UGC presents

Félix MOATI Sara FORESTIER Eric ELMOSNINO MAÏWENN

TELE GAUCHO

A film by Michel LECLERC

Screenplay
Michel LECLERC

Adaptation
Michel LECLERC and Thomas LILTI

With the participation of Emmanuelle BÉART

Yannick CHOIRAT Zinedine SOUALEM Samir GUESMI François-Eric GENDRON
Lionel GIRARD Christiane MILLET Anne BENOÎT

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SYNOPSIS

Everything began when camcorders replaced cameras. Suddenly, making TV was within everyone's reach.

But Jean-Lou, Yasmina, Victor, Clara and Adonis wanted more than just their own TV network – they wanted to start a revolution! And so they created Télé Gaucho, a channel as provocative and anarchistic as the major stations were stuffy and conservative. Five years of rattling cages, of daring protests and pirate broadcasts, of nights of drinking and frustrated love affairs...

It was a magical moment out of time.

INTERVIEW WITH MICHEL LECLERC

After the success of LE NOM DES GENS, what kind of film did you want to make?
I've wanted to make TÉLÉ GAUCHO since the time I was part of Télé Bocal, between 1995 and 2000, which is what inspired the film. That independent TV channel represented the quintessential group experience to me. I've always been fascinated by group films like LE PÉRIL JEUNE or NOUS NOUS SOMMES TANT AIMÉS, which tell the story of three or four friends over the years, mixing politics with falling in love and growing up.
In TÉLÉ GAUCHO, the main character Victor has a hard time admitting that he really belongs in the group, though he can't stand the idea of not being a part of it.

We see certain segments you created for Télé Bocal in the film.
Most of them are segments I created, like "Before, I Used to Think..." or "Objects that Annoy You." One day, Nagui saw "Before, I Used to Think..." and asked me to make 100 episodes for broadcast on Canal Plus, on the show Nulle Part Ailleurs. I accepted, unlike Victor in the film, who is "purer" than I am. But to soothe my conscience as a "social traitor" I negotiated with Nagui that everything had to be shot at Télé Bocal, so that it would benefit financially from the production. And yet I was treated like I had "sold out." In that ultra-political left-wing circle, it's very hard to defend yourself as an independent; it takes being egotistical, since it comes down to a defense of "I did it myself."

Your short film LE POTEAU ROSE seems like a precursor to TÉLÉ GAUCHO.
Yes, you could really say that TÉLÉ GAUCHO is a sort of overblown making-of of POTEAU ROSE! But when I was at Télé Bocal, unlike Victor I was not a young kid who had just left his parents; I was already working as an editor for TV. In all I spent five years at Télé Bocal, and towards the end I made that short using personal and family archives as well as segments shot for Télé Bocal. It was a sort of diary. And miraculously, that film I shot and edited in a week, almost unconsciously, touched people – and everything changed for me. I had already made six or seven short films, very classic in form and narration, but LE POTEAU ROSE – a sort of autobiographical fiction – was the only one that really had any success! I was troubled because I was convinced that it was less a film than a personal video, and I was wary of being compromising and egocentric. And yet, that was the short that touched people! From then on, my approach to film changed: I understood that I had to dig more into the intimate, while keeping a certain distance from my own neuroses, and for me, humor allows me to find that distance.

How did you write the script?
At the very beginning, I had the intention of making a documentary about Télé Bocal. And then, a story was born from that idea – a character film, without true narration, based on the most memorable events that I myself had experienced. After about twenty pages, I asked for help from Thomas Lilti, a close friend who made LES YEUX BANDÉS. Thanks to him, something snapped into place: he pushed me to realize that the story I wanted to tell was about Victor, a young man who goes to Paris to become an adult. My modesty had pushed me towards a collective narrative, in which I didn't emphasize any one character more than another. But Thomas explained to me that that was exactly what was interesting; of course the film described a libertarian and anarchist atmosphere, but above all it was about the story of a young man confronted with his own ideals and artistic ambitions, his first love experiences and the subject of paternity, who in the end isn't the same person he was at the start.

