

MOVE MOVIE  
presents

# My Father's Guests

starring  
KARIN VIARD  
FABRICE LUCHINI  
MICHEL AUMONT  
VALÉRIE BENGUIGUI  
and VERONIKA NOVAK

a film by  
ANNE LE NY

Screenplay by ANNE LE NY and LUC BÉRAUD  
Produced by BRUNO LEVY

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# SYNOPSIS

Lucien Paumelle has always had strong convictions. A retired doctor but still active, he is well known for his commitment to many humanitarian causes. His dedication even leads him to marry Tatiana, a young Moldavian woman, to keep her from being thrown out of the country.

But his children, Babette and Arnaud, soon notice that his behavior no longer fits the principles he has always defended: could he have fallen for the charms of his flamboyant wife, even at the age of 80?

As Tatiana and her daughter settle into their new life with the Paumelle family, everyday life becomes chaos for Babette and Arnaud.

Soon all the family relationships will have to be reinvented...

# Interview with Anne Le Ny

## *How did this film originate?*

A few years ago, something similar happened in my family, which I observed from a distance, and it left me somewhat perplexed. I couldn't quite understand how my cousins, adults, could be so overwhelmed by the escapades of their aging father, when in principle they had become independent of him so long ago. It was upon the death of my own father that I finally understood what they had been deprived of: there's no set age for feeling unloved by a parent.

So I took a greater interest in that family episode and the whole symbolic aspect of inheritance and heritage. In addition, through Lucien's character I saw the possibility of portraying a whole generation of activist and extremely committed leftist intellectuals, to which my father and all the men in my family belonged.

It's obvious the overall tone of the film is pretty ironic towards them, but after all, they were the ones who taught me to think critically. So the satire is an affectionate tribute to their teachings...

## *Can you tell me about Lucien's character?*

He is a heroic figure with a very strong personality who acts upon his convictions. All the members of the family necessarily define themselves in relation to him, whether it's through admiration, like Babette, or through opposition like Arnaud. Also, when the paternal icon starts to crack, no one in the Paumelle family can avoid facing their own contradictions.

What I like in Lucien's character is, what he loses in respectability he gains in humanity. Of course given the situation, his love for Tatiana looks a lot like abuse of power or sexual harassment, but at the same time, falling madly in love at the age of 80, isn't that the most beautiful form of heroism you could imagine?

## *How do Babette and Arnaud (Lucien's children) deal with the situation?*

For Babette it is a huge disappointment, a betrayal. In fact, she has always followed in her father's footsteps: like him, she is a doctor, involved in social causes and very politically minded. She has always felt like the legitimate heir to the family values: for her, it was the only way to make sure her father loved her. Deprived of paternal recognition, she has no idea who she really is anymore. But once she has "digested" this disillusion, it's liberating, and Babette finally allows herself to recognize her own desires.

Arnaud's character seems to be in contradiction with the family's moral values. He is a rich business lawyer, whose success is despised, or at best, not really acknowledged by his clan. They criticize his taste for luxury, his materialism. But in the end these exterior signs of wealth are just superficial symptoms of his revolt against a dominating father who, he feels, never gave him any consideration. Also, when Lucien loses it, Arnaud's vision of him gradually

changes: his father becomes human, fallible like himself, and he can begin to love him. For brother and sister, questioning their ties to their father is also of course an opportunity to look at each other differently and re-evaluate their own relationship. All the family relationships have to be reinvented. Losing their father's love, they end up finding each other again.

*How do you explain the reaction of Karine (Arnaud's wife)?*

Karine is the real snob of the family, even if she comes from a lower income, less intellectual environment than everyone else; acquiring material comfort above all gave her a strong instinct for property, which isn't the case with Arnaud. She probably feels closer to Tatiana than the others do: the instinct to survive, the absolute necessity of seizing rare opportunities when they present themselves, she knows what that means – she has lived through it. That makes her all the more ferocious when it comes to defending the hard-won comfort so dear to her. I won't say Karine lacks morality or generosity, but she is the kind of person who tells you, "family first and foremost," which is surely justifiable, but I can't help it, seeing blood ties as an absolute value is an excessive viewpoint that terrifies me... I certainly didn't want Karine to be unlikeable, but it's obviously not an accident that the character who is most attached to family values (so fashionable right now) is the one who denounces the situation!

*How did you build and develop Tatiana's character?*

In my real family story, the young woman was French, so it was pretty clear that for her, money was the only consideration. I'm not really interested in having a character labeled as "the villain." I like each person to have his or her reasons. A newspaper article about families who take in illegal aliens gave me the idea of making her an immigrant in hiding. Tatiana comes from Moldavia, the poorest country in Europe and one of the most plagued by the mafia, corruption and human trafficking. She is above all a victim of her socio-economic situation. So it is absolutely legitimate that she fights to offer her daughter a better life. Also, when Lucien makes a move on her, she has very few options: she is afraid of ending up on the street or in a chartered plane... so she chooses to adapt and get by the best she can. The Paumelle children are in a moral dilemma, whereas for Tatiana, it's a question of survival. Even if at the beginning each person's reasons are justifiable, what is at stake for them is so different that there is very little chance of them finding common ground. It's certainly not a very optimistic vision, but if I want to be honest with myself, that's really how I see the world. And in any case, if you're optimistic, you don't write comedies, do you?

