



MIA AND THE MIGOO

A FILM BY JACQUES-RÉMY GIRERD



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A FILM BY JACQUES-RÉMY GIRERD

France - 2008 - 91 min - Colour - 1:85 - Dolby SRD - French

World Sales & Festival Bookings
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the directors label





SYNOPSIS

Pedro leaves his poor village and finds work drilling a tunnel through an area of exceptional natural beauty that is to become a luxurious hotel complex. But mysterious forces are working against the project. When a landslide blocks the entrance to the tunnel, Pedro is left trapped. Mia, his daughter, decides to go looking for him but she has to cross the cursed forest. Meanwhile, the brash hotel promoter is alarmed by the discovery of a huge footprint and other incidents on the site. At the worst possible moment his investors decide to pay a visit. To make matters worse he is forced to bring his young son along. Mia enters the mysterious, almost fairytale world of the forest which will lead her to encounter the mysterious Migoo...



INTERVIEW WITH JACQUES-RÉMY GIRERD

How did you first come up with the idea for Mia and The Migoo?

A film project is inspired by more or less confused ideas – sometimes brilliant and promising, sometimes completely stupid – and in any case by a strong sense of purpose. First you have to sort out your inner thoughts. You go right ahead and do loads of images, sketches of characters, bits of dialogue pop up in your mind – and I try to piece them together haphazardly. It all keeps going around and around in my mind sometimes for months – until one day I feel I'm on to something, gaps get filled in and the ideas come together – and I come up with a brave little orphan girl, a Migoo like no other, a road-movie feel... It's a godsend!

Now how did you turn these original impulses into a screenplay?

Before I translate the story into a screenplay, the material is literary, close to a romantic tale. At this stage I let myself be totally dominated by words. It could turn into a novel.

And yet it became a screenplay...

It did indeed, albeit almost reluctantly. No kidding – I'm a film director first and foremost. But I don't like to work by myself. I like to work in a group and bring various creative ideas to the work in hand. Just as for *Raining Cats and Frogs*, Iouri Tcherekhov and Antoine Lanciaux have helped me explore our work in progress, flesh out a plotline, build and develop the chemistry. You prioritize the ideas, the characters grow deeper, the dialogue gets more complex and the film takes shape. Then comes the time to put all those ingredients to the test of graphic design. The shooting script comes in.

You've invited Benoît Chieux (who designed *Ma Petite Planète chérie* and *Charlie's Christmas*) on board to do the graphic design.

It came as a natural choice for me. If you look at the plotline, Benoît is obviously the right person for the job. The filmmaking flips the film upside down, brings out the accidents, challenges the film, lashes out at it, coaxes it, tames it, questions it... The sketched out emotions take shape, the action grows intense, humour comes in, and so does the poetry.

How did you work together?

For a year and a half I followed step by step his progress in this key stage – I'd provide Benoît with clear indications on each scene, change my objectives and I'd sometimes make changes when the film went off track. While he was working on the design and teeming with ideas, I'd be working on the dialogue and editing the sketches of each scene as the shooting script progressed. It was team work and we got to be the film's first audience. This is how far the writing goes. A key element of the film is the animatics – which is a rough black-and-white cut that I voice myself and to which I add artificial sound effects. It is my first draft, my soul mate, my secret inner light. It makes it possible to find out how the film will play out before principal photography actually begins.

Mia et le Migoo is your second feature. Did you find it easier than *Raining Cats and Frogs*?

I must admit that I didn't have much peace of mind when I shot *Raining Cats and Frogs*. Throughout the making of the film, I kept thinking, 'Will I be up to it? How long will the crew hold out? Will we run out of money? Will there be an audience for it?' Thing is, I had many concerns. But the odd thing about *Mia and The Migoo* was that, now that I'd come to terms with how difficult it was to make a first feature, I felt liberated and really glad to be working with a crew that also looked at things with hindsight. We felt at ease. It was a real pleasure working together in such conditions with complete trust!

How difficult was it to get the film funded?

You can't raise 8.5 million Euros that easily. I started out on the wrong track trying to set up a co-production with Germany. For eight months I went in circles – I was unable to raise more than two thirds of the total cost – until Luc Besson showed a keen interest in the project, which turned out to be insufficient. Oddly enough Europacorp's interest stirred things up. New partners approached me. And then things got moving rapidly as if by magic when Celluloid Dreams (World Sales) showed their interest. It gave the project more credibility, our original partners raised their contribution, an Asian co-producer showed up as if by magic and so I finalized the budget. Magic doesn't only happen in screenplays!

10% of the film was made in Italy. Why didn't you make the whole film in France?