How did you create the main characters?
The key word for me is contradiction – or the ambiguity in each of us. We feel attached to Jean-Lou, the leader, because he is a charismatic character who brings the other characters together; without him, the group wouldn't exist. But he is also a small time con man who loves cons so much that he can't resist the pleasure of conning himself; nobody ever reproaches him for not being completely honest.
He oversees several blocks and has a very angry side, but at the same time, he federates and drives the movement. At one point, he is faced with popular success and can't stand it. He wants to be master of his little world and always stay close to it. He is as fiery and irresponsible as a child who destroys his own toys. For fear of success, he prefers to fail.
Yasmina is the most sincerely dedicated one. She probably has personal reasons for her revolt and she takes her experience at Télé Gaucho very seriously. For her, it is a way of reaching out to people and making citizen-protest television. But she is lacking perspective and takes herself a bit too seriously. She and Jean-Lou make a volatile pair: his religion is troublemaking and anarchy, while she is trying to be useful to others. As a result, her seriousness causes the others to poke fun at her.

And Victor?
The viewer sees the film through his eyes, since he embodies a sort of normality, like the whiteface clown. For a long time, he takes a lot of hits, people make fun of his naïveté. But deep down, he is ambitious. He wants to succeed, and meeting these people with whom he feels a connection, he sees a way of achieving his goals. So he gets caught in the contradiction of working for a commercial channel while being part of Télé Gaucho. Through him, the film asks questions about how to reconcile idealism and ambition: how much can you sacrifice your ideals without becoming a cynic? That's the path of this character who grows up but who certainly loses a certain purity on the way. Similarly, he endures a rude first sexual experience. He jumps enthusiastically into a love relationship that doesn't take long to cut him down. Yet he is probably the character, more than anyone else, who has his head on his shoulders, who knows where he wants to go, and who achieves his goals, because at the end of the story he finds the answer to his own question, "How do you make a film?"

The character of Clara is more ambiguous than she seems to be in the beginning.
Clara embodies another aspect of Baya in LE NOM DES GENS, as if in TELE GAUCHO, Baya was split into Yasmina and Clara. From the very start, we can tell she's a little crazy.
But she has a sunny and attractive sort of craziness, and a sense of freedom that wins Victor's heart. Little by little, we see that her craziness is not so sunny after all: she is a scattered character for whom the border between reality and fiction is a very fine line. She has a succession of enthusiastic obsessions – for the circus, for politics, etc. – but since she never gives herself the means to do something about them, her whole life is doomed to failure. She suffers from it but doesn't try to fight that tendency. So she becomes a very dark and mortifying character – she even works in a mortician's shop – and she has a very discouraging effect on the others. No one can count on her, least of all herself. As soon as Victor realizes this, he understands she can only bring him down.

Etienne is also caught in his own paradox.
We've all known that kind of person who wants to be purer than everyone else. He totes his politico-cultural baggage and talks the talk, which allows him to constantly judge others. These lesson-givers are common in alternative communities. In a group, there are always little "Torquemada." That's why I enjoyed making him a character who isn't as left-wing as he seems to be: he's the son of a bourgeois family who lives in Auteuil, which among that crowd is very disparaging and absolutely has to be hidden.

Patricia Gabriel is clearly the enemy target.
Yes, because she makes trashy TV and embodies values at the opposite end of the spectrum from Télé Gaucho. Except that Victor is faced with the real person, not the image she gives off. And the real person, as it often happens, is more complex than that, so Victor is not so sure anymore that he wants to do her harm.

It is clearly a politically committed film, but it doesn't clobber you with a message.
The film's dialogue warns us of the risks of dogmatism. Yasmina explains that it doesn't matter whether Patricia Gabriel is a nice person or not, she represents the enemy and must be eliminated. Victor, on the other hand, says she is likely to get fired. I like activism and political commitment, but there are limits to how you define the enemy and in those situations I always remain cautious.

