

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Widow Clicquot

Elisa Leonelli · Friday, July 19th, 2024

Widow Clicquot is a British movie about the young Frenchwoman who created the most famous champagne in the world, *Veuve Clicquot Ponsardin*, in the early 1800s. It premiered at the Toronto Film Festival in September 2023 and opens in theaters July 19.

[Haley Bennett](#) plays the lead and produces with her partner, director Joe Wright, Thomas Napper directs from the 2008 book by [Tilar J. Mazzeo](#), *The Widow Clicquot: The Story of a Champagne Empire and the Woman Who Ruled It*.



Haley Bennett — *Widow Clicquot* © Caroline Dubois

[Barbe Ponsardin](#), born in 1777, married François Clicquot at the age of 21, and when her husband died six years later, she insisted on continuing to run their wine business, rejecting a buy-out proposal by [Jean-Rémy Moët](#).

The movie starts with the death of François ([Tom Sturridge](#)) and weaves back and forth between the past, the life of the loving married couple and their daughter Clementine, and the present, when

the young widow has to fight her father-in-law, produce and export her champagne to Russia during the [Napoleonic Wars](#), succeeding against all odds.



Haley Bennett — *Widow Clicquot* © Caroline Dubois

I ask Haley Bennett about the unusual relationship between this husband and wife in the early 19th century. She replies: “The film is about a woman who created champagne, the rise of the “Grand Dame of Champagne,” but what interested me the most about that story was her resiliency. I want audiences to discover a young woman who endures heartbreak and abandonment. It’s really about her grief and her failures, her need to bottle time, so that she can examine it. Through the course of the film, as she moves forward beyond her loss, she also is examining her marriage, her love for her true partner, whom she is still trying to keep alive through the process of creation. Their relationship began as an arranged marriage, and it was a very surprising love that they developed, he treated her as an equal, but ultimately what crushed him is what empowered her. She had a much stronger constitution than him, so there were times of beauty in their relationship and times of deep despair. It’s one woman’s archetypical journey from a shy and timid girl, who is doting on her husband, whom she loves. He’s defeated by his own demons, and after he passes, this difficult event that takes place is something that pushes her into a new position that is the catalyst for her to discover her independence and herself as a soulful and creative force.”

Director Thomas Napper adds: “The relationship between Barbe and François is almost like a celebration of the ideals of the French revolution of 1789: [égalité](#), [fraternité](#), [liberté](#). They believe in egalitarianism between them and also with the workers in their vineyard. They are a young

couple trying to do things differently, to embrace a new idea, which is champagne, and to do it in a new way. They represent a kind of modernity, they have a bohemian modern quality to them as a couple, and we go on a journey with that relationship, which feels very modern for the time.”



Haley Bennett — *Widow Clicquot* © Christine Tamalet

My other question is about the concept of the circle, that Widow Clicquot proposes to her workers, a method employed by women for cooperation, as opposed to the hierarchy, favored by men. Bennet says: “I have many female friends who are entrepreneurs, designers, producers, directors, writers, artists, political figures, advocates of change, and they are doing it successfully, with grace, humility, compassion, with a willingness to collaborate and listen. With *Widow Clicquot* I wanted to shine a light on ambitious, successful women who dream big and achieve their personal and professional goals, while still staying true to themselves. Widow Clicquot changed the course of history for women, long before it was in vogue to empower one-self and others. I’m in my thirties now, and it feels like I’m only starting to scratch the surface of what I want to achieve, of my potential, both professionally and personally. I feel a responsibility to inspire women to design their own lives, that’s what I’m trying to do, and that’s why I produced this film and I wanted to portray this woman. Clicquot is the kind of woman that I hoped to be, and I want to support other girls and women to do the same. She is a beacon of light. I have a five-year-old daughter, and I want her to carry that torch forward.”



Haley Bennett — *Widow Clicquot* © Caroline Dubois

Napper adds: “When we meet [Sam Riley](#) playing [Louis Bohne](#), he has a conversation with Barbe and teaches her about power: ‘We have lived with kings for too long and Napoleon is no better. Your idea of the circle is very nice, but you must project power to lead.’ So this is the dynamic in the present, when Barbe is becoming a leader and a powerful human being. And it’s not like she’s becoming a man, because she leads in her own way, by example and by working in the fields. Your observation about the circle and the hierarchy is a lovely way of looking at the two sides of the story. The past and the present are slightly different, and we see the difference in Barbe, the relationships have changed and she is changing through the film, which is one of the most enjoyable and pleasurable things about *Widow Clicquot*. We are watching the birth of an artist, an icon, an entrepreneur, a legend, happen in the course of the film.”

Watch the *Widow Clicquot* trailer [here](#), click on underlined words for links to background information.

Available on Netflix as of November 16

This entry was posted on Friday, July 19th, 2024 at 7:33 am and is filed under [Film](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [Comments \(RSS\)](#) feed. You can leave a response, or [trackback](#) from your own site.