

Blu-ray Review: Andre Téchiné's Invaluable Lost Gem 'The Brontë Sisters'

Submitted by [mattmovieman](#) [1] on August 22, 2013 - 4:25pm

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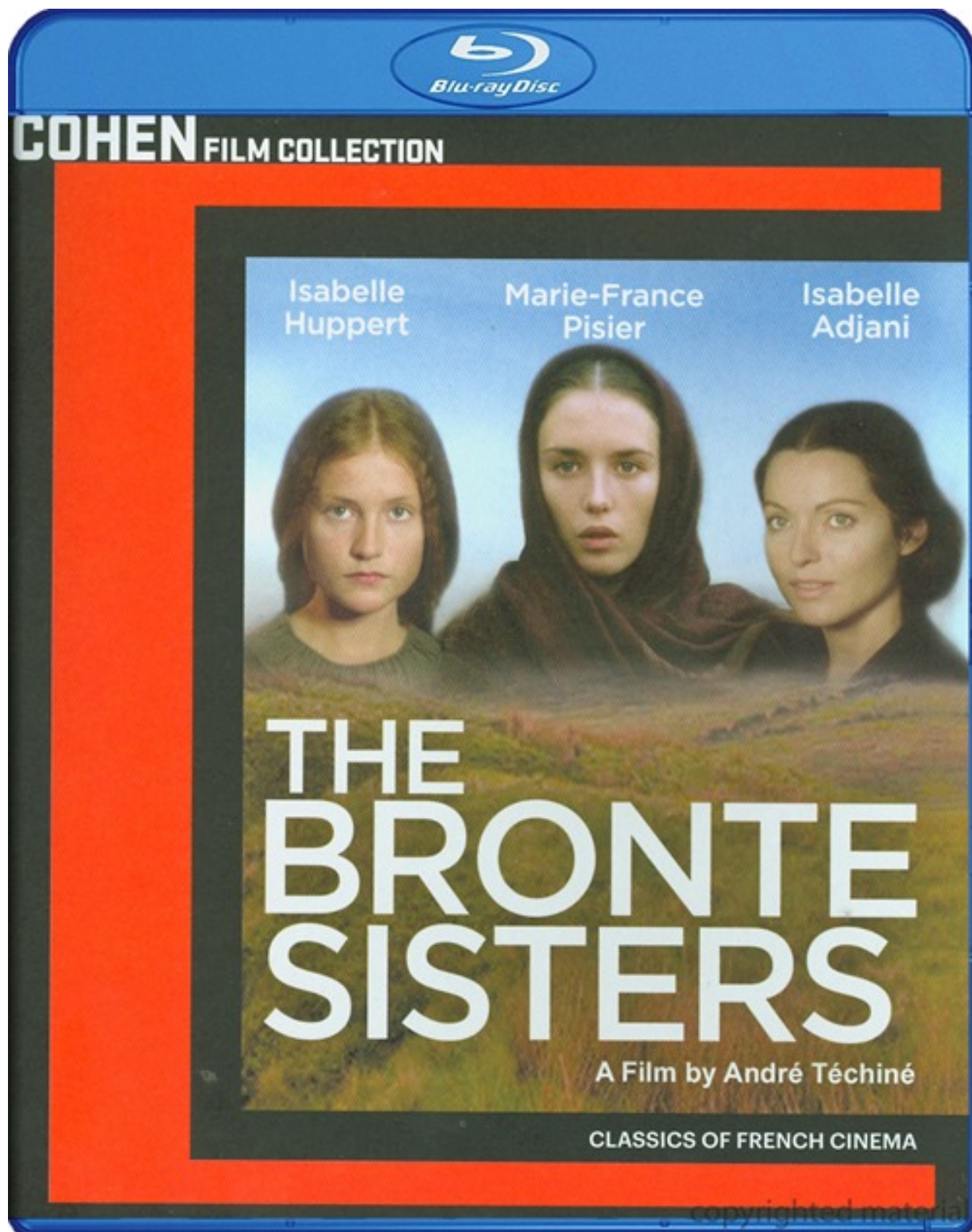
CHICAGO – Hats off to Cohen Media Group for unearthing yet another indispensable piece of cinema. Andre Téchiné, the brilliant French director perhaps best known for 1994's "Wild Reeds," united three great actresses to star in his ambitious, painstakingly researched 1979 portrait of the Brontë sisters who authored literary classics under male pseudonyms.

It's ironic to see Isabelle Huppert cast in the role of the least well-known Brontë girl, Anne, considering that her screen career ended up being far more prosperous than those of her co-stars. Even at 26, Huppert has the piercing stare of a weary, time-worn soul, and her presence here is as hypnotic as ever. A mournful close-up in which her eyes close deeply upon reflection of an immediate tragedy is more achingly forlorn than the saddest of string orchestras.



Blu-ray Rating: **5.0/5.0**

Indeed, Téchiné's film is a majestic ode to the sweet sorrow of melancholia. It's startlingly accurate in its portrayal of the real-life characters, utilizing locations and music from the sisters' own lives. Yet the film would never be mistaken for a docudrama. Naturalistic acting was never a goal of Téchiné's, who aimed instead for a heightened grim eloquence and formalism further expressed through the hyper-articulate, often poetic script co-authored by Pascal Bonitzer ("La belle noiseuse"). In a way, Téchiné's approach is as audaciously artful as Andrea Arnold's recent adaptation of Emily Brontë's "Wuthering Heights," which spent its first act conveying the essence of the author's prose through haunting, wordless imagery. Rather than explore how the Brontë women conceived of their timeless literary masterpieces, Téchiné illustrates their origins by simply focusing on the character's relationships with one another and with nature itself. Fraught with isolation, the lives of these siblings were cut short well before they were able to witness the influence of their achievements, with the sole exception of "Jane Eyre" author, Charlotte (Marie-France Pisier). As middle sister, Emily, Isabelle Adjani gets many of the film's juiciest scenes, cutting through the morose proceedings with a fiery temperament.



The Brontë Sisters was released on Blu-ray and DVD on July 30th, 2013.

Photo credit: Cohen Media Group

Yet for much of the picture, all three sisters play a supporting role to their brother, Branwell (Pascal Greggory), whose impassioned pursuit of fame and success as an author is as ill-fated as his romance with the wealthy Madame Robinson (Hélène Surgère). A scene in which Branwell is forced to squirm through dinner with his lover and her suspicious husband (Adrian Brine, whose eyes could set waterlogged wood aflame) is a delicious masterwork of foreboding innuendo. Like Emily and Anne, Branwell would never live to see the Brontë dream achieved. Only Charlotte remains in the film's stunning final sequence, attending an opera in her meek attire while surrounded by a Victorian upper-class wholly unaware that they are in the presence of greatness.

"The Brontë Sisters" is presented in flawless 1080p High Definition (with a 1.66:1 aspect ratio) and includes Criterion-quality extras. Dominique Mailet's excellent hour-long documentary includes all-new interviews with Téchiné, Bonitzer and Greggory that are refreshingly honest in their reminiscence of the tense production. Audio commentary is provided by NPR critic Wade Major and Brontë scholar Sue Lonoff de Cuevas, which offers a great deal of historical and analytical context to each scene.

'The Brontë Sisters' is released by Cohen Media Group and stars Pascal Greggory, Marie-France Pisier, Isabelle Adjani, Isabelle Huppert, Hélène Surgère, Adrian Brine and Patrick Magee. It was written by Pascal Bonitzer and Andre Téchiné and directed by Andre Téchiné. It was released on July 30th, 2013. It is not rated.



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