We get the feeling that in 1995-96, when the film takes place, "re-enchanting" the world is still a possibility.
I think the film is one of the first to describe that period as the past. In 1995, people started to buy small cameras and camcorders, but you couldn't post the images on the internet yet, like you can today. The film takes place in that "technical window" when everyone could film and edit, but no one knew how to show what had been shot.
That is the story that TÉLÉ GAUCHO tells: in a way, we were reinventing the birth of cinema by organizing public screenings where we showed what we had shot during the day, exposing ourselves to live reactions from the audience. There is a amusement park side to that, which is where that feeling of enchantment and escape comes from. The atmosphere of TÉLÉ GAUCHO is a lot like the 70's: love, politics, freedom... with the exception that in the 90's the enemy target wasn't really political power anymore, it was commercial television, which from that time forward began to embody absolute power.

Is is fair to say the film was influenced by Truffaut?
The way the main character is portrayed is similar to Truffaut; he lives his life like a film and probably prefers fiction to real life. And since Victor is a movie buff, he identifies with Antoine Doinel a lot – to the point of naming his son Antoine – and experiences life like a tightrope walker, a little hesitant, sometimes unfair with women, on the edge of adulthood... There is a side to the film like BAISERS VOLÉS. And when Victor shoots with Clara, he acts like he is Truffaut, which is pretty ridiculous. That's actually the problem with influences: it's better not to try to be like someone you will never be able to equal.
On the advice of my Director of Photography Guillaume Desfontaines, I watched and re-watched LA RÈGLE DU JEU for the filming of that scene full of life and confusion with fifteen people on screen all talking at the same time, to ensure that the scene still flowed overall, that we don't get lost and we want to be a part of the party. I also thought a lot about the party scenes in Fellini's films, and worked a lot on the background action, especially through the character of Samir Guesmi. Of course I'm not comparing myself to them.

Tell me about casting. You wanted to work with Sara Forestier again?
On LE NOM DES GENS, I was fascinated by how serious her approach to the role of Baya was, which may seem paradoxical since Sara is vibrant and has a gift for comedy. She embraces things fully and goes deep into what she does, without analyzing it. There is a certain affinity between the characters of Baya and Clara, they share a touch of madness, but Clara's madness doesn't evolve in the same way. Also, in the beginning, Sara was a little afraid of that proximity between the two characters, and we worked with the idea that distinctions had to be made. We see things the same way, we have the same sense of what is funny and what is touching.

How did you get the idea of Eric Elmosnino for Jean-Lou ?
I figured given his theater background, he probably knew that kind of group dynamic quite well. Because at heart, the gang at TÉLÉ GAUCHO is a little like a theater troupe that has to make do with what it's got. Actually, Eric was totally a part of that whole group, many of whom really worked at Télé Bocal – and I had no need to explain to him who Jean-Lou was. He was fabulous at slipping right into character. He is a very funny actor whose precision lets all the subtlety of the role shine through.

And Maïwenn?
She was nearly a part of LE NOM DES GENS. Even before I met Sara Forestier, I'd considered her for the role of Baya, and the screen tests were fabulous. But she was reticent about certain nude scenes, and since I was very attached to them, we failed to find a workable middle ground. I figured it was a missed opportunity. A few months after the film came out, she sent me an email to say that she regretted her decision. So I thought we should try a new experiment. She had that physical rage that interested me. She makes a religion of spontaneity, which can sometimes bother acting the partners she works with; she is constantly afraid that if she delivers the text too faithfully, it will seem artificial. As a director I made full use of her ability to improvise.

Young Félix Moati, son of Serge Moati, is wonderfully realistic.
I had fears in the beginning, because I didn't want a "son of someone" playing Victor, a young man from a provincial background which has nothing to do with the world of Paris. And then, as soon as we met, very early on in the project, before I even started shooting LE NOM DES GENS, we had a great relationship and became close. I recognized myself in him, or to be more precise, he is the young man I would have liked to be at his age. He has a magnificent sense of humor as well as sensitivity, culture and receptivity. So though I had expected to spend a long time casting that role, I stopped with him.

Emmanuelle Béart plays a character quite unlike herself.
The first thing she told me was that she would have preferred to play a left-wing character! Because if anyone is a committed activist, especially in the interest of immigrants, she is! Luckily she doesn't take herself too seriously, and she was generous and very receptive, with Félix in particular. I especially like the restaurant scene between Victor and Patricia, where I asked the actors to improvise. Emmanuelle started to destabilize him and it actually disarmed him! As I result we think her character is a lot more clever than we thought it was at first.

