

MAMMAROMAN AND KICK'N RUSH PRESENT

QUINZAINE
DIRECTORS' FORTNIGHT
CANNES 2024

Laurent
Stocker
FROM
LA COMÉDIE FRANÇAISE

Delphine
Baril

Charlotte
Læmmel

Gaëtan
Peau

Anthony
Paliotti

PLASTIC GUNS

a movie by
Jean-Christophe Meurisse

length : 1h36

JUNE 26th IN THE THEATERS

DISTRIBUTION

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SYNOPSIS

Michel Uzès, a man in his forties, is arrested during his trip to Denmark. He is suspected by the police to be **Paul Bernardin**, a wanted murderer accused of killing his wife and three children a few years ago. While Uzès maintains that he is innocent, two amateur detectives – **Léa** and **Christine**, set out to conduct their own investigation. They know the whole affair inside out and feel certain that he is the wanted murderer. Meanwhile, in Argentina, a Frenchman in his forties with a mysterious past celebrates his wedding with his pretty, young fiancée...

IN CONVERSATION
WITH
JEAN-CHRISTOPHE MEURISSE



WHY THIS INCONGRUOUS TITLE, *PLASTIC GUNS*?

My approach to find titles for my films is rather surrealistic, somewhat akin to exquisite corpses, as was the case for my previous film *Bloody Oranges*. *Plastic Guns* sounds good to me because everyone is a little plastic-like. The characters, the wrong Bernardin, the true Bernardin, the investigators, are all bogus people. When I reread the screenplay, the page it was opened to was the scene where Zavatta, the “*police ninja*”, gets shot at by his children armed with toys – I knew I had found my title.

FROM THE VERY FIRST SCENE ONWARDS, WITH THE TWO ODDBALLS CHATTING AWAY AS THEY CUT UP A CORPSE IN THE FORENSIC SCIENCE LAB, THE TONE IS SET, WITH A DEFINITE BALANCE BETWEEN HUMOR AND HORROR...

That’s what I like: mixing things up. What I don’t like is remaining in just one register or genre. I want everything to be taut, in the narrative as well as in the formal rendering. You don’t know what to think. We constantly oscillate between the absurd and horror, laughing at the worst, between tragedy and comedy. On the absurd side, there’s the scene where Vincent Dedienne and Aymeric Lompret, two cops completely out of their depth, have a zoom call with Danish policemen, and no one really understands each other. Otherwise, there are also more tragic scenes, with drastically bloodier events...

THERE ARE DELIGHTFUL RETORTS AS WELL.

Humor in words comes from my history with the theater. When we say that Zavatta is half-man, half-machine, with bat blood, it’s the very illustration of the surrealism I was talking about. This said, I write the dialogue and I submit it to the actors, but I leave room for them to improvise. In my work approach, there’s this kind of freedom. When the actors place themselves in a spontaneous situation, they often create sheer gold! I am intent on preserving this quality of acting, which is very specific.

WHEN WE SEE YOUR FILM, THE WORD “*WORK*” ISN’T WHAT COMES TO MIND...

This sensation indicates that what we see on-screen was born from a free and fortunate situation. In fact, it all begins with the screenplay, which I put down in writing, on paper, for two or three months. This text constitutes 80% of the film. After that stage, Amélie Philippe, who is my collaborator as well as my wife, pores over the whole document. We elaborate on certain situations together, then I meet with all the actors and actresses ahead of time for each sequence and I try to see what they’re going to do with it. I listen to them, we rewrite, we rehearse one year ahead of the film shoot. The madness of my films is a concerted affair that is rehearsed at length. When we shoot the film, it has to be an explosive outburst, with each day of the shoot a celebration. Thirty-four days of filming, thirty-four days of festivities!

WHAT ARE THE SPECIFIC PROBLEMS YOU ENCOUNTER WITH THIS KIND OF SCREENPLAY?

There are several plots that interweave with different characters and need to unfold without losing track of the narrative. I like hyperlink cinema movies, which allow you to go from one character to another, and to build things up through the surprise of going back and forth between several storylines. I conceive my films like mosaics. The trick is to find the cornerstone that is going to support the entire structure. I freely inspired myself from Guy Joao’s story, the poor fellow who was arrested in Glasgow and mistakenly taken for Xavier Dupont de Ligonnès – but had nothing to do with him whatsoever. A former Renault employee in early retirement, he’d been confused with a man wanted for murder in France and after his arrest spent twenty-six hours of sheer hell in a Scottish jail... Something akin to the tangled irony found in many of Sempé’s drawings! I thought to myself that the real Dupont de Ligonnès must have had a good laugh! Perhaps he was sipping guava cocktails in good company in South America... I imagined two amateur web investigators who, rather than dedicate their weekends to collecting stamps or DIY projects, spend their time off conducting their own investigations. In their alcohol-fueled pursuit, they end up enucleating the eyeball of the wrong person...

FOR YOU, CINEMA IS THEREFORE A WAY OF MAKING FUN OF THE WORLD?

Cinema is here, I think, to show what cruelty and evil are. I stretch things out a bit. The enucleation in the end didn't come straight out of some creative delirium. It's a reference to the Papin sisters, Christine and Léa, who murdered their employers in 1933. The older of the two sisters, who was a psychopath, gouged her employer's eyes out with a spoon. I kept the sisters' first names as an eyewink reference to this grisly news item from the past.





A WAY OF REVIVING THE THEATER OF CRUELTY ADVOCATED BY ANTONIN ARTAUD ?

