

CINÉFRANCE STUDIOS
PRESENTS

AUDREY LAMY A MOTHER'S SPECIAL LOVE

A FILM BY JOHN WAX

EDEN LOPES NICOLAS CHUPIN DE LA COMÉDIE FRANÇAISE NAIDRA AYADI BENJAMIN TRANIÉ JEAN-CHARLES CLICHET

Lenght : 1h33 - Format : Scope - Son : Digital 5.1

INTERNATIONAL SALES

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SYNOPSIS

Pauline is the mother of Andrea, a 6-year-old autistic boy. Freshly separated from his father, she finds herself having to move into a shared living situation with her brother and sleeping in the living room. Approaching 40, one could dream of better circumstances, but let's say she doesn't really have a choice.

Her son has a passion for animals, is sensitive, obsessive, full of energy and at times very choleric. She would so much like to have an instruction manual on how to deal with the changes between moments of joy and moments of helplessness, violence too, and why one noise might trigger him and another not.

Fighting on a daily basis to maintain him in a conventional school system while making a living as a waitress, she has to juggle complicated schedules and a complicated family... and at the same time try to fulfil herself as a woman. In short, Pauline is at her breaking point.



INTERVIEW WITH JOHN WAX

WHAT IS YOUR BACKGROUND ?

I started out as a set photographer, shooting small clips and making-of. After meeting Franck Gastambide on KAÏRA SHOPPING , a mini-series for Canal +, he hired me as a technical advisor on his film PATTAYA . From one project to the next, I trained various technical and artistic positions, and eventually came to direct alongside Fabrice Eboué and Jean-Pascal Zadi.

HOW DID THE FILM COME ABOUT ?

I had just finished SOME LIKE IT RARE with Fabrice Eboué. With Fabrice Eboué, Cinéfrance producer David Gauquié asked me if I'd like to direct my own film. We were just before confinement, and my friend Marie-Odile Weiss, who was creating her show, invited me to the premiere. It was called IN FLIP-FLOPS AT THE FOOT OF THE HIMALAYAS and was inspired by her personal story as the mother of an autistic child. Apart from the title, which I liked, I really, I loved this one-woman show, because it was both funny and touching, and it had all the makings of a good film. Theaters having closed the very next day she was only able to give one performance.

But when I had lunch with David, I told him about the play, then had him read the text, and he was just as taken with it. So I called Marie-Odile to ask if she'd be interested

in adapting her play into a film, and we started working together on a script that combined real-life experiences, such as his relationship with his son's mistress, with other things that were more personal to me. That's why there's so much of me in the character of Pauline, the mother, particularly in her relationship with her family.

HAVE YOU LOOKED INTO AUTISM ?

Yes, I read books and watched documentaries. It gave me a lot to work with in the script, because in the play, Marie-Odile talked about her son, from his birth to his 11th birthday, and in the film, I had to narrow it down to focus on one school year. But it's not just a film about autism, it's a story about rebuilding your life as a 40-year-old separated woman with a child. Having two children by two women from whom I'm separated, it's a subject that speaks to me.

WHAT KIND OF WOMAN IS PAULINE ?

At first, she's a woman who's not at all autonomous, having always lived off her father or her partner. She's messy, unconcerned with paperwork, and when she finds herself on her own, she must learn to become a responsible adult. Through her journey, the film asks how to become an autonomous adult so that her child has a chance to become one too.

HOW QUICKLY DID AUDREY LAMY SETTLE INTO THE ROLE ?

It was obvious to me from the start. I discovered her in Maiwenn's film POLISS, and she impressed me in just one scene. Later, when I worked with her on Fabrice Eboué's film COEXIST, we got on very well, and I discovered that she could play anything. You see her a lot in comedies, but I've always thought that she's capable of varying genres, because she's such a great actress. That's why I was happy to offer her a more dramatic role. I knew she'd be capable of playing a comedy character who could grab you by the emotions.

WHAT WAS HIS INVESTMENT ?

It was immediate. Two hours after sending her the script, she called to tell me she'd accepted. I'd never had such a quick response before, and I was delighted by her enthusiastic response, especially as when I was writing the script, I was already thinking of her and couldn't think of anyone else for the part. Audrey being a real hard worker, two months before shooting she already knew all her lines and made me a lot of suggestions. So, as our discussions progressed, we continued to rewrite the script. She showed a real commitment to the role and to the film, which was obviously close to her heart.

AND ON THE SET, WHAT KIND OF ACTRESS IS SHE ?

She's happy, she jokes. I like to laugh too, so it was a pleasure to work with her, because the atmosphere was excellent, and the energy carried us along. And for the emotional scenes, although she can cry on command, she needed to put herself in a bubble a little beforehand. It wasn't a question of getting painful feelings out of her, but she needed to put herself in a different energy.

HOW LONG DID IT TAKE YOU TO FIND THE CHILD WHO WOULD PLAY ANDREA ?