Where did you shoot?
Télé Bocal was at Cité Aubry, in a magnificent interior courtyard, a sort of oasis of anarchy which led off into several corridors in different directions. But since that location has been demolished, we shot a hundred yards down the road at Villa Riberolle, in the 20th district of Paris, where you still get that winding geography and bric-a-brac feeling. In that kind of squat, you are in another world, where the rules aren't the same as they are elsewhere, whether it has to do with meeting people, flirting or talking. For me, it's also a place for fantasies, where you can be daring, and where the way you build a scene is primordial; you are never isolated from each other, because there are stairwells in every direction and openings in the walls wherever you go.

What was your directing approach?
The central idea, which comes out of my experience at Télé Bocal, was to make what the characters shoot with their little digital cameras part of the story of the film. For example, we learn that Clara is pregnant while Victor is shooting footage of a demonstration. I found that interesting from a directing standpoint, for the construction of the narrative. So in the beginning I had the intention of mixing fiction with real images shot back when I was a part of Télé Bocal. I was obsessed with making the viewer believe that what my characters were doing was real, with making sure there wasn't a single doubt as to their commitment. It was the same with the immigrant rights demonstration, where I mix archival images from that time with shots of actors at Chaillot fifteen years later. We shot incognito at real demonstrations, like the one organized by Le Front National on May 1st or the Gay Pride demonstration, which was pretty fun to do. I absolutely wanted to make sure it didn't seem "fabricated."

How did you choose the music?
Since Télé Gaucho is a melting pot of sorts, I wanted to keep the amusement park feeling, even in the musical choices. So there are several "levels" of music. First the "in" music, to which the characters listen. Except for a song by Les Motivés, which for me was very emblematic of the that time and place, I wanted all the songs to be original and faithful to that festive, amusement park feeling: there are fanfares and songs by Adonis (founding member of Télé Bocal) that mix humor and music, beautiful melancholy songs by Janga backed up on guitar, and K-Roll, a punk group that hung out with us a lot. Next, there is the "off" music, written by Jérôme Bensoussan, who had done my two preceding films. I asked him to dissociate himself completely from all the rest. So he composed a more emotive, more narrative score, with influences of Nino Rota and Delerue.

There are also your own compositions.
I've always written songs. And I always find a way to slip them into my films – it's a pet pleasure of mine! Since I wanted to avoid being cliché for the love scene between Clara and Victor, and since I love musical comedies, I found it amusing for the couple to make love to a song and for the lyrics to become their dialogue. For that moment I used a song by Baya and me, called "Le souffle de l'explosion." For that sequence I thought a lot about Christophe Honoré's CHANSONS D'AMOUR, a film I love.

CAST

Victor	Félix Moati
Jean-Lou	Eric Elmosnino
Clara	Sara Forestier
Yasmina	Maïwenn
With the participation de Emmanuelle Béart	
Etienne	Yannick Choirat
Jimmy	Zinedine Soualem
Bébé	Samir Guesmi
Père Victor's Father	François-Eric Gendron
Adonis	Lionel Girard
Victor's Mother	Christiane Millet
Madame Serrano	Anne Benoit

CREW

Director	Michel Leclerc
Screenplay	Michel Leclerc
Adaptation	Michel Leclerc and Thomas Lilti
Production	31 JUIN FILMS / Agnès Vallée et Emmanuel Barraux
Post-Production Manager	Alexandre Isidoro
Production Manager	Albert Blasius
1st Assistant Director	Amandine Escoffier
Director of Photography	Guillaume Deffontaines
Sound	Sophie Laloy, David Vranken et Stéphane Thiébaut
Set Photographer	Michael Crotto
Costumes	Mélanie Gautier
Production Design	Stéphane Becimol
Editing	Annette Dutertre
Casting	Aurélie Guichard, Julie Navarro
Original Music	Jérôme Bensoussan

Produced by AGNES VALLÉE and EMMANUEL BARRAUX

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