold Steady: \$25,000
Duffy: \$15,000
Gnarls Barkley: \$50-60,000
Hip-Hop Live! Talib Kweli, David Banner & Little Brother: \$30-35,000
Kings of Leon: \$35,000
Lupe Fiasco: \$35-40,000
Matisyahu: \$35-40,000
Menomena: \$15-20,000
Method Man & Red Man: \$35,000
Mogwai: \$25,000
Panic At the Disco: \$125-150,000
Ray LaMontagne: \$35-40,000
Regina Spektor: \$30-35,000
Robert Randolph and the Family Band: \$35-40,000
Staind & Seether: \$85-100,000
T-Pain: \$40,000
The Bravery: \$25,000
The Fratellis: \$15-20,000
The National: \$20-25,000
Third Eye Blind: \$50-60,000
Vampire Weekend: \$25-50,000 (depending on convenience to itinerary)
Wilco: \$30-35,000
Willie Nelson w/Jakob Dylan: \$80-100,000
Wyclef Jean: \$60,000
prettypolly.com

The Pitchers By Berger & Wyse



Readers recommend songs about arguments

By Maddy Costa

You've just had a blazing row with someone and both of you have flounced off in opposite directions to seethe in the no-man's-land between recrimination and reconciliation. What happens next? For songwriters, the answer is simple: the quarrel continues, only this time to music. Few topics in pop are more morally suspect than arguments: even when the writer is apologising, you get the impression they are relishing the opportunity to have the last word – and have it publicly, too.

If the following playlist doesn't seem especially confrontational, that's probably because my idea of an argument is to bark my (obviously correct) opinion at someone, then refuse to allow my opponent to respond. Isn't that just typical of a parent? The wonderful thing about Yakety Yak, released in 1958, is that it could describe parent-child relations from any era since the dawn of time: Mum rants, child opens mouth, laconic Dad mutters, "Don't talk back." Harper Valley PTA portrays another mother on the rampage, arguing with the local "hypocrites" who dare to criticise her free-and-easy ways.

You grow up, you enlist in the great war between the sexes. Lesley Gore's feminist anthem is an exquisitely (well, I would say that) one-sided affair, a declaration of independence that brooks no contradiction. A similarly bloody-minded anti-heroine is troubling Suggs in *My Girl*: there's something heartbreakingly pathetic about his attempts to placate this truculent woman. Main Source aren't even trying: bored with wishing that his girlfriend would "come down with lockjaw", the narrator is ready to dump her.

Sadly, some people ignore all the warning signs and marry anyway. Such a pair feature in the frighteningly rancorous *No Children*: glued together by hate, they communicate by arguing, even with their friends. While there's nothing dignified about clashes between couples, the fights between love rivals are even worse. Riled by her man's insouciance, Millie Jackson grows increasingly catty – and when his wife arrives, she starts vomiting spite.

Thankfully, not all songwriters direct their belligerence at lovers. Fugazi's *The Argument* is a potent attack on right-wing politics and warmongering: released in October 2001, the song suggests a prescient dig at George Bush's militaristic response to 9/11. Two years later, at a gig in London, the Dixie Chicks declared that they were "ashamed" of their president. It led to anger and death threats to the band, to which Not Ready to Make Nice was their furious response.

In 1968, when the US was embroiled in the Vietnam war, a Democratic party convention descended into noisy chaos, with anti-war demonstrators singing *We Shall Overcome* and pro-war factions attempting to drown them out with *Happy Days Are Here Again*. The story so inspired jazz musician Charlie Haden that he recreated the scene with his band. *Circus '68 '69* is thrillingly obstreperous – and almost as difficult to listen to as a blazing row.

This week's playlist

- 1 **Yakety Yak** The Coasters
- 2 **Harper Valley PTA**
Jeannie C Riley
- 3 **You Don't Own Me** Lesley Gore
- 4 **My Girl** Madness
- 5 **Looking at the Front Door**
Main Source
- 6 **No Children** The Mountain Goats
- 7 **Leftovers** Millie Jackson
- 8 **The Argument** Fugazi
- 9 **Not Ready To Make Nice**
Dixie Chicks
- 10 **Circus '68 '69** Charlie Haden

Next week: songs about strangers

Give us your recommendations and learn how to download this compilation <http://music.guardian.co.uk/readersrecommend>