

CHEZ WAM presents

BABIES

(Bébés)

An original idea by Alain CHABAT
A film directed by Thomas BALMÈS

National release 16 June 2010

76 minutes

Visa: 114 874 / 35 mm / 1.85 / Dolby SR-SRD and DTS

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Synopsis

Four countries and four babies, from birth to their very first steps.

Their names are Ponijao, Bayarjargal, Mari and Hattie, and they live in Namibia, Mongolia, Japan and the United States.

BABIES invites us simultaneously into four very different cultures, capturing the funniest, most carefree and moving moments, those unique and universal incidents of the first few months in our lives.

An hour and a half of adventure, action, humor and tumbles...

The parents' point of view...

Last November and December, screenings of BABIES were organized for the parents and the children who starred in the film. They have all grown a lot since. Now, they're aged between three-and-a-half and four years old.

Here are the different perspectives of the mothers and fathers from Namibia (Tarererua and Hindere), from the United States (Susie and Frazer), from Japan (Seiko and Fumito) and Mongolia (Mandakh and Purev) on this exceptional experience.

FOR THE FIRST TIME ON THE BIG SCREEN PONIJAO

NAMIBIA

The project's appeal

"I agreed to do the project because I never went to hospital for any of my pregnancies and it meant I could be cared for by a doctor. I am very poor and I'd never have had the means to go to a doctor otherwise. It was very interesting to be filmed at the same time as other women from different countries." (Tarererua)

"The production company paid Tarererua's hospital bills without asking me for anything. I didn't need to sell a goat. We were paid for the shoot but we only agreed to do it for the sake of Ponijao's future. Before starting filming, Thomas brought us many things like flowers and food. He chose my wife from among many others. He was very welcome!" (Hindere)

The casting

"Two people came to see us after having found my name on the village register. They took my photograph. Thomas told us he had told the village chief that some French people were coming to film a documentary. He told us he had seen other women from neighboring villages. They didn't want to participate in the project and he chose to make his film here with us. I was very pleased but it didn't sink in straight away! We agreed to what he asked of us. We told him we'd help him in his project." (Tarererua)

The shoot

"I was happy during the shoot. Thomas filmed from morning to night. We only stopped for lunch. We worked together like we were part of a family. We were happy when he came to shoot. He made sure he always checked if everybody was healthy and happy. He brought us what we needed; food, mainly. He took care of us." (Tarererua)

On their child

"To me, Ponijao is a star. This was the first time I'd ever seen her on a screen. She is very happy and joyful in the film. I want her to be healthy. I'd like her to live in a nice place, in a better home so that she can take care of her own children as we have done for her with the money we got for the film." (Tarererua)

On the other cultures

"The development of the other babies is different. I think they have better living conditions. Their mothers feed them well. They eat healthy food and they are in good health. But I was surprised to see that they don't look after them, they are alone. I was afraid the little American girl would hurt herself when she fell from the car in the park. As for me, you can see I'm with my children. The happiest one is the little Mongolian boy, even if he just plays on his own with his roll of bathroom tissue." (Tarererua)

What the children think

"Ponijao was very happy to see the film. She saw herself as a baby and then crawling! She's proud to say she's been in a film with her brother, sister and mother. You don't see me in the film, even though I was sometimes there during shooting. It's not only the women who look after the babies; the fathers do it too, but the men are always very busy looking after their herd." (Hindere)

Surprising and funny sequences

"I was surprised to see the American mother put a pump on her breast to extract her milk and be able to nourish her daughter. Here, we wait for the milk to come of its own accord. It can take two days. In the meantime, we give the baby goat's milk. I found that very interesting." (Tarererua)

On the experience

I am delighted that people in other countries will be able to see me. I should have liked to meet the other women in the film. I'd like Ponijao to be able to see the film again when she's grown up so she can see what we did for her. It's for her benefit and so that she can grow up in better living conditions that we took part in the project." (Tarererua)

"Making this film was a good thing. It teaches you a lot, seeing other countries and how they live. If they make a sequel, the team would once again be very welcome into our family." (Hindere)

Family facts

- The family are members of the Himba tribe.
- They live in Epembe, near Opuwo, in northwestern Namibia.
- They breed cows and goats.
- Hindere (the father) is constantly moving around to find water for his animals.
- They live in very close harmony with nature.
- Ten children in the family, including a newborn. The eldest, Tjombinde, is almost 26 and Ponijao, the second-youngest, is three-and-a-half years old.
- Tarererua was around eight months pregnant when the director met her for the first time.
- Tarererua is divided between her desire for a nice house in a town and continuing the Himba tradition, and passing that on to her children.
- Only one of the couple's children goes to school but their mother would like to send two more.
- Ponijao's character: A strong sense of family, at ease with herself, very photogenic, loves dancing, prefers playing with a food sack than with a real toy!

