



presents

# MY BEST FRIEND

(MON MEILLEUR AMI)

Directed by  
**Patrice Leconte**

Starring  
**Daniel Auteuil, Dany Boon,  
Julie Gayet**

Produced by  
**Olivier Delbosc and Marc Missonnier**

A  
**Fidélité Films, TF1 Films Production and Lucky Red** co production  
in association with **Wild Bunch** and  
with the participation of **Canal + Cinecinema**

Running time  
**1h30**

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## **SYNOPSIS**

François is a dealer in antiques. At his birthday dinner, his associate Catherine candidly informs him that he has no friends. The other guests agree. François is shocked. He has nothing but friends, his days are full of meetings, of people. Catherine offers a challenge: François must produce one of these good friends, a real friend - his best friend. He's got ten days.

## **LONG SYNOPSIS**

François is a middle-aged antique dealer. He's got a stylish apartment and a fabulous life, but at a dinner with a group he considers his dearest acquaintances, he is blindsided by the revelation that none of them actually likes him. He's arrogant, self-centred and harsh, and they don't believe he even has a friend. His business partner Catherine makes him a bet: if he can produce his *best friend*, she will let him keep the massive Greek vase he acquired that afternoon on the company tab. If not, it's hers.

Having accepted the wager, François naively tears through his address book, trying to shoehorn an increasingly unlikely series of contacts into the all-important role. Moving through Paris, he keeps encountering a trivia-spouting, big-hearted cabbie named Bruno. Bruno's chatty, lowbrow ways grate against François's designer temperament, but he covets the other man's easy way with people. He convinces Bruno to teach him how to make friends and sets about learning the "three S's" – being sociable, smiling and sincere – though they don't come easy.

Is the answer to François' problem sitting beside him in the taxi?

## CAST LIST

Daniel Auteuil	<i>François</i>
Dany Boon	<i>Bruno</i>
Julie Gayet	<i>Catherine</i>
Julie Durand	<i>Louise</i>
Jacques Mathou	<i>Bruno's Father</i>
Marie Pillet	<i>Bruno's Mother</i>
Elizabeth Bourgine	<i>Julia</i>
Henri Garçin	<i>Delamotte</i>
Jacques Spiesser	<i>Letellier</i>

## **CREW LIST**

Director	Patrice Leconte
Original story by	Olivier Dazat
Screenplay adaptation	Jérôme Tonnerre and Patrice Leconte
Dialogues	Jérôme Tonnerre
Music	Xavier Demerliac
Cinematographer	Jean-Marie Dreujou
Production designer	Ivan Maussion
Costumes	Annie Périer Bertaux
Editor	Joëlle Hache
Sound	Paul Lainé
Sound editing	Francis Wargnier
Mix	Dominique Hennequin
Casting	Gérard Moulévrier
Stills photographer	Jean-Marie Leroy
Assistant director	Hubert Engammare
Make up	Joël Lavau
Hair Stylist	Laurent Bozzi
Production manager	Christine de Jekel
Produced by	Olivier Delbosc and Marc Missonnier
In association with	Wild Bunch
Co-produced with	Fidélité Films TF1 Films Production Lucky Red
With the participation of	Canal + Cinéma
International Sales	Wild Bunch

## **INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR – PATRICE LECONTE**

### **How was the idea for *My Best Friend* born?**

Patrice Leconte: It was born before we shot *French Fried Vacation* (*Les Bronzés*), the day Jérôme Tonnerre called me to say that he had in his hands a well-developed outline written by Olivier Dazat for Fidélité Productions. They needed a director, and Jérôme immediately thought that I would be interested. With good reason – I loved the premise. Although I had some concerns about the plot, I went to meet with the producers. After this fruitful meeting, we began to work in tandem from this starting point, in order to go in a direction that both of us liked.

