



FESTIVAL DE CANNES
SÉLECTION OFFICIELLE 2024
CANNES PREMIÈRE

THE MARCHING BAND

A FILM BY
EMMANUEL
COURCOL



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INTERNATIONAL SALES

PLAYTIME

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A full-page background image showing a male conductor with a beard, wearing a black long-sleeved shirt and blue jeans, standing and leading an orchestra. He is holding a baton in his right hand and gesturing with his left. The orchestra consists of many musicians, mostly young adults, seated and playing various instruments including violins, violas, cellos, and a double bass. They are in a rehearsal room with a dark red wall. The scene is captured from a slightly elevated side angle, showing the conductor's profile and the backs of some musicians in the foreground.

SYNOPSIS

Thibaut is an internationally renowned conductor who travels the world. When he learns he was adopted, he discovers the existence of a younger brother, Jimmy, who works in a school cafeteria and plays the trombone in a small marching band. Everything seems to set them apart, except their love of music. Sensing his brother's exceptional talent, Thibaut decides to remedy the injustice of fate. Jimmy begins to dream of a different life...

INTERVIEW WITH EMMANUEL COURCOL

YOUR FILM TAKES ON SEVERAL SUBJECTS.
WHAT WAS THE ORIGINAL IDEA BEHIND IT?

I am tackling themes that are dear to me and that I have already dealt with in my previous films, such as fraternal ties, chance and social determinism, and I am bringing them together in a single story.

My starting point was an idea I had a long time ago, during a consultation on a film that never saw the light of day, set in Tourcoing in the world of majorettes. I went there to meet a marching band and its troop of majorettes, the "Cht'is lutins". No one could read music, not even the conductor. The band's entire repertoire was made up of pieces that he adapted by ear. He would break down the parts by section, and the others would reproduce what they had heard. After the rehearsal, we all went for a drink at his place, and seeing these people of all ages so warmly together made me realize the importance of music and the marching band as a social and emotional bond: it is a family and a way of life, a remedy for isolation, the omnipresence of screens and our dematerialized world. As I watched their boss, I wondered what his destiny would have been had he been born into a more privileged environment. That is when I had the image of a great conductor discovering the existence of a brother who plays in a marching band: a cultural, emotional, social and musical shock.

YOU COLLABORATED WITH IRÈNE MUSCARI ON THE WRITING.

Right from the start, I wanted to write with a screenwriter. I met Irène while working on *The Big Hit (Un Triomphe)*, my previous film. She was working as a cultural coordinator in jails at the Meaux penitentiary and gave me some very good advice on the script and the making of the film. When we started talking about my next film, it was she who came up with the wonderful idea of the marrow transplant. She had never written a screenplay before, but her female point of view seemed indispensable, so we went

for it. She amazed me, she learned very quickly and I discovered a real screenwriter. She has a great eye for detail, the ideas just flow and we complement each other. I have the technical background, the sense of general structure and dialogue, while she has a fine-tuned approach to character psychology and human interaction. We are very similar in terms of taste and cinephilia. In the end, what started out as a counterpoint quickly turned into a four-hander writing.

THE TONE YOU ADOPT IS CONSTANTLY ON THE EDGE BETWEEN COMEDY, SOCIAL COMEDY AND DRAMA...

What I like above all is to reconcile opposites and find a form of compromise or balance. This is as true in my life as it is in the cinema: drama or comedy? Auteur film or popular film? Classical music or popular songs? Why choose? It is a demanding path over a ridge line, not always easy, but it is what I love. It is what drives my desire to write.

You are playing with very delicate things, and you have to know how to avoid pathos as soon as it appears. You have to be moving while avoiding any complacency and know how to take a tangent at the right moment, to find the little thing that defuses the situation and brings out the emotion by surprise.

For example, we were careful not to get drawn into a film about illness. Here, it is a trigger that is quickly forgotten, leaving room for the relationship between the two brothers. The same goes for the social aspect of the factory. It is an economic reality that we wanted to evoke, but without embarking on a completely different film.

Because here, the subject is above all the musical and fraternal meeting of two worlds.

On the other hand, I am wary of the famous "feel good movie", which is too marshmallowy. If the film is as touching as I hope it will be, it is thanks to the emotion and humanity of the characters in whom we find ourselves. It is seeing people generous in action despite the cruelty of life, people trying to make a place for themselves by carrying big suitcases. That's what makes it so good.

This balance is achieved through writing, acting and editing. In this respect, Guerric Catala, my chief editor, and I have the same feeling. The more I go forward, the more my editing experience nourishes a form of economy and precision in the writing of the next project.