European co-production is a financial necessity to finalize a film budget such as Mia and the Migoo's. There's no other way! We collaborated with Enarmonia, a Turin-based studio that operates virtually like our own. They're a medium-sized company which focuses on high-quality content. We were meant to get along really well – all the more as the people that run the studio and the artists we worked with turned out to be lovely. We worked together trustingly and even whole-heartedly. It was enjoyable for everyone involved. I can't think of any misunderstanding between us and we all had similar results in all respects. In retrospect, I am grateful for the European co-production «necessity» and for our chance meeting with our friends from Turin!

Your films always deal with environmental issues, with protection of the planet.

When you have an interest in living beings, you can't do otherwise.

How so?

There's more to a film than just the storyline, however good it may be. True, the story has to be captivating and to deliver, but the real focus of the film is elsewhere. The real point of the film lies in the brief slices of life captured by the camera, in the vibes between the characters, in the poetic purpose. And more precisely, in this case, in the wonderful relationship with the forest. I like to think that the film communicates intimately with the audience, that it whispers some secret words into their ears, bits of lived or imagined experiences, tiny things that may change their lives. Actually environmentalism is all about finding atoms of honesty deep within life. The Earth needs our adjusting to this line of thinking. I'd like everyone to feel the presence of the Migoo!

Your approach is more philosophical and poetic than scientific?

Exactly!

But still, the character of the totally immoral property developer, whose aim is destruction, and that of the brave little girl who's a go-getter provide a powerful allegory!

Indeed, nature is fragile and can be destroyed by the slightest thing. Modern man has dramatically deepened the imbalance. On a geological scale, the damage is tremendous – some say irreparable. Only tomorrow's children will probably be able to understand where man must be going next. Environmentalism isn't only about developing HEQ house insulation, promoting renewable energies or reducing greenhouse gas emissions! It's a new relationship with yourself and with Earth. We all must find our own Migoo.

Now that you mention it, can you tell us about the Migoo?

That's a tough one! He's neither a giant, nor a monster, nor a Golem, nor a spirit – and yet he's all these combined. He embodies the forces of nature, at once mineral, plant and animal. He's totally at one with the cosmos. We all have a little Migoo deep down. The big thing is to be able to relate to it.

How did you come up with Mia's graphic design?

Benoît Chieux's art department tried to find the look that best matched the material.

To begin with, they were inspired by Impressionist painters including Henri Matisse, Raoul Dufy and Paul Cézanne. Obviously they were smart enough to distance themselves from them. The point was to break away from classic designs and deliberately adopt a painter's viewpoint to bring out the brushstrokes, the unevenness of the brushwork, and the mark of the line. Each setting is a masterpiece with an acute sense of pictorial composition. And with the magic of CGI, our artists provided light, depth and motion to these backgrounds. Sounds easy when you put it like that, but we had to struggle.

Now that you mention it, did you rely heavily on CGI?

Not only did it help us enhance the settings but we kept using CGI throughout the making of the film to better manage graphic effects. Drawings are digitally processed on the computer. The point is you shouldn't be able to notice it. If you can spot the CGI in any scene, you have to go one step back and find an alternative. CGI is supposed to comply – we're not. But then again 20 to 25% of the film was created in 2D or 3D. Special effects which dominate the film were almost completely computer-generated. When you use today's tools, you can go one step further without giving up on the sensual magic of traditional animation. Things can be improved at any time, which is wonderfully helpful in terms of accuracy and efficiency. We came up with a fine blend of graphic novelty and state-of-the-art technology. The result is both stunning and very modern-looking.

How long did it take to make the film?

All in all, six years. We spent two years on the writing which – as I mentioned before – included the editing of the black and white animatics. It took another three years for the production per se and one year to finalize the film and work on the theatrical release.

Six years is amazingly long!

With a film like this, you need to make several hundreds of thousands of handmade drawings. This is why you have to have a huge labour force (over two hundred artists and technicians altogether) and spend a lot of time on the production. Despite the considerable efforts and the help of the computer, there's no way you can work faster. Besides, I like to ponder things over and take my time. It helps you control everything, improve every shot, every scene, and be proud of a job well done. You can hardly shoot more than two seconds of footage per day! Working like this teaches you humility. We've been accustomed to the human pace of things for a long time.

You mentioned two hundred people. How did you find the other artists and technicians?

Folimage has operated a basic team working at the studio for years. I'm amazingly fortunate to work with people whose outstanding experience has grown over time. Now when you produce a film like *Mia et le Migoo*, you have to hire additional help. We mainly hired experienced animators from abroad. Oddly enough it's easier to have a Berliner or a Ukrainian come over to the south of France than have a Parisian leave Paris. At the end of the day fifteen nationalities were represented in our studio. This cosmopolitan atmosphere was extremely helpful because the diversity of origins, skills and experiences proved to be challenging and rewarding. For instance our team included Masako Sakano who worked with Miyazaki for more than twenty years. He really raised the bar for all of us.