### **What exactly appealed to you in Olivier Dazat's story idea?**

Patrice Leconte: The issues in his screenplay: the story of a guy who is said to not have any friends; who lashes out in violence and who, to prove the opposite, makes an absurd and abstract gamble: to show others this friend he doesn't have! I found it novel to gamble on such an impossible thing, and so it allowed me to deal with friendship and the lack of friendship. In my mind, it's like telling a love story. All you have to do is change their names! But if this project immediately attracted my attention, it's also because I felt that the subject resonated within me. It is definitely not an autobiographical film, but if you asked me point-blank who my best friend is, I would really be at a loss to answer. Except that, contrary to François, played by Daniel, it doesn't prevent me from living.

### **How did you work on the writing with Jérôme Tonnerre?**

PL: This is the second time we've worked together, after *Intimate Strangers* (*Confidences trop intimes*), and we worked together in precisely the same way. Our method as a duo is simple. We see each other for a whole afternoon, we talk a lot. Jérôme takes notes and understands where I want to go. He's a real chameleon. And I find myself directing a film that he wrote, one that we both discussed, but one that I feel is very close to me, since he went along with me without forgetting to add his personal touch.

### **This film is a blend of genres, between comedy and drama. Was the desire to make this shade of film present in the writing?**

PL: No. When we began writing, we thought we were doing more of a comedy. But I was not satisfied with such a light treatment of this subject of friendship that I found so fascinating. On the contrary, I liked the idea of a movie that turns on its head. Like a plane in an air show that takes off normally, but after going into a tailspin, ends up flying upside down.

### **Did you choose *My Best Friend* because you thought it made sense to embark on this adventure after *French Fried Vacation*?**

PL: When I'm making a film, I usually know what I will be shooting afterwards... without having an exact career plan in my head. In any case, I knew that *My Best Friend* was to be the movie that would follow *French Fried Vacation*. And it worked out well, because I no longer want to do overly serious movies. Life is serious enough as it is... So I was delighted to dive into a movie about relationships that plays out on a provincial note, with unsophisticated people, even though it takes place in Paris. Without being among the best of my previous films, much of my inspiration is found here.

### **When did you get the idea for the two lead actors?**

PL: I thought of Daniel Auteuil right away. He seems so open, affable and benevolent that I found it novel to see him play a guy who has no friends. If we had chosen an actor who would have overplayed the role, and we could picture this as a plausible situation at first sight, the story would not have worked as well. The dice would have been loaded from the beginning. Subsequently, we had a lot of trouble finding the actor who would play Bruno. A lot of ideas crossed our minds. But I'd had Dany Boon in mind for a long time. After seeing his different shows, I wanted to work with him early on, only at first; his name did not strike a chord with the producers. So I abandoned this idea, grieving inwardly. But then, after we endured many rejections, and Dany was starting to be more recognized through *Joyeux Noël*, I went back on the offensive. All the more, as Daniel had pushed me in this direction after finding Dany so superb in *The Valet (La doublure)*. For him as for me, that was the actor and the man we needed for this project. So we got him. But I'll say it again, in my mind and heart it was him from the beginning.

### **Why in particular did you want him for the movie?**

PL: For me, Dany Boon is someone who is wonderful in the straightforward sense of the word. Someone luminous, someone open. And I needed this simplicity, this down-to-earth side. You see in him this simple – but not naïve – sense of wonder at the world, this unique relationship he has with people elsewhere in his life, and that is exactly what was required to play his character. I might add that he stepped into the role of Bruno like one would step into a nice warm bath.

### **Did Daniel Auteuil and Dany Boon immediately hit it off?**

PL: Their enjoyment of working together was obvious right away, because they immediately had admiration, friendship and respect for each other. Each of them also has this generosity that makes all the difference. There was not a single moment when one was trying to see if he could outdo the other. They worked together.