DID YOU HAVE A MANTRA TO KEEP YOU IN THE SPIRIT OF WHAT YOU WANTED TO ACHIEVE?

No, I didn't have any mantra, just a musical bath that reflected the film's abundance. We tackle very different musical registers, but I tried to remain true to my tastes while offering a varied musical landscape. Whether it is the classical music that Thibaut conducts and that Jimmy discovers through him, or the jazz that the two brothers share, or more unexpected scores like the Aznavour song... I listen to a lot of music, and Irène is also a great music lover. We did, however, enlist the help of composer Michel Pétrossian.

USUALLY, MUSIC IS USED TO PERFECT THE MISE EN SCÈNE. BUT IN THIS CASE, IT IS ONE OF THE SUBJECTS OF THE FILM... HOW DID YOU GO ABOUT FILMING IT?

For the orchestral part, the idea was to get away from simple concert footage and get to the heart of the orchestra. I had to get shots that you don't get when you attend a concert. I wanted us to be immersed with Thibaut, I wanted to film his hands and his expressions. For the marching band, it was simpler because things are less formal, it is a real show in itself, more chaotic, more alive too.



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and find a form of compromise or balance.
Drama or comedy?
Auteur film or popular film?
Classical music or popular songs?
Why choose?"

SILENCES ARE ALSO VERY IMPORTANT...

Yes, but it is very intuitive to set up silences, because they follow movements. In fact, I have followed the dramaturgy of a score: allegretto, andante, adagio, etc., all these movements to which I am sensitive. I feel, very modestly, like a conductor myself.

NO ORIGINAL MUSIC?

Michel Pétroussian and I tried to include an original score but it was too much. Precisely because we needed silence. And there were already a lot of musical tracks.

LET'S TALK ABOUT THE CAST. ARE THE ACTORS ALSO MUSICIANS?

Benjamin Lavernhe has a good ear, he is very gifted, very musical, a drummer and a guitarist. He has a piano at home, and all he had to do was work on the pieces to create the perfect illusion. As for conducting, he was coached for several months and then on set by Antoine Dutailly, a brilliant young conductor. Benjamin is very hard-working, and he tried hard to make himself perfectly believable by working on the scores and gestures with extreme precision. Conducting an orchestra is like driving a Formula 1 car: there is no room for error. On the set, during excerpts from the symphonic pieces, he really conducts, so much so that if he makes a mistake, the orchestra crashes. Some of the musicians even said to him: "We have had some conductors who were not as good as you!"

Pierre Lottin, on the other hand, is a self-taught musician at heart. He never attended the Conservatoire, but he composes and plays the piano to a very high standard. You can see him in particular during the jam session with Benjamin at the restaurant, where they had the time of their lives. For the film, he took trombone lessons for several months with Estelle Wolf, a trombonist who plays both in classical training and in her marching band. During the film, he actually plays at a perfectly acceptable amateur level.

Sarah Suco, also a musician - an accordionist - has also taken trumpet lessons with Estelle, and can handle the instrument well enough to keep up with the marching band. In fact, we made a making of of the whole musical aspect of the film. It is fascinating, very funny and very touching.

WHAT WAS THE CASTING PROCESS LIKE?

I chose Pierre Lottin very early on, since he was in *The Big Hit (Un triomphe)*. The role of Jimmy was written for him. On the other hand, I had not thought of Benjamin Lavernhe at the outset, because the ages were reversed. The adopted son was the youngest. When we thought of swapping, we were able to broaden the range of actors, and Benjamin came to mind very quickly.

FOR THE SUPPORTING ROLES, WERE YOU LOOKING FOR ACTORS OR MUSICIANS?

First of all, I was looking for actors, but they had to be able to play music. Because professional actors were mixed with real marching band musicians, they had to be indistinguishable from each other. No pun intended, but I am very attached to harmony on a set.

YOU WERE AN ACTOR AND SCREENWRITER BEFORE MOVING ON TO DIRECTING...

Let's say it was a late vocation. I was not thinking at all about directing when I was accepted as a young actor at the National School of Theater Arts and Techniques. I only thought of being a film actor, but I mainly did theater. I had a respectable career without much more, and little by little, my desires became sharper, I needed more. I started writing a play, then a screenplay, and by chance I met Philippe Lioret, who



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asked me to collaborate on his next film. After that, I co-wrote several films with him and other directors. And then a sort of dissatisfaction started to arise, I began to say to myself: "Well, I wouldn't have done it like him..." and finally: "Why not me?" That is how I got into directing.

WHAT DOES IT CHANGE IN THE WORK OF DIRECTING ACTORS TO HAVE BEEN AN ACTOR?