FOR THE FIRST TIME ON THE BIG SCREEN HATTIE

UNITED STATES

The project's appeal

"The project offered a universal vision of childhood. We thought it would be interesting for Hattie to be in contact with other countries. All these babies are growing up according to their own culture. You see life for what it is and it opens up horizons for us. It would be good if at the age of 12 or 13, Hattie could travel to meet up with the other children in the film." (Susie)

The casting

"In January 2006, a friend asked me if I'd be interested in working on a film that focused on babies' lives. Chance had it that they were also looking for a child that was due to be born in the San Francisco Bay area in April or May. I said that mine was due during that period and a few days later, Thomas flew out and we met. His intentions regarding the project were the right ones." (Frazer)

The shoot

"It was extremely exciting taking part in the project but we didn't want to have a camera crew on our heels all the time. I know what that means as I work in the movie business! We asked that Hattie be filmed only as a baby, without getting too involved in our lives."

(Frazer)

"We didn't want to be filmed during the birth. We had a contract stipulating that the natural needs of the baby would be respected such as eating and sleeping. We would have pulled out immediately if that hadn't been the case. Frazer even shot certain scenes himself. He could separate out our life and that was great. It wasn't like we always had a film crew hanging around us." (Susie)

On their child

"Hattie isn't a star. She's just a child with a child's needs. She's afraid of nothing. She tries things out and if it doesn't work out for her, she carries on regardless! She watches carefully and nothing upsets her. It's wonderful to see her discovering the world around her. I loved hearing her make her first sound. She was at the hospital. It's a unique moment that you can never reproduce. I also loved the scene where she peels a banana, bites it from the wrong side, discovers that it tastes bad, spits out the piece and throws it away. At the time, we couldn't tell her but she got it anyway. She won't do it again!" (Susie)

"The scenes in the hospital were poignant and hard to watch. We had a bad experience with Hattie's birth. She had a little trouble breathing and the doctors had to clear fluid from her lungs. She wasn't in danger. In the hospital, there were lots of monitors and doctors. There were also premature babies who were really in a bad way. Fortunately, Hattie wasn't in that situation. She took some antibiotics and came home three days later." (Frazer)

On the other cultures

"I've never been to Tokyo but I identified with the Japanese mother in her way of educating her child: Going to the park, to the zoo, taking her child to daycare because she has a job. In Namibia, children grow up in a different culture. The traditions are very strong. Ponijao has the same necklace as her mother and the first thing she wears is a loincloth. Namibian children are more indulged than ours are. We don't have that kind of freedom. In the United States, if you saw a child lick a dog's tongue in a park, there's be a dozen parents who'd yell at it to stop. In Namibia, nobody panics; everything is simple." (Susie)

What the children think

"Hattie felt very involved in the subject of the film. She pointed at herself when she appeared on screen. She loved the scene when she's jumping up and down in her bouncy chair, and the one where she's looking at the cat. She also found the sequences where the other children were having their hair cut very interesting. She was captivated by seeing the little Mongolian boy taking a pee. Her curiosity drove her to ask if it was a girl's pee or a boy's one! She was also very surprised by the rooster walking through the Mongolian baby's bedroom." (Susie)

Surprising and funny sequences

"The film is full of amazing scenes. There's the one with the little Japanese girl who tries to understand how her toy works. She manages to do it by accident, starts again and can't repeat it. She's overwhelmed and lets you know it! The scene with the goat in Mongolia is amazing. She drinks the water from the baby bath and he doesn't mind at all. When he hears his mom yelling at the animal, he looks closer and seems to realize there's something unusual going on. It was also very interesting to see the Namibian mother coat her stomach with that red powder and put it on her son's head after having cut his hair with a knife." (Susie)