Joan Borderie, the children's casting director, saw hundreds of young actors. From the videos she sent me, I was able to form an initial idea, then I reviewed a few dozen of them in screen tests, and two, in particular, caught our attention. The first one was a real natural: in front of the camera, he was very funny and endearing, but Eden stood out from the crowd because when we saw him, we felt that despite his 8 years, we could really work with him. In the run-up to the shoot, he prepared his role with a coach, and Marie-Odile guided him through the gestures and speech patterns of an autistic child. She also showed him some videos and introduced him to her son over lunch. Once on the set, Eden was a real partner for Audrey and I directed him like any other actor. He remembered every indication, and integrated the instructions into his performance, like a real little actor. And today, when people who have seen the film ask me if the young actor is really autistic, I take it as the nicest of compliments.

THE CHARACTERS AROUND THEM ARE AS WELL DRAWN AS THEY ARE EMBODIED.

TELL US ABOUT THESE ACTORS.

As with *SIMPLY BLACK*, I liked the idea of introducing audiences to some very funny people and lesser-known talents. Nicolas Chupin, who plays the father, I loved as a flute teacher in *SCHOOL LIFE*, by Grand Corps malade and Mehdi Idir. When I tried him out, I found that he really had the rhythm of a comedy. He's funny, fair and an excellent comedian who belongs to the Comédie Française troupe. I met Benjamin Tranié one evening after his show. We had a good laugh, and I called him back for *KÔKÔRIKÔ*, Canal+'s sketch show. When I wrote the script, I wasn't sure which actor could play the brother, but when I remembered him, I thought he'd be perfect. I'd also loved Naidra Ayadi in *POLISS*, and when I suggested her name to Audrey, she was delighted, because she loved this actress. When I met Naidra, things went very smoothly between us, and she immediately established herself in the role. I also chose Jean-Charles Clichet at the tryouts. I didn't know him, but Coralie Amadeo, the casting director, introduced me to him. I liked the fact that he was cute without being too good-looking, and his endearing Droopy side really appealed to me.

WHAT KIND OF DIRECTOR ARE YOU ?

I usually act out scenes to show the actors how I'd like them to be played. So my direction is quite instinctive, in terms of timing, intention and so on. And there wasn't too much improvisation on this shoot, so we stuck pretty closely to the text.

WHAT WERE YOUR DIRECTING REQUIREMENTS ?

I can't be seen taking a day to put together a complicated technical plan. While some French directors have big cinematographic ambitions and put all their resources into using big machinery, I prefer to give myself more shooting days and concentrate on the acting, on the actors and on what I want to tell.



INTERVIEW WITH AUDREY LAMY

YOUR DESIRE TO MAKE THIS FILM SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN IMMEDIATE !

I don't think I've ever read a script as quickly as this one! All I had to do was absent-mindedly read the first two pages, and I happily fell into the trap of a good script: I couldn't stop. An hour and a half after receiving John Wax's e-mail, I called him back to tell him that I'd be delighted to accept the role of Pauline.

WHAT ATTRACTED YOU TO THE PROJECT ?

It was a combination of things. The story was very beautiful, and I thought it was original to deal with autism through the prism of a mother who's a bit lost. John's ambition was not to make a film about autism, but about a woman who has to find the courage, patience and stability to live serenely with her son's disability. Pauline doesn't have the codes, and she wants to teach her son to be independent, even though she isn't independent at all. In a way, they both have a handicap that they'll have to overcome.

WHAT IS PAULINE'S "HANDICAP" ?

She's pretty cut off from the world. Pauline has no friends and a very limited family life, with a father who doesn't

care what she goes through and a brother who's nice but not very reliable. With her son, she's going to have to go a long way to become stable and independent, but the story will be beautiful because they're going to write it together with their own means.

WHAT LINKS WERE YOU ABLE TO ESTABLISH BETWEEN YOURSELF AND THIS CHARACTER ?

Pauline is first and foremost a mother, and being one myself, I know that children are the thing that touches and weakens us the most. And while I'm lucky enough to have healthy children, I know the fear of imagining them being excluded or mocked in the playground. As soon as our children live in society, we always hope they'll fit in.

HAVE YOU MET ANY PARENTS OF AUTISTIC CHILDREN ?

No, I listened to a few podcasts, but Marie-Odile Weiss was our main reference on the subject, as she has an autistic son, and the film was inspired by her story and the one she directed. She was very present on the set, especially for Eden who, thanks to her, was able to give a masterful performance, and I was able to ask her all the questions I wanted. In talking with her, I understood just how much

her life was a daily struggle, an exhausting and sometimes demoralizing struggle, but that she found her strength in the unconditional love she has for her child. At her side, I discovered all the tools likely to help autistic children progress and learned how to speak to them and calm their crises. Marie-Odile would also point out to us when scenes weren't plausible and give us the keys and tools, we needed to make each situation believable.

WAS THE TONE OF THE FILM PALPABLE FROM THE MOMENT YOU READ THE SCRIPT ?