You have assembled a stellar cast. Do you think that these days you can't make an animated feature without famous actors?

I don't think so. This has to do with too much fantasy. As far as I'm concerned, it is emotional. I love the likes of Ventura, Gabin, Blier, Michèle Morgan, Jeanne Moreau. I like the great French actors of yesterday and today and can't help thinking of them when I work on the dialogue. I just can't get them off my mind. They indirectly help me find the right words, they keep me company, they comfort me. Jacques Villeret was my favourite Migoo up until he died. You know, it's been such a treat working with Dany Boon, Pierre Richard and Miou-Miou. Jean-Pierre Coffe is a lovely person. I'd give an arm to work with Yolande Moreau for one more hour. Laurent Gamelon was just wonderful, always attentive, creative and amazingly natural. We had huge fits of giggles... Not to mention the children and the supporting cast who provided unforgettable moments. Voices carry the basic emotions of the film.

The fact that you picked Dany Boon after the success of his latest film could be seen as a calculated move...

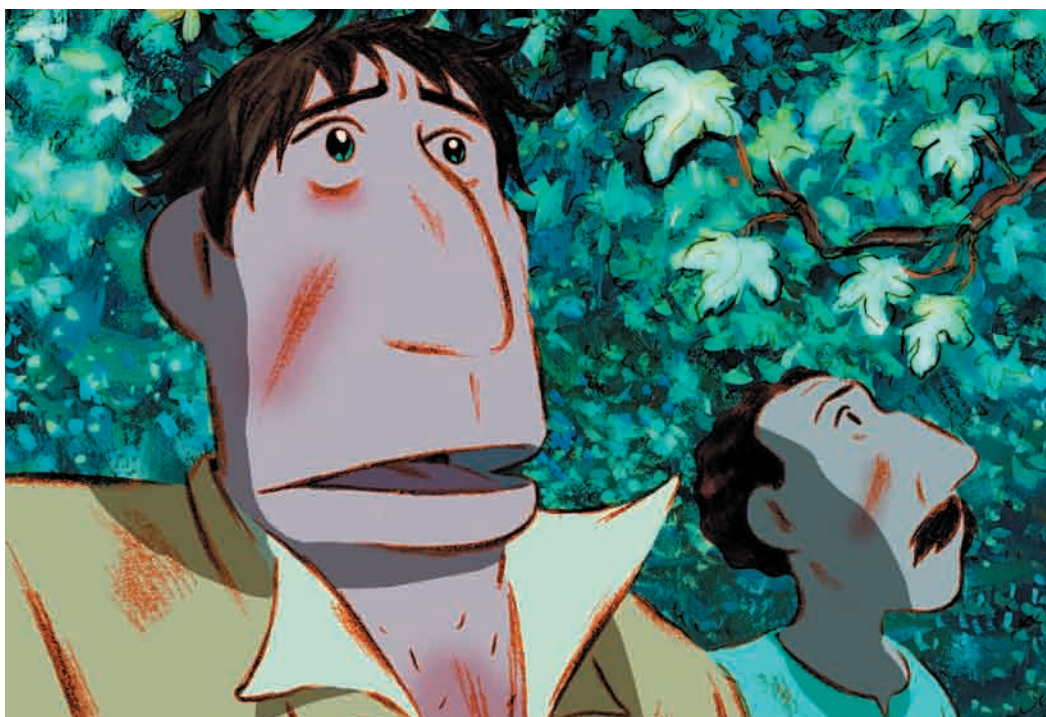
With the hindsight of *Welcome to the Sticks*, it certainly does seem like a copycat move – but the thing is I recorded Dany Boon's northern accent almost three years ago, at a time when he was shooting *La Maison du Bonheur*. I guess it will be some time before people believe it wasn't calculated. But then again there are a variety of accents in the film: from Belgium, Italy, Spain, Russia, Japan, Mexico, kids-from-the-projects... and from Northern France – which is definitely accidental!

So the voices of the cast are not dubbed?

Definitely not. The recording of the voices was precisely the very first stage of the filmmaking process. Way before cameras began rolling. This helped the animators bring life to their drawings and directly find their inspiration in the original voices – they relate to the actors' emotions, sensibilities and rhythms. Unlike dubbing, we record creative voices. Every actor is able to express himself freely under my supervision and be himself as he doesn't have to stick to pre-existing drawings. It makes a world of difference. Obviously the result isn't the same – it's much more realistic. This poetic realism is exactly what I was looking for.