On the experience

"Thanks to this project, I was able to observe Hattie more attentively. It's very interesting to see things from her point of view. It was like being at the theater, even if a film crew was there. But in watching the film, I felt Hattie wouldn't have anyone to emulate. She's an only child. This occurred to me when I saw a scene with the Mongolian baby. Everybody around him is sharing so much with him. It was beautiful to see!" (Susie)

Family facts

- They live in Oakland, near San Francisco.
- Susie WISE, the mother, is a professor at Stanford University (California).
- Frazer BRADSHAW, the father, is a cinematographer. His first feature as a director (EVERYTHING STRANGE AND NEW) won awards in many festivals in the United States.
- Neither grew up in Oakland, but they have lived there since they went to university in the early 1980s.
- One child: A daughter, Hattie.
- Hattie's character: A curious, energetic child who is shy at first but very sociable after five minutes. She loves telling stories, going for bike rides, painting and doing gymnastics.

FOR THE FIRST TIME ON THE BIG SCREEN MARI

JAPAN

The project's appeal

"I was pregnant when we first heard about the project. As this was our first child, I saw the possibility for an amazing and unusual experience for the whole family. My husband and I work in fashion. We know what a shoot is but appearing in a documentary is very different. I didn't imagine this film would be released all over the world!" (Seiko)

"The project had meaning. For people of my generation, being a father means a lot. My own father was very busy. He didn't put much energy into his relationships with his family and educating his children. Twenty years ago, Japan was very focused on economic development. Women didn't work and mothers took care of the home while fathers worked hard elsewhere. Now, our country is richer. We have more time to take care of our families." (Fumito)

The casting

"We met Thomas in the hotel where he was staying in Tokyo. As we all three speak English, communication was easy. The proposition was a little bizarre because we'd never participated in a shoot as subject matter! I had no idea of what was going to happen after the birth. It was a complete surprise." (Fumito)

The shoot

"Obtaining authorization to film in Tokyo is very difficult; it was very hard for the team to shoot outside the apartment and they weren't allowed to film in the hospital. At no time was shooting a problem for us. We let them do what they had to do and they were extremely considerate. But sometimes when they wanted to shoot, Mari wanted to go to sleep!" (Seiko)

On their child

"In the film, we witnessed the first steps of a great star of the future! My favorite scene is the one where she is in the toy shop in her stroller. She looks around, her eyes wide open. She seems like she's looking for something in particular. It's very cute." (Fumito)

On the other cultures

"I think I am quite a lot like the American mom in my beliefs. We're both the type to take classes or meet other families with children. On the contrary, the Namibian mother takes care of her baby all on her own. She is pretty silent but you feel like she loves him a lot. It's a society that seems more closed in on itself but there are no doubt very strong links binding the members of that family." (Seiko)

What the children think

"Mari recognized herself when she watched the film. She knew it was her, she recognizes her own face. We film her all the time and show her the movies. But she didn't really like seeing herself on screen as a baby because now she's a big girl!" (Seiko)

Surprising and funny sequences

"I wondered why the little Mongolian boy is tied to the bed with string. I think it's very cold there in winter. Maybe it's to keep him warm?" (Seiko)

On the experience

"I found the film very moving. A lot of love emanates from it. You also see the physical and emotional evolution of the children. That's a common denominator for all the families. I hope the public will feel the same thing." (Seiko)

"The film offers a wonderful look at the evolution of four babies. When people see it, they will understand the power a child has over its life." (Fumito)

Family facts

- The parents work in fashion.
- When Mari was born, they lived in a small apartment in Tokyo, in the Shinjuku neighborhood in the northeast of the city. A year and a half ago, they moved to Minato-Ku in the center.
- One child: A daughter, Mari
- Mari and her cat are very close. He was already there before she was born. She is very authoritative with him and sometimes they squabble, like cats and dogs!
- Mari's character: She's curious about everything, constantly looking for new sensations and new places every day. She gets a thrill out of being frightened, she has a very good appetite and looks after her dolls like a mother!