It is invaluable to know what it is like to be in front of a camera. For me, actors are fellow students. There is an immediate affinity between us. In this respect, actors sometimes feel a lack of confidence in filmmakers, so when they come across a director who knows their craft, speaks the same language and empathizes with them, they feel confident. And trust is crucial. I always give them freedom. They can improvise within a precise framework. The dialogues are written, but I am always open to pleasant surprises, whatever the importance of the role.

Benjamin, for example, is very inventive. He is always coming up with new things, trying to feed the character and the situations. He is a virtuoso, a perfectionist. And when it is too much, we pare it down in editing.

Pierre also invents in his own way. He has this instinctive, animal side, and at the same time, he constructs his role with a lot of thought. He is very fine, very accurate. The two of them have very different natures, but they complement each other very well. Sarah's work is equally simple and demanding. It was a pleasure to work with artists like them.

WHERE EXACTLY DID YOU SHOOT?

In Lallaing, near Douai. Irène and I had scouted the area. Before choosing Lallaing, I had seen a very nice documentary, *La fanfare ne perd pas le nord*, and I had asked the director, Frédéric Touchard, which marching band to contact. So one day we met

up at their place, just like Benjamin in the film. After rehearsal, we all had a few beers together, and the people there were immediately welcoming and charming. Their personalities, as well as their magnificent brick premises and the rehearsal room shown in the film, were a perfect match for what I was looking for. For me, the choice was obvious: I had found the Walincourt marching band! So it is this marching band that we see playing in the film. On the first day of shooting, they were a little intimidated, but very quickly their natural composure took over, especially with the supporting members of the marching band who, like Jacques Bonnaffé, are also all instrumentalists. And by playing together, we were able to create a real troupe spirit that can be felt in the film, where we find the unifying power of music!

THE FILM HAS SOMETHING OF THE BRITISH SOCIAL COMEDY, BUT AT THE SAME TIME IT IS VERY FRENCH, PROBABLY BECAUSE THIS NORTHERN REGION HAS A STRONG HISTORY AND A REAL PERSONALITY...

Yes, there is a rich, cinematic social fabric in the North. With its cinematic houses and brick streets, and its authentic, popular atmosphere. But what counts most, whatever the film, are the characters and their humanity. And yet, all that human material that is so dear to me and that is to be found there is particularly touching and inspiring. Because I love stories and above all the people who bring them to life: the characters...



EMMANUEL COURCOL BIOGRAPHY



Emmanuel Courcol is a French actor, director and screenwriter.

Alongside his career as an actor, he gradually turned to screenwriting in the 2000s, before moving into directing in 2012 with his first short film *Géraldine je t'aime*, starring Grégory Gadebois and Julie-Marie Parmentier.

He then directed his first feature film, *Ceasefire (Cessez-le-feu)*, in 2015, with Romain Duris, Grégory Gadebois, Céline Sallette, then in 2020 *The Big Hit (Un Triomphe)*, with Kad Merad, Marina Hands, Laurent Stocker.

He received a César Award nomination for Best Original Screenplay in 2010 for *Welcome*, Prix Jacques-Prévert for screenplay the same year.

Selected for the 2020 Cannes Film Festival, *The Big Hit* won Public Award at the Angoulême Francophone Film Festival and the Best Comedy of the Year Award at the 33rd European Film Awards.

CAST

THIBAUT DÉSORMEAUX

JIMMY LECOQ

SABRINA

CREW

DIRECTOR

SCREENPLAY AND DIALOGUE

PRODUCERS

PRODUCTION

CINEMATOGRAPHY

EDITING

SOUND

SET DESIGN

COSTUMES DESIGN

MAKE-UP

CASTING

PRODUCTION MANAGER

LOCATION MANAGER

ORIGINAL MUSIC AND QUADRATURE

FRENCH DISTRIBUTION

INTERNATIONAL SALES

BENJAMIN LAVERNHE
DE LA COMÉDIE FRANÇAISE

PIERRE LOTTIN

SARAH SUCO

EMMANUEL COURCOL

EMMANUEL COURCOL, IRÈNE MUSCARI

MARC BORDURE, ROBERT GUÉDIGUIAN

AGAT FILMS

MAXENCE LEMONNIER

GUERRIC CATALA

PASCAL ARMANT, SANDY NOTARIANNI, NIELS BARLETTA

RAFAEL MATHÉ

CHRISTEL BIROT

CHARLOTTE LEQUEUX

EMMANUELLE PREVOST

MARIE-FRÉDÉRIQUE LAURIOT-DIT-PRÉVOST

YOANN JARTON

MICHEL PETROSSIAN

DIAPHANA DISTRIBUTION

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