Yes. I enjoy showing monsters. I have a naive utopia of my own, which is that the more evil you show in movies, the less there is outside. Showcasing nice people bores me rather quickly. The tone that I have chosen was already expressed in ***Bloody Oranges***, which set the cat among the pigeons. There are people who loved it and others who hated it. Lukewarmness is the enemy. In spite of the succession of funny or dreadful scenes, there's a moral at the end of ***Plastic Guns***, which crystallizes hope or a certain future, a happy ending of sorts: the bad guy, played by Laurent Stocker, does end up being arrested when we were led to think he was going to get away with it. And Zavatta, the loser, was right. It's important to remind everyone that this story, for which the French public had a somewhat morbid fascination, concerns a man who killed children. The film is a narrative and emotional rollercoaster but it also includes a reflection about society. I hope that people will walk out of the movie theater with a lot of thoughts stirring in their minds.

YOU DECONSTRUCT THE MECHANICS OF OUR WORLD – OUR ABSURD AND MAD WORLD?

Yes. And there's great jubilation in it, as well as emotional and frightful aspects; overall the film is a satirical depiction of our society, with a focus on our inconsistencies. When you see what happened to Guy Joao, you realize that reality is always worse than fiction. The proof: if you watch the news on TV at home, nothing happens. If you place the TV on a theater stage with four hundred spectators, the same newscast will elicit laughter. Contextualizing through a stage performance is already a form of deconstruction. This is what the sheer power of art is. Depicting, writing, filming are already in of themselves acts of dissection. Art ought to divide, be caustic. The ideal is when people walk out of the movie theater having a heated argument.

IS CINEMA A TOOL TO PURGE EVIL?

Yes. I have no qualms about not sparing viewers and I enjoy manipulating them. Here, I show Evil in a comedic context. Cinema is an emotional experience and we can't, in my opinion, be restricted to just one genre. So I switch from a comic to a horrific register. I am amused by the fascination that French people have for grisly news items. These news items are a display of violence, of misery and misfortune. Beyond providing a form of entertainment, they are a reflection of our human condition. I wanted to make a film about Xavier Dupont de Ligonnès because I wonder what drives French people to consume what is published in the press about that sordid affair in such abundance. Why are they so fascinated? I believe that there are some people who vicariously project themselves into the journey of this 'good family man.' Perhaps some of them secretly dream of getting rid of their dull family lives and starting afresh? It's exactly the case for my leading characters: Léa plunges into this investigation to escape her daily life as a housewife. She likes the challenge afforded by Bernardin. Christine, for her part, embodies the monster buried deep within all of us; she fantasizes about the man. The news item is open to reinterpretation through fiction and this further strengthens its cathartic dimension.

THE MUSICAL SCORE FOR PLASTIC GUNS REFLECTS THIS ANARCHIC MAYHEM...

We have Julien Clerc, Taj Mahal, Dalida, Mahler, Bach, Frankie Valli... When I write, I also play music in the background. I can't write without music. I can't imagine life without music. French pop music, rock, jazz, I listen to everything. Music opens pathways for the imagination. Yet, I somehow always end up circling back to 1960s and 70s rock and roll, from Creedence Clearwater Revival to Elvis Presley. I went to see Chuck Berry, Jerry Lee Lewis, and Bruce Springsteen's concerts when I was younger...



IN YOUR FILMS, THE CAST IS ESSENTIAL...

The four leading actors and actresses, Delphine Baril, Charlotte Laemmel, Laurent Stocker, and Gaëtan Peau, rehearsed with me for a long time. I also like bringing more famous people in for a day of shooting, like Jonathan Cohen, Vincent Dedienne, or François Rollin and Romane Bohringer. Delphine and Charlotte belong to my theater company, Les Chiens de Navarre, and are used to improvisation, a skillset in which they excel. They have fanciful personalities, which is something I find very interesting. In fact, it's a quality that all the actors and actresses in the film share. I also always take on people who are funny.

WHY?

Because it's easier to make funny people dark than the other way around. I always seek to find that special touch of madness in actors and actresses. As Deleuze used to say, there is a certain charm to madness. This could actually sum up the entire film.



JEAN-CHRISTOPHE MEURISSE BIOFILMOGRAPHY

Former theater director, Jean-Christophe Meurisse founded the widely acclaimed ***Les Chiens de Navarre*** company in 2005.

In 2013, he directed the medium-length film ***Il est des nôtres***, which won awards and critical acclaim.

He went on to direct several feature films: ***Apnée*** (*Critics' Week, Cannes, 2016*), ***Bloody Oranges*** (*Midnight Screening, Cannes Film Festival, 2021*) and finally ***Plastic guns*** (*Closing night, Directors' Fortnight*)

CAST

Paul Bernadin

Léa
Christine
Michel Uzès
Zavatta
Joana
Thiago
Lucille
Hanna

Laurent Stocker
DE LA COMÉDIE FRANÇAISE

Delphine Baril
Charlotte Laemmel
Gaëtan Peau
Anthony Paliotti
Juana Acosta
Philippe Rebbot
Romane Bohringer
Hanna Cremois

CREW

Written & Directed By **Jean-Christophe Meurisse**
Producer

Marine Bergere
Romain Daubeach
Antoine Blesson
Nicolas Descalles
Javier Ruiz-Gomez
Flora Volpelière
Hervé Redoules
Sophie Rossignol

DOP
EDITOR
PRODUCTION DESIGN
COSTUMES

Photos : ©2024_ Mamma Roman – Kick'n Rush





CHARLES