FOR THE FIRST TIME ON THE BIG SCREEN BAYARJARGAL

MONGOLIA

The project's appeal

"When we first heard about the project, I wasn't sure I wanted to be filmed. We were told that we wouldn't be play-acting, that we should just continue behaving as normal. The idea was to observe our lives and the way our children grow up. We didn't have to make any effort and nobody wasted our time. I liked that approach so my wife and I decided to agree." (Purev)

The casting

"We saw Thomas for the first time at the hospital where Mandakh was being looked after. She was about to give birth! When he went into the delivery room, he had a big smile on his face. It was the doctors who invited him in! In the start, Mandakh was nervous. But at the end, the pain was so great that she completely forgot that the team was filming Bayarjargal's arrival." (Purev)

The shoot

"Several times we left the team alone with the baby. We trusted them. We couldn't stay with him all the time just because the crew was filming. We were very busy with the animals and the household tasks. We just carried on as normal. In winter, to stop the baby burning himself on the stove in the middle of the yurt, we tied his ankle to the bed with string. That way, he had a perimeter of freedom but he was safe when he was left alone. That's how we bring up our children in Mongolia." (Purev)

On their child

"To us, Bayarjargal isn't a movie star. I loved seeing him take his first steps at the start of the film. The rest of the time, you have the feeling that he fights a lot with his brother but in reality, they are very close. They share their food and protect one another. When one of the children here has a problem, they deal with it together." (Purev)

On the other cultures

The Japanese and American babies seem to be pretty advanced. These countries raise their children within a group. Their parents sing with them. They are very hands-on. But I was sorry for the little Japanese girl because she spends all her time closed up inside. And she has so many people around her! I'd like her to grow up well. But the one who interested me most was the little African girl. Over there, children are raised in the school of hard knocks!" (Purev)

What the children think

"The film talks about me, the sky and the sounds in the sky. It shows me when I fell off my scooter. I got up straightaway. It also talks about my brother who bites me! I didn't recognize myself all the time. I remember the times when I was riding my bike and I like the bit when you see me learning to walk." (Bayarjargal)

Surprising and funny sequences

"I liked the simplicity with which the little Namibian girl is being brought up. In the United States and in Japan, children are educated like they are in Mongolia. Even if they are city kids whereas ours are very close to nature, it's very similar. We can't be with them all the time because we also have lots of work to do." (Mandakh)

On the experience

"The film shows very clearly how we raise our children. In Mongolia, they grow up at the heart of the steppes. They are in contact with nature. Their life is peaceful. I like seeing the freedom in which my family lives on the screen. I'd like all the children in the world to experience the internal peace we have. The film also made us think about what we should change here to improve our life. Our sanitation conditions are nothing like what they have in the West. It will help us improve them and organize our home better." (Purev)

Family facts

- The family lives in Bayanchandmani, in the center of the country, in the steppes.
- They have two children, both boys, the youngest being Bayarjargal.
- They raise cattle and sheep.
- They live very close to nature.
- Bayarjargal's character: He is sensitive, willing, and extremely cooperative. He is honest, attentive to others and likes to pit his strengths against them. He is sure of himself, confident and he loves to play with his brother with whom he is extremely close. He loves riding his bike.

Behind the camera

Thomas BALMÈS: Screenwriter - director

A graduate of the Institut Supérieur d'Études Cinématographiques.

1992: Created his company TBC Productions.

2002: Created his company Margot Films.

He has worked with many TV channels including Canal+, BBC, SVT and SBS,
and has won awards at festivals in Berlin, Jerusalem, Nyon, Prague and San Francisco.
Father of three.

FILMOGRAPHY

2010 BABIES (screenwriter-director-executive producer)

2005 DAMAGES (screenwriter-director-producer)

2004 A DECENT FACTORY (screenwriter-director-producer)

2001 LE DERNIER DES PAPOUS (screenwriter-director-producer)

2000 WAITING FOR JESUS (screenwriter-director-producer)

1999 THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO THE PAPUANS (screenwriter-director-producer)

1997 MAHARAJAH BURGER (screenwriter-director-producer)

1996 BOSNIA HOTEL (screenwriter-director-producer)

1995 Making of PAR DELÀ LES NUAGES by Michelangelo ANTONIONI
(screenwriter-director-producer)

Alain CHABAT: Screenwriter and producer

1987: Creation of the comedy quartet, "Les Nuls".

1994: Creation of his production company "Chez Wam".

1996: Started out as a feature film director.

César award for Best First Film for DIDIER.

President of the "Les Toiles Enchantées" charity.

Father of three.

