



INTERNATIONAL
ROME FILM FESTIVAL
SPECIAL EVENTS

THOMAS LANGMANN PRESENTS

LAETITIA
CASTA

GUILLAUME
CANET

KAD
MERAD

WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF
GÉRARD
JUGNOT



WAR OF THE THE NEW THE BUTTONS

AFTER **THE CHORUS**

THE NEW FILM BY **CHRISTOPHE BARRATIER**

REINE



Studio 37

m a r s

BASED ON THE NOVEL BY LOUIS PERGAUD



m a r s



THOMAS LANGMANN
PRESENTS

LAETITIA CASTA
GUILLAUME CANET
KAD MERAD

Special Guest Appearance - GERARD JUGNOT

in



after THE CHORUS (€35 million international box office)
the new film by CHRISTOPHE BARRATIER
Adapted from the novel by LOUIS PERGAUD

2011 · FRANCE · 100 MIN · 35MM · 2.35 · DOLBY 5.1 · COLOUR

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SYNOPSIS

March 1944.

While the planet is shaken by the terrible events of World War II, another war is being played out in a remote corner of the French countryside. The children of neighbouring villages Longeverne and Velran have always hated each other. Now their battle takes a new turn: prisoners will have the buttons of their clothes removed and return home almost naked, vanquished, humiliated.

The 'War of the Buttons' has been declared and whichever village collects the most buttons will be declared the victor.

Alongside this conflict, a young Jewish woman, Violette, has won the heart of Lebrac, Longeverne's leader. Will Violette's real identity be revealed, and will she be denounced?

LOUIS PERGAUD'S NOVEL

LOUIS PERGAUD

"The War of the Buttons" - subtitled "The novel of my twelfth year" - possesses the unusual charm of books written by those who died too young. Its author, Louis Pergaud, was born in 1882 and killed in action in 1915. A schoolteacher, he left only a handful of novels, one of which is this famous 'epic in short pants', a comic tale of schoolchildren from two neighbouring villages - Longeverne and Velran - who have been waging war since time immemorial.

THE WAR OF THE BUTTONS: A BESTSELLER

The novel's phenomenal success is due to the fact that it talks about the world of childhood without taboos or sentimentality. Pergaud delved into his own memories of growing up in the Doubs, a mountainous region of Eastern France. A tremendous joie de vivre and energy radiate from his novel, fed by the imagination of kid warriors and spiced with the earthiness of their regional language.

THEME AND CHARACTERS

Pergaud opposes the traditional character of the wartime traitor to children's solidarity in the face of adversity. The Longeverne kids are all hungry for freedom and the familiar natural world is their playground. Their enemies are the Velrans, but also the coarse, rough world of the adults. This realistic childhood chronicle humorously raises the issue of education and questions the principles of the authority of fathers.

THE ART OF PERGAUD

Pergaud inherited the art of storytelling from his farmer ancestors. He knows how to bring his characters to life, how to animate a scene, how to deliver fast-paced, sinewy dialogue. The action-packed adventures of his young heroes are funny, touching and forceful.

FROM PAGE TO SCREEN

CHANGING THE TIME AND THE PLACE

Transposed from Eastern to Central France, the film begins in March 1944 (rather than the late 1800s of the novel) and follows the quarrels between the kids of Longeverne and Velran quite faithfully. However, by setting the double story at the dawn of the Liberation, Christophe Barratier lends to the conflict between the children a gravity overshadowed by the tragic discords of the adults.

THE PRESENCE OF ADULTS

This reimagining of Pergaud's novel grants more room to the adults, who are split into two camps. Here the dramatic issue is played on a double level between children and grownups. It is about defending a country (France) and a territory (Longeverne), about identity and dignity, individuals (Violette, Simone) and property (the buttons).

A LESSON IN LIFE

Christophe Barratier's film presents a lesson in republican life in which school occupies a favoured position. The wind of Liberty blows inside the heads of the Lebracs - father and son - and the Teacher. Equality is manifest

in the tax that the Longeverne camp tries to impose on the wealthy Baccailé. As for Fraternity, it is present throughout the film: solidarity amongst the groups, complicity to protect Violette, resistance networks... We are also reminded how important it is to not accept any form of oppression.

A CONVERSATION WITH DIRECTOR CHRISTOPHE BARRATIER

What interested you so much in Louis Pergaud's novel that you wanted to adapt it and make a new version of the film?

I was ten when I saw THE WAR OF THE BUTTONS. I read the book at school, and later I saw Yves Roberts' film. What really struck me was that for the first time, children could wage a war, disobey, rebel, and it wasn't a bad thing - on the contrary. I love to be in touch with childhood freedom again, to let the child that remains in me talk.