You've been making animated features for thirty years. What's your take on the genre?

Don't tell my mother – she believes I'm a writer! I've ended up making animated films quite by chance. For as long as I can remember I've always been torn between solitary work – like writing books for instance – and quite the opposite – like managing huge teams. When I'm by myself, I feel like being with other people and when I'm with other people for too long, I feel like escaping to a remote desert. When you make an animated feature, you definitely find out what a collective artwork experience is all about; you get to do a bit of everything – it's wonderful! It's a universal language and the imagination is limitless. Nothing has made me happier – both as an artist and as a citizen – than animated films. I always go back to the genre – just as you go back to your folks. What began as a chance discovery became my roots.









BIOGRAPHY - JACQUES-RÉMY GIRERD

He grew up in the countryside and found it difficult to apply himself at school – to the great displeasure of both his parents and his teachers. He's always been messy, loud and spontaneous. He's successively worked as an electrician's apprentice, a metal stamper on the assembly line, an organic gardener, a schoolteacher, an art professor, a sociocultural activities organizer, a medical student, a Bordeaux wines salesman, an apprentice of Tibetan mandala, a sound engineer, a visual artist, a film professor, a rock band drummer, a chicken breeder in the Drôme, a lyricist, a museum attendant, a cook in Tokyo, a stand-up comedian, a pen pusher for Gallimard, a freelancer for Libération, a producer for Folimage and even an animation filmmaker!

FILMOGRAPHY AND SIGNIFICANT DATES

- 1977 First animation film 4 000 foetal images (4 min.)
- 1981 Creation of Folimage
- 1984 Le Cirque Bonheur (10 x 7 min.)
- 1988 César award for Best Animation for Le Petit Cirque de toutes les couleurs
- 1990 Le Bonheur de la vie (20 x 5 min.)
- 1991 Creation of the Festival d'un Jour
- 1992 Mine de Rien (40 x 2 min.)
- 1995 Ma Petite Planète chérie (26 x 5 min.)
- 1997 Charlie's Christmas (30 min.)
- 1998 Cartoon d'Or (European oscar for Animation)
- 1999 Creation of La Poudrière école européenne du film d'animation
- 2003 Raining Cats and Frogs (animated feature which had 1,2 million admissions in France et and won 7 international awards)
- 2004 Cœur de trèfle (novel, Gallimard)
- 2006 Traversées (art exhibition, Grenoble)
- 2008 Mia and the Migoo
Création de la Cour des images à la Cartoucherie

CREW

**Director
Screenplay**

Jacques-Rémy Girerd
Jacques-Rémy Girerd
Antoine Lanciaux
Iouri Tcherenkov
Benoît Chieux

**Graphic Design
and Storyboards
Head of Design
Colour Models
Assistant Directors**

Benoît Chieux
Gaël Brisou
Maryse Tuzi
Flore Poinard
Marc Robinet
Patrick Tallaron
Benoît Razy
Izu Troin
Hervé Guichard
Loïc Burkhardt
Kamal Aïtmihoub
Juan-Carlos Concha
Peter Dodd
Sandra Gaudi
Siergjej Gizila
Sébastien Godard
Morten Riisberg Hansen

**Production Manager
Cinematography
Special Effects
Editor
Sound
Main Animators**

Antoine Lanciaux
Larisa Lauber
Sylvie Léonard
Enrico Mezzena
Patrizia Nasi
Cristina Parisotto
Susanne Seidel
Serge Besset
Deyan Pavlov
Folimage (Valence)
Enarmonia (Turin)
Gertie-Colourland (Milan)
Folimage
Enanimation
Gertie
France 3 Cinéma
Rhône-Alpes Cinéma
Sayers Studios
Bayard Presse
Jacques-Rémy Girerd

**Music
Conductor
Animation Studios**

Co-Producers

**Producer
Financial Director
and Executive Producer
Head of Production**

Emmanuel Bernard
Pierre Meloni

With the participation of

Centre National de la Cinématographie, Canal +, TPS, Eurimages, Région Rhône Alpes,
Département de la Drôme, Ville de Valence, PROCIREP, ANGIGOA, MEDIA

VOICES

Mia
Aldrin
Jekhide
The Mother
The Grandmother
Pedro
Neness
Baklava
Jojo La Frite
Malakof
The three Aunts
The Witch/The Migoos

Garance Lagraa
Charlie Girerd
Laurent Gamelon
Miou-Miou
Line Wibl e
Pierre Richard
Jean-Pierre Coffe
Romain Bouteille,
Carim Messalti
Jean-Fran ois Derec
Yolande Moreau
Dany Boon