### **When looking at your body of work, we see that you particularly like “buddy movies”...**

PL: I realized, in hindsight, that in nearly all my movies, my duos were composed of people I had used previously and completely new people, as if I needed the reassurance of people whose talents I knew while facing the unknown. That was the case with *The Man on the train (L'homme du train)*, where I knew Rochefort but not Johnny Hallyday; in *The Widow of Saint-Pierre (La veuve de Saint-Pierre)*, where I knew Daniel Auteuil but not Juliette Binoche; in *Intimate Strangers*, where I knew Sandrine Bonnaire but not Fabrice Luchini. Few of my movies stray from this rule. The ones that do stray are not the best ones I made. <laughing> And recently, a student who was doing a thesis on the couple in film made me notice something incredible: in all my features or nearly all, I always direct characters who meet for the first time during the movie. It's the case here with Daniel and Dany Boon, *The Man on the train (L'homme du train)*, *The Girl on the Bridge (La fille sur le pont)*, *Intimate Strangers*... Only *Tandem* strays from this rule. So my work as a filmmaker consists of setting up meetings. I would never have been able to write *The Cat (Le chat)* with Signoret and Gabin about a couple that has been living together for years. I wouldn't be able to deal with the threads of their relationships, because then I would need to feed on what happened before the film began. I like setting up meetings in the film's “now”, since all you have to do is observe what the characters do. Serge Frydman said to me one day that the real screenwriters in a film are the characters. He's right. The moment the characters are sufficiently sketched, all that's left is to watch them be alive. Like a chemist.

**Why did you choose Julie Gayet to play the associate of Daniel Auteuil's character?**

PL: A few years ago, I made a promotional film for France Inter in which a young woman was cycling. We were looking for an actress and I came out with Julie's name in a meeting. Everyone agreed. So I met Julie for the first time on that occasion and explained that I was going to film her in black and white while she rode a bicycle wearing a red dress. She trusted me, and I got along well with her. I stored her face in a corner of my memory, waiting for the movie where I could call upon her. And for this Catherine character, the most lucid of the group who is always a step ahead of the rest, I thought right away that she would be absolutely perfect, since she has this form of intelligence that is never over intellectual or studied. So I offered her the film and she accepted.

**After *The Girl on the Bridge* and *The Widow of Saint-Pierre*, this is the third time you've worked with Daniel Auteuil. Do you still need to talk to each other?**

PL: Daniel puts more faith in a look or a smile than in 1,000 words. He is not one of those actors who need to be spoon-fed psychology. All the better, because I'm not the type to take actors by the hand to explain to them where their characters come from and where they are going. What interests me is doing things, feeling them. When a screenplay is well written, the actors must be in there naturally. And Daniel is like that. Before the film, we only saw each other for wardrobe fitting, and we only had to call each other two or three times up to the first day of shooting. It was the scene where Drouot and Julie were misbehaving. It's always a bit stressful to begin acting with a director you don't know, an actor you don't know, but who himself knows the director. It's simple: I had the impression that I'd just left Daniel the night before. It's what we say of all the people we love and lose track of.

**On the topic of this close bond between you, did you pay more attention to the newcomers – Dany Boon and Julie especially – to integrate them into your world?**

PL: It's all about balancing. One day, I made a major gaffe. On *The Girl on the Bridge*, I was shooting for the first time with Daniel and I had just directed Vanessa Paradis in *Half a Chance* (*Une chance sur deux*). The first day, I gave all my attention to Daniel as the newcomer, abandoning Vanessa somewhat. And I know she took it very hard, because that evening, she told me that it wasn't because we had already made a movie together that I had to abandon her. She explained that she needed me as much as the first time. I realized my mistake. It was a lesson for me. Since then, in the first days of every film I've done, obviously I've paid more attention to the new ones, but I never again abandoned the "veterans". In both cases, my basic principle for directing actors is identical: the confidence I place in them. An actor who acts without sensing the confidence of the director who is watching them is like a bird without wings. He cannot fly! He just flops out of his nest onto the ground.