Why did you choose to set the film during the Occupation, more particularly in 1944?

I had the feeling that a more serious conflict was missing from the background, one that could allow us to go beyond the little war amongst the children and the parochial rivalry - hence the idea of setting the WAR OF THE BUTTONS within the big adult war. This way, the tragic conflict amongst the adults would echo the more light-hearted war between the children. Behind the story of the squabble between two villages, a major war is taking place not too far away and is already announcing its outcome. The final days of

the Occupation were a very dark period, beneath the shadow of genocide: children suffered, parents were made prisoners and deported. The French countryside harboured many hidden Jewish children. In creating the character of the Jewish girl in hiding, protected by the young haberdasher, the issue of the adult war no longer seemed a subplot, but a conflict that resonated with our characters.

Your two previous films, THE CHORUS and PARIS 36 both featured children as main characters. What is the connection to childhood that makes you want to explore this time in life in your films?

My childhood dreams have never left me. Oscar Wilde said: "Wisdom means to have sufficiently big dreams so as not to lose sight of them while pursuing them." When I was a child my artistic ambitions were both huge and wild: cinema, music, literature, drawing... With each new project I realise that I want to make a film that I would have liked to watch as a kid. The child I was liked anything spectacular, musical, sentimental, and confrontational. I wanted to add to all this the lust for life of a hypersensitive soul like Lebrac who encompasses the whole array of feelings a child can experience, the tender and painful poetry of Violette, the happy-go-lucky attitude of Little Hat....

What would you say to children and teenagers to encourage them to read the novel and discover your filmed version?

Louis Pergaud's novel is a magnificent description of the passage from childhood to adolescence, and shows us how children can

unite and show solidarity. The film is truly a free adaptation of the novel, in the sense that I let my inspiration guide me towards areas that were foreign to the novel. The buttons, the battles, the rivalry, the betrayal are all there of course, but through music, dramatic inspiration, battle scenes, the emotion that pervades it, magnified by modern film techniques, my ambition is to give the children and their family a total spectacle. The film transcribes first and foremost the fervour of freedom present in Pergaud's novel. The children are not only at war against each other, they are involved in trying to form their own republic. They make up their own rules, not only for fighting but also for living. Equal taxes are mentioned for the first time, along with solidarity and union. They are a group. These ideas were already present in THE CHORUS. I also think that by setting the story in 1944 we can take the opportunity to remind children of what the Occupation was like, and of the great wind of hope that swept through France during the Liberation. A history lesson told through entertainment. And let's not forget humour. There are very few great films without humour. And I do mean humour, not comedy. I think that a serious subject can be more interesting if, as in the film, the unexpected is given a lot of space. That way, children don't feel they are watching a history lesson but a real story that touches them, enriches them and that they'll want to watch again and encourage their friends to discover.

CAST

The Teacher **GUILLAUME CANET**
Simone, the Haberdasher **LAETITIA CASTA**
Lebrac's Father **KAD MERAD**
The Aztec's Father **GERARD JUGNOT**
Bacaillé's Father **FRANCOIS MOREL**
Lebrac's Mother **MARIE BUNEL**

THE CHILDREN

Lebrac **JEAN TEXIER**
Little Hat **CLEMENT GODEFROY**
Top Hat **THEOPHILE BAQUET**
Bacaillé **LOUIS DUSSOL**
The Cove **HAROLD WERNER**
Camus **NATHAN PARENT**
Violette **ILONA BACHELIER**
The Aztec **THOMAS GOLDBERG**

CREW

Directed by

CHRISTOPHE BARRATIER

Producer

THOMAS LANGMANN

Executive Producer

DANIEL DELUME

Associate Producer

EMMANUEL MONTAMAT

Screenplay

STEPHANE KELLER

CHRISTOPHE BARRATIER

PHILIPPE LOPES CURVAL

1st Assistant Director

LAURE MONRREAL

Production Manager

FRANCOIS HAMEL

Post-production Supervisor

FRANK METTRE

DP

JEAN POISSON

Costume Designer

JEAN-DANIEL VUILLERMOZ

Production Designer

FRANCOIS EMMANUELLI

Continuity

FRANCOISE THOUVENOT

Editors

YVES DESCHAMPS

ANNE-SOPHIE BION

Sound

DANIEL SOBRINO

EDOUARD MORIN

OLIVIER WALCZAK

Original Music

PHILIPPE ROMBI

Child casting

VALERIE ESPAGNE

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