*Isn't the question of each person's "reasons" and "good intentions" a kind of second theme of the film?*

Yes, absolutely. The characters in the film all have strong convictions and they try very sincerely to act upon them. But in life, even with the best intentions, it is very difficult to clearly untangle the good from the bad. Really bad people are just about as rare as true saints. A large part of the bad things done down here on Earth are by people like you and me who are figuring it out as they go along and trying to do the best they can. We all have morals, but certainties rarely stand up to the test of real life's complexities... So in

this film I try to create a dramatic structure that clearly puts into play all of the situation's contradictions. What interests me is bringing viewers to the denunciation scene (basically one of the most repugnant acts in the world, in my opinion) with a clear idea of the motivations of each of the characters in mind. My goal is to achieve, at that moment in the film, a kind of interactivity with them so that instead of thinking, "What jerks!" we ask ourselves: "My God, what would I have done if I were in their shoes?" So that we ask ourselves moral questions, without being judgmental.

*What is the film's intention? There are no bad guys, no good guys... Who is right?*

I don't know, and that's what interests me. I have a definite opinion about the act of denunciation, but in the way I film I try not to pass judgment on my characters. I think that even more than the writing or acting, it's the distance at which you place the camera that really defines the intention of a film. There is a place where you are too empathetic with your subject; at another, you reach a cognitive distance. The right place really depends upon each director and it's more a question of feeling than thinking, but when you are at the right distance, everything "plays" naturally and things make sense.

When I see a film, I don't like scenes where I feel too clearly that the director is telling me: here this character is right, there he is wrong.

Personally, I don't feel like I have a duty to educate, on the contrary I'd rather share my doubts and questions. Which doesn't mean I'm neutral, since the way you ask a question necessarily holds within it a point of view. But I don't feel like I know more about the subject than audiences do.

I hope that audiences coming out of the theater will ask themselves the same questions I do, that I'll feel less alone and that maybe they will help me to answer them... and above all, of course, I hope they laugh.

*Which brings us to the tone of the film...*

As a viewer, I have a really hard time taking films without humor seriously. How can you not take into account the fundamental absurdity of life? Horrible things are often "horrible and funny." Italian theatre, to give just one example, was very good at combining the melancholy with the grotesque. For my part, I feel like my brain works a lot better when I'm chuckling... Maybe it's a question of oxygenation?

*How did you cast the actors?*

Karin Viard and Fabrice Luchini are both great actors, with an obvious gift for comedy and intelligence in their acting that always shines through. They are also both virtuosos of a sort, which generally isn't what interests me in an actor, but which in their case allowed us to push sincerity and emotion to the limit, while still keeping the possibility of changing the tone in a split second and switching back to comedy. Working with people who are capable of such a high level of acting is a director's delight. Except of course they open up such a huge field of possibilities with every shot that after a while there's almost no limit to what I can ask for... I've been a fan of Michel Aumont since I was a child, when I would go see him in plays at the Comédie-Française with my parents. Michel is so modest that when we met for the role of

Lucien, he asked me how I had heard of him... I nearly died laughing. Valérie Benguigui is one of those actors, the minute you see them on screen you feel like you've always known them. But what I like most about her is an indescribable uncertainty and fragility that blends in with that familiarity, giving her acting complexity. What's more, she also has a real sense for comedy: she knew just how to tinge the character's bourgeois respectability with the slightest touch of vulgarity, which I find irresistible.

Since Tatiana is Moldavian, we could have gone for an actress who spoke either Russian or Romanian; both languages are spoken in the country. Having more options meant I could pick an actress for her talent: Veronika Novak stood out right away as a natural choice.

*"My Father's Guests" is Anne Le Ny's second feature-length film. She directed "Those Who Remain" in 2007 and co-wrote the screenplay for "Didine" by Vincent Dietschy in 2008.*

# CAST

Babette  
Arnaud  
Lucien  
Karine  
Tatiana  
Doctor  
Julie  
Rémi  
Simon  
Sorina

Karin Viard  
Fabrice Luchini  
Michel Aumont  
Valérie Benguigui  
Veronika Novak  
Raphaël Personnaz  
Flore Babled  
Olivier Rabourdin  
Max Renaudin  
Emma Siniavski

# CREW

Director  
Screenplay  
Producer  
Director of Photography  
Script Supervisor  
Assistant Director  
Casting

Editor  
Sound Editor  
Sound Mixer  
Production Manager  
Art Direction  
Costumes  
Set Photographer

Sound  
Original Music  
Makeup  
Hair Stylist  
International Sales

Anne Le Ny  
Anne Le Ny & Luc Béraud  
Bruno Levy  
Patrick Blossier  
Sylvie Koechlin  
Anne Felotti  
Nathalie Cheron, Jeanne Millet  
& Christophe Istier  
Francine Sandberg  
Béatrice Wick  
Cédric Lionnet  
Jacques Royer  
Yves Brover  
Charlotte David  
Thibault Grabherr  
& Anouchka de Williencourt  
Eric Devulder  
Béatrice Thiriet  
Jackie Reynal  
Cédric Kerguillec  
TF1 International

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