

Les brigades du tigre in motion

Director Jérôme Cornuau's spectacular new 'auteur' feature, **Les brigades du tigre (The Tiger Squads)** is a blend of historic reality and fiction. Set in early 20th century Paris, it focuses on Les Brigades Mobiles, the motorised police squads whose sole mission was to support the judicial authorities in seeking out and suppressing criminals. The inspiration for a French television series in 1974, the popularity of these colourful characters has never waned.

Although psychological relationships dominate the story, **Les brigades du tigre** is primarily an action film in which cinematographic 'authorship' plays a major role. "There are three distinct groups of characters," explains Cornuau's long-time friend and colleague, Director of Photography Stéphane Cami. "The motorised police squads are always filmed in motion with their leaders to maintain the group effect, while the anarchists are shot with a less structured, shoulder-held camera. The officers of the Paris Prefecture of Police, who loosely represent the 'old guard', are filmed with more static cameras equipped with long lenses. It works well, without being too schematic."

Cami spent 12 years working alongside numerous master cameramen, including Bernard Lutic, Romain Winding, Pierre Novion and Jean-Jacques Bouhon and collaborated with such directors as Benoît Jacquot, Jean-Claude Brisseau and Eric Rochant. He established himself as a DP more than 10 years ago with clips and commercials; **Les brigades du tigre** is his second – and most ambitious feature.

"Working on a period film is a most gratifying experience because the sets have a history and a certain style," says Cami. "And when I say 'period', I mean historical reality as well as period lighting. In **Les brigades du tigre**, we had to stay faithful to reality while still retaining freedom of expression." Cami studied photos and paintings from the era and discovered that electric lighting was fairly widespread in Paris in 1912 and the opera was utilising the precursors of the first Fresnel lamps and 'follow spot' lights. "Jérôme and I wanted to stay very close to the characters to avoid a 'postcard' or 'historic mural' look and aimed for a

'stylised naturalism' based on contrasty and fairly directional lighting. The complication is that the film is almost always in motion, often with two cameras positioned at an angle of 90° to each other, so I tried as much as possible to stay out of the axis of the light and often placed one camera against the light, with the other side-lit."

Cami opted for suspended lighting to free up the space and allow the Director to work as he wished. "I chose helium balloons, spherical Chinese lanterns and Springballs for daylight scenes and experimented with 20 inch diameter Bag-o-Lights that we adapted for 4kW or 6kW Cinepars for soft directional lighting. I also used FluoStar neon tubes mounted on very light three foot square frames with an integrated ballast: a system developed by Pascal Pajaud, my own Chief Electrician that can be adjusted from 0 to 100 with no change in the colour temperature. For strong directional lighting that's perfect for the effect of very harsh sunlight through windows, I used Molebeam 12kW, 4kW and 2500w lights."

Cami combined three different film stocks: Eastman EXR 50D 5245 for daylight exteriors, Kodak Vision 250D 5246 for daylight interiors and Kodak VISION2 500T 5218 for evening interiors and night exteriors, routinely overexposing 5246 and 5218 by one stop to reduce grain during printing and for expanded latitude in the lowlights. The ARRIcam and ARRI 535B cameras were adjusted by three perforations and equipped with a complete set of Cooke S4 lenses and a 24-290mm Angénieux zoom.

Shot in 13 weeks in and around Paris and at the Vichy Opera House in central France, **Les brigades du tigre** is a French-Italian co-production of Manuel Munz, TF1 International, France2 Cinéma and France3 Cinéma, with participation of TPS Star and support from the Île-de-France region. ■



Top: A scene from the film.

Above: Director Jérôme Cornuau and DP Stéphane Cami frame a shot.

Below: Recreation of a Parisian street in the early 20th century.

