

LES FILMS PELLEAS PRESENTS

IN THE COURTYARD

A film by **PIERRE SALVADORI**



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IN THE COURTYARD

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PIERRE SALVADORI

France · 2014 · 97mins
2.39 · Colour · Dolby · 5.1

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SYNOPSIS

40-year-old musician Antoine suddenly decides to end his career. After several days' aimless wandering, he is hired as the caretaker of an old residential building in Paris.

Mathilde is a recently retired resident, generous-spirited and deeply involved with the management company of the building.

After she discovers a crack in her living room wall, her worry gradually turns to panic - what if the building were to collapse?

Slowly, Antoine develops a fondness for this woman he is afraid will slip into madness.

Through a confusion of misfires and anxiety, the two develop an awkward friendship, funny yet solid, which might just get them through this difficult patch...

INTERVIEW WITH PIERRE SALVADORI

– How was the idea of IN THE COURTYARD born?

I've always wanted to make a film around a borderline character. A woman 'crazy with worry' - crazy in the true sense of the term - who can no longer absorb the overabundance of bad news. A woman "poisoned by information," as Paula Fox says.

I've often wondered how one might inoculate oneself against all of this: the reports, the grim predictions, the dreadful prophecies...

How can someone live knowing all that and not panic? Mathilde can no longer manage it.

– Do you begin with a subject or with characters?

I'm a bit wary of subjects, but not of characters.

For IN THE COURTYARD, yes, I started from characters, and things came together slowly and naturally. When you get to know the characters, and begin to like them, they're like magnets: they attract the story, the setting, the tone, the supporting roles. Everything stems from them.

We started with Mathilde, who meets Antoine, and with their friendship. Then the characters around them, who are all paralyzed, troubled or numbed...

But the "intention" came to my screenwriter and me thanks to a piece of dialogue from the end of "The Wire". One of the characters quotes a phrase from Kafka: "You can hold yourself back from the sufferings of the world, that's something you are free to do. But perhaps this holding back is the one suffering you could have avoided."

This phrase stuck with me. It made an impression. It was like an answer offered to me. For the film and the rest.

Then eventually, through Mathilde, we get to this little world, the courtyard, and if not to a subject, at least to a context: fear, the temptation to withdraw, that is felt throughout our society. The feeling that we are immersed in an icy liquid that paralyzes us, the notion that fear numbs and the future is bravery.

If there is a theme, it is the characters that bring it or carry it: Lev, so lost that he becomes mystical and violent; the obsessive Maillard; and Mathilde, blinded by fear and worry.

It is only once Antoine has died that she says: "I understood that I'd let the world become a whisper... I understood that despite my anxieties and my fears, I had to do whatever it took to return to others."

– And Antoine?

Antoine is the sort of character you often find in my films, from THE APPRENTICES to BEAUTIFUL LIES. The sort who is easily tempted by the thought of giving up, by the fantasy of respite and the desire for a less painful relationship with the world. Antoine has a torturous relationship with existence. He's the anxious type. He tries to obtain his need for respite through an opiate, a soothing drug.

– I was reminded of APRES VOUS, where one character helps another.

The theme of 'goodness' is very important in your films.

My characters are often concerned for others, they are compassionate, they empathise and often take on the pain of others. Goodness and even what we sometimes contemptuously call kindness are qualities that transcend existence and endow people with a poetic and magic dimension, not too remote from panache. In opposition to self-interest, they give a different idea of the world. These are characters that touch me immensely, in life and in cinema.

– *They're not always so nice...*

No, sometimes they are aggressive, exhausted and violent - like Mathilde, when she throws a pear at Antoine, from the 6th floor.

It's these contradictions, these little paradoxes, that give them their humanity and also help create comedy.

I like Mathilde. I like the constant back and forth between her panic and her conscience. After having wreaked utter havoc in her childhood home, and terrorising the mother and kids, she tells Antoine on the station platform: "My God, Antoine, did you see what I did? People long for calm and tranquillity and I yell at them."

I love these paradoxes, this mixture of benevolence and dread.

– *IN THE COURTYARD is perhaps your darkest film...*

THE APPRENTICES tells the story of two unemployed lads, both more or less lost and depressed; WHITE LIES relates the tale of a wandering, isolated and mentally ill girl; THE SANDMEN depicts an incestuous couple caught up in heroin trafficking; APRES VOUS tells the story of a man who tries to commit suicide and another wracked with guilt for saving him, and PRICELESS, the story of a girl who prostitutes herself and a man who will do the same for the love of her. And so on...

My characters have always been somewhat in pain, nervous, anxious. I think the stories I've told have always been rather sad. But comedy hides and protects this. In this case it's perhaps more obvious since this is a less of a 'genre' film.

In fact, IN THE COURTYARD was going to be even darker! At first there were no comic elements at all. But I'm always tempted to inject something funny, something lively, almost like an obligation to pull myself together. It's a permanent duality, in me and in my characters.

– *Is IN THE COURTYARD your most personal film?*

All my characters are close to me, always. IN THE COURTYARD is a chronicle in which the characters are not disguised; they are stripped of any pretence. There are no contract killers here, no adventuresses running around palaces. Sometimes I looked at Gustave Kervern and thought I might have pushed our physical resemblance a bit far: our beards and our weight! There was a time I had Guillaume Depardieu play characters like me - handsome, blonde, slender. I must have a different image of myself nowadays!