FILMOGRAPHY "MOVIE PRODUCTION":

2010 BABIES by Thomas BALMÈS (screenwriter-producer)

TOGETHER'S A CROWD by Léa FAZER (producer)

2008 UN MONDE À NOUS by Frédéric BALEKDJIAN (producer)

LA PERSONNE AUX DEUX PERSONNES by Nicolas & Bruno (producer-actor)

2006 I DO by Eric LARTIGAU (screenwriter-producer-actor)

2004 RRRrrrrr !!! by Alain CHABAT (screenwriter-producer-director-actor)

2002 ASTERIX AND OBELIX: MISSION CLEOPATRA by Alain CHABAT (screenwriter-coproducer-director-actor)

1997 DIDIER by Alain CHABAT (screenwriter-coproducer-director-actor)

Bruno COULAIS: Composer

Studied violin and piano.

3 César awards for *MICROCOSMOS*, *HIMALAYA* and *THE CHOIR*.

2 Victoires de la Musique awards for *MICROCOSMOS* and *THE CHOIR*.

Oscar for Best Song for *THE CHOIR*.

2007: Sacem Music Grand Prix for Audiovisual.

2010: Annie Award for *Coraline*.

Has composed several operas, mainly for women.

Father of three.

SELECTIVE FILMOGRAPHY:

- 2010 BABIES by Thomas BALMÈS
OCEANS by Jacques PERRIN & Jacques CLUZAUD
- 2009 CORALINE by Henry SELICK
VILLA AMALIA by Benoît Jacquot
- 2008 THE SECRET OF KELLS by Tomm MOORE & Nora TWOMEY
LUCKY LUKE by James HUTH
- 2007 THE SECOND WIND by Alain CORNEAU
MAX & Co by Samuel and Frédéric GUILLAUME
THE LAST DEADLY MISSION by Olivier MARCHAL
- 2005 THE WHITE PLANET by Thierry PIANTANIDA & Thierry RAGOBERT
- 2004 BRICE DE NICE by James HUTH
- 2003 THE CHOIR by Christophe BARRATIER
- 2002 GENESIS by Marie PERENNOU & Claude NURIDSANY
- 2001 L'ENFANT QUI VOULAIT ETRE UN OURS by Jannik HASTRUP
- 2000 THE TRAVELING BIRDS by Jacques PERRIN, Michel DEBATS & Jacques CLUZAUD
HARRISON'S FLOWERS by Elie CHOURAQUI
VIDOCQ by PITOF
CRIMSON RIVERS by Mathieu KASSOVITZ
BELPHÉGOR, PHANTOM OF THE LOUVRE by Jean-Paul SALOMÉ
- 1999 CRIME SCENES by Frédéric SCHOENDOERFFER
HIMALAYA by Eric VALLI
HARD OFF by Claude BERRI
- 1997 ALREADY DEAD by Olivier DAHAN
SERIAL LOVER by James HUTH

1995 MICROCOSMOS by Claude NURIDSANY & Marie PÉRENNOU
1992 LE RETOUR DE CASANOVA by Edouard NIERMANS
THE SON OF THE SHARK by Agnès MERLET
LE PETIT PRINCE A DIT by Christine PASCAL
1986 QUI TROP EMBRASSE by Jacques DAVILA

Cast

THE CHILDREN:

Ponijao (Namibia)

Mari (Japan)

Hattie (United States)

Bayarjargal (Mongolia)

THE PARENTS:

Tarererua and Hindere (Namibia)

Seiko and Fumito (Japan)

Susie and Frazer (United States)

Mandakh and Purev (Mongolia)

Crew

Original idea	Alain CHABAT
Director/Adaptation	Thomas BALMÈS
Production and executive production	CHEZ WAM Alain CHABAT Amandine BILLOT Christine ROUXEL
Executive production	TBC Productions Thomas BALMÈS Jill COULON
Original music	Bruno COULAIS
Production	Martin JAUBERT
Post-production supervisor	Cyril CONTEJEAN
Assistant director	Jill COULON
Editors	Craig MACKAY (AFC) Reynald BERTRAND
Assistant editors	Erica FREED Colette BELTRAN Pauline CASALIS Cédric JOUAN
Sound editors	Samy BARDET Armelle MAHE
Assistant sound editor	Jérôme FAUREL
Sound re-recording mixer	Thierry LEBON
Music editor	Joseph DEBEASI

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