Yes, John wanted to direct a comedy that was full of emotion. It was important not to minimize the subject of autism, and to find the right balance between moments of emotion and moments of lightness. What's pure comedy allows us to withstand the tougher, even violent sequences. The scenes with Benjamin Tranié, for example, are a breath of fresh air, because this brother is enough to make you laugh.

HOW DID JOHN WAX DIRECT YOU ?

On the first takes, he left us free to go as far as we'd imagined and to let ourselves be surprised. Afterwards, he would direct us, taking into account - or not - what we had proposed. This was great fun, because it meant we could suggest a lot of things, and even improvise, before he made his choice. It gave us the impression of working together. Not just for us, but for the whole technical team too, because he listened carefully to the assistant directors, and the technicians were free to give their opinions.

WAS THERE AN IMMEDIATE BOND WITH EDEN ?

Yes, because he's already an actor! Honestly, I've rarely seen a child with such a desire to act - often the desire comes mainly from the parents. On the set, he was extremely concentrated and had a good feel for things. He easily integrated all the cues for the scene, as well as his character's idiosyncrasies: the way he didn't look in the eyes, the way he tucked his feet in, the way he bent over a little, the way he moved in all directions, all the while maintaining coherence and credibility. Eden was impressive because he wasn't a robot; he clearly enjoyed himself and didn't do anything mechanically.

DO YOU APPREHEND SCENES OF VIOLENCE BETWEEN YOU ?

We were helped by foam objects that wouldn't hurt us, but he and I were so intent on being faithful to the story of Marie-Odile and her son that we didn't ask ourselves too many questions. In fact, when he had to pull my hair, I encouraged him to really go for it, because we had to believe it. Nevertheless, the slap scene at the bus stop wasn't easy to shoot. It was the last sequence of a long day (at the end of another scene in which I was getting angry with the teacher in the middle of twenty or so child extras), and I was afraid of getting violent in front of a little boy as adorable as him. As well as being able to do it physically, I had to make people empathize with my character and understand that, like all mothers, she had reached a breaking point.

WASN'T THAT THE COMPLEXITY OF THIS CHARACTER ?

Yes, it was indeed. Living with a brother who smokes pot all day, working in a bar and having a penchant for alcohol, Pauline is far from the perfect mother. So, at first, you have to wonder which family this poor kid fell into. It wasn't easy for me to create empathy for this woman. But I was able to draw on her background, on the way she struggles to allow her son to have the same life as other children, and on her

clumsiness, because we forgive clumsy people more easily than cold or careless ones. In Pauline's case, we see the emotions, the fatigue and the feeling of being helpless in the face of the problem. The only thing that saves her in the end is her son, because if he can lean on her, she can lean on him too. She's a real heroine.

HOW WILL THIS ROLE MARK A TURNING POINT IN YOUR CAREER ?

Although my career has already offered me roles as fighters in social comedies such as *INVISIBLES* and *THE KITCHEN BRIGADE*, this is the first time I've really been in the thick of things with such a strong, complex character. There's a real evolution in Pauline, and an extremely wide range of play, because she has contradictions and, more rarely for me, a great deal of fragility. A role like that is a gift for an actress !



CAST

PAULINE AUDREY LAMY
FABRICE NICOLAS CHUPIN
de la Comédie Française
ANDRÉA EDEN LOPES
SAMIA NAIDRA AYADI
VALENTIN BENJAMIN TRANIÉ
THOMAS JEAN-CHARLES CLICHET
BASTIEN STEVE TIENTCHEU
HENRY STEPHAN WOJTOWICZ
JACQUELINE TATIANA GOUSSEFF

CREW

DIRECTOR JOHN WAX
SCREENPLAY MARIE-ODILE WEISS ET JOHN WAX
WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF
BASED ON THE SHOW AND PODCAST BY
PRODUCERS GAUTHIER PLANCQUAERT
MARIE-ODILE WEISS PARADISO MEDIA
DAVID GAUQUIÉ ET JULIEN DERIS
ASSOCIATE PRODUCER JEAN-LUC ORMIÈRES
PHOTOGRAPHY DIRECTOR VINCENT MATHIAS - A.F.C.
EDITING NADÈGE KINTZINGER
ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK MICHEL-ANGE MERINO
SOUND ENGINEER CÉDRIC BERGER
SOUND EDITING OLIVIER MORTIER
MIXER LUC THOMAS
SETTINGS MAAMAR ECH-CHEIKH
CASTING CORALIE AMÉDÉO - A.R.D.A. & LISA LHOSTE - A.R.D.A.
SCRIPT ISABELLE QUERRIOUX
1ST DIRECTOR ASSISTANT AURIANE LACINCE
PRODUCTION DIRECTOR MAXIME MUND
STAGE MANAGER ANNE-SOPHIE DUPLESSIS
POST-PRODUCTION DIRECTOR ANTOINE LEPOIVRE
COSTUMES SARAH GUICHARD
FRENCH DISTRIBUTION & INTERNATIONAL SALES LE PACTE



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