– *There is something unavoidable in Antoine's death. We get the feeling that it is necessary to help Mathilde live...*

From the moment Antoine stops making music, he abandons his life. He meets Mathilde and helps her but his destiny is written. It's she – always open to others, and realizing that she hasn't been able to help him – who understands that she absolutely must return to the world. That is the tragic dimension of the film, and in the end probably more a tragedy than a chronicle! The whole film consists of telling how he will disappear. These are things (screenwriter) David and I discussed from the beginning.

– *The supporting roles bring comic or fantastic elements - like Maillard, who barks in the courtyard at night...*

Yes, Lev and Maillard do bring a comic note. They are extravagant characters, slightly more delineated, a bit exaggerated. It's like an obligation I feel: at a certain point I love to step back, even if discreetly, from the naturalism that sometimes annoys me in cinema.

– *Did you have Catherine Deneuve and Gustave Kervern in mind from the start?*

I've wanted to work with Catherine Deneuve for ages. I wrote the film for her. I said to myself no one could ever imagine her going crazy. She comes across as someone you can rely on, someone brave who knows how to live, someone with a secret.

Some actors tend to become their characters and you can play with that. I thought that if she played Mathilde it would be all the more surprising.

And of course I thought of her quickness, her feeling for comedy and for shock.

"I like people who lack of self confidence, they try harder." - I knew that she would deliver this sentence magnificently. She does rapid-fire like Katherine Hepburn! She is an actress with a real style. Maybe that's why she enjoys such a lasting bond with the audience. She imbues her characters with a transparency and an opacity at the same time.

Everyone knows she has an amazing voice - that she sings rather than speaks. It's a real thrill when you're writing dialogue. It allows the writers, whom she serves beautifully, to be literary, because in her mouth the words don't sound literary. You can take risks with the text, and you won't hear it. It will ring true. She eradicates anything that could seem artificial.

— *And Gustave Kervern?*

I thought of Gustave for Antoine once the script was written. We did some tests. But I think I already knew that I wanted him. I met him briefly at a party without knowing him. He was funny. He was kissing everyone. I saw that he possessed a kindness, a real patience... that he would be the ideal character, able to absorb all that. I'd also seen him in the 'Groland' sketches. It was clear he also had a real feel for comedy, and that his ability to play amazement and incomprehension would bring a comic counterpoint to Mathilde's madness.

PIERRE SALVADORI FILMOGRAPHY

- 1993 **WILD TARGET** (Cible Émouvante)
- 1995 **THE APPRENTICES** (Les Apprentis)
- 1997 **WHITE LIES** (Comme Elle Respire)
- 2000 **THE SANDMEN** (Les Marchands de Sable)
- 2003 **APRES VOUS**
- 2006 **PRICELESS** (Hors de Prix)
- 2010 **BEAUTIFUL LIES** (De Vrais Mensonges)
- 2014 **IN THE COURTYARD** (Dans la Cour)
French release: April 23rd

CAST

CATHERINE DENEUVE — *Mathilde*

Since 2000, Catherine Deneuve has starred in **DANCER IN THE DARK** by Lars Von Trier, **8 WOMEN** by François Ozon, **CHANGING TIMES** by André Téchiné, **PALAIS ROYAL!** by Valérie Lemercier, **A CHRISTMAS TALE** by Arnaud Desplechin, **POTICHE** by François Ozon, **THE BELOVED** by Christophe Honoré, **ASTERIX & OBELIX: IN BRITAIN 3D** by Laurent TIRARD and **ON MY WAY** by Emmanuelle Bercot.

GUSTAVE KERVERN — *Antoine*

First coming to widespread public attention in 1999 with his appearance in **GROLAND** on Canal+, Gustave Kervern began directing in 2004 with his partner Benoît Delepine.

Together they have written and co-directed a number of feature films including **LOUISE-MICHEL** (Special Jury Prize, Sundance 2008), **MAMMUTH** (Official Competition, Berlin, 2010) and **LE GRAND SOIR** (Un Certain Regard, Cannes 2012).

FEODORE ATKINE — *Serge*

PIO MARMAÏ — *Stéphane*

MICHELE MORETTI — *Colette*

NICOLAS BOUCHAUD — *Mr Maillard*

OLEG KUPCHIK — *Lev*

GARANCE CLAVEL — *Antoine's Ex*

CAROLE FRANCK — *Temp Agency Woman*

OLIVIER CHARMASSON — *Specialist*

BRUNO NETTER — *Mr Vigo*

CREW

Directed by

PIERRE SALVADORI

Screenplay by

PIERRE SALVADORI
DAVID COLOMBO-LEOTARD

DP

GILLES HENRY

Editor

ISABELLE DEVINCK

Original Music

STEPHIN MERRITT
GREGOIRE HETZEL

Sound

BRIGITTE TAILLANDIER

Sound Mixer

ERIC TISSERAND

Sound Editor

GERMAIN BOULAY

Production Designer

MICHEL BARTHELEMY

Costume Designer

VIRGINIE MONTEL

Make-up

CEDRIC GERARD

Continuity

SANDRINE BOURGOIN

Casting

ALAIN CHARBIT

Assistant Director

LUC BRICAULT

Production Manager

MARC FONTANEL

Producer

PHILIPPE MARTIN

Production Company

LES FILMS PELLEAS

Co-Producers

FRANCE 2 CINEMA

DELTA CINEMA

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