**After making reference to the radio game show "Le jeu des 1000 francs" in *Tandem*, this time it's another game show – on TV – that features in *My Best Friend*: "Who Wants to be a Millionaire?" ("Qui veut gagner des millions" with Jean-Pierre Foucault playing himself). Why this choice?**

PL: It's very simple. When we were putting together the screenplay with Jérôme Tonnerre, we knew that the Bruno character was to take part in a game show. And one fine day we had the revelation: one of the wild cards in "*Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?*" ("*Qui veut gagner des millions*") is the call to a friend! From that moment, we were worried that the producers of the game show would say no to us! I couldn't imagine making up a fake game. It had to be real life; the people had to have their own references. And I found it amazing to film Jean-Pierre Foucault playing himself. I was acquainted with him before. There was goodwill between us. I simply asked him to follow the written text, to be himself and not an actor. And it was a real treat.

**What visual concept did you decide on for *My Best Friend*?**

PL: Since the movies I do are all different, I try each time to have, in a small way, a directing plan. But when I started work on ***My Best Friend***, I have to admit shamefully that I didn't ask any of these questions. I had enough confidence in the screenplay and the characters to do without it and not worry. So I directed this film from day to day without any visual concept, except the one I never forget: the concept of the actors, the characters. For the setting as much as for the directing, I wanted a film that had all the appearances of naturalism and where uncomfortable, strange, or darkly humorous things happen to us without warning. I did not want my directing to be out of sync with that because that would have meant overdoing what the screenplay proposed. Obviously, I hope that it's better directed than a bad TV movie. <laughing> I didn't want to draw attention to myself.

### **How did you choose the film score?**

PL: I called on a group called L'attirail, headed by Xavier Demerlac. I met him a few years back, when I was looking for a score for ***The Girl on the Bridge***. I happened across their first album. I loved it, I met him, and I went to their concerts. And I told him that one day, if I had the chance, I would ask him to write the score for a film. I found that ***My Best Friend*** could be a perfect match for him, because he wasn't going to go in the direction of easy emotions, and his music, sometimes bordering on fanfare, has something very joyous about it. His tones can be exuberant, all the while having sad accents. This unconventional mixture appealed to me. And in the end, I was overjoyed, because there is a certain unique musical flavour that did not exist in this film at the outset, but blends in with it perfectly.

### **People often say that a film is rewritten in the editing. Is that the case for *My Best Friend*?**

PL: True, this film was rewritten in the editing, but in an unexpected way. In all my films, the evocative power of this or that image made me change their structure. Here, it was more unusual. The first version of the screenplay was pre-timed at 2 hours and 5 minutes. Right away, Jérôme Tonnerre and I told the producers we were going to do the pre-filming edits. But (it was a great luxury because it costs a lot of money) they asked us to film the complete version and to see in the editing what works best. I accepted, and my first complete edit came in at... 2:05. From then on, with my editor Joelle Hache, we discussed the questions of how and why we would cut. It was like a Lego set: a lot of fun to do.

### **We've read here and there that you are soon going to give up filmmaking. Has this film made you want to continue?**

PL: This decision was not born out of disappointment over this or that film. It's not because making ***My Best Friend*** has thrilled me to bits and could make me go back on my choice. I haven't lost the taste for filmmaking. I still love making films as much as before. I would just like to stop before losing my freshness. In a way, I'm acting like Anna Galiena in ***The Hairdresser's Husband*** (*Le mari de la coiffeuse*), who, realizing that the extraordinary love that bonded her to Jean Rochefort's character would not last forever, chose to throw herself in the canal while she was still in the clouds. After ***My Best Friend***, I won't make more than three feature films, and I know exactly what they will be. So there won't be room for any more! By announcing it publicly, I'm not looking to shout it from the rooftops, but to push myself to keep my word, and to really do it. Without, however, joining Anna Galiena by throwing myself into a canal...



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