

Diaphana presents



Playing Dead

France- Belgium / 2013 / 104' / French / 1.85 / 5.1

International Sales:

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## Synopsis

Jean, a forty-year-old struggling, out-of-work actor has hit rock bottom. Although open to any kind of work, he can't get a break. At the unemployment office, his counselor has a rather odd proposal: he can get a job helping the police reconstruct crime scenes, by standing in for the dead victim. Jean's obsession for detail impresses the detectives, allowing him to take a leading role in a sensitive investigation in Megève ski resort, during low season, after a series of murders.

## **Interview with Jean-Paul Salomé**

### **Where did you get the idea for *Playing Dead*?**

The subject had been recently on my mind: I had read an article in the newspaper, *Liberation*, about actors who were hired by the Courts to reenact crime scenes. It made me think. The material was there for both a comedy and a thriller, as well as a metaphor for the role an actor plays. I started with a series of informal conversations with Jérôme Tonnerre as groundwork,

and then I began writing alone, a process which took me a great deal of time, as I wanted the police plot to be believable. I wasn't starting from a book such as an Agatha Christie mystery, which would have been a mere pretext for doing a comedy. It was difficult to find a balance. There were several versions of the script and finally a last round of revisions made with Cécile Telerman.

### **Which came first: the story's outline or the forced association of the two main characters?**

The idea for a whodunit, a provincial thriller, came first: I had wanted to shoot in a ski resort during off season for a very long time. There is a particular atmosphere: the abandoned ski-lifts, the snow that is really slush, etc. This depressingly sad and sorrowful atmosphere is conducive to offbeat humor. It works for the mystery. Naturally, it can't help but evoke *Twin Peaks*! Then the idea of the two opposing main characters took hold. If there was an actor, there had to be a director, and in this specific instance, the director was the investigating judge. And since there was to be a pair in opposition, might as well make the judge a woman, a young woman with no experience. I met a young judge who guided me a bit. In her mind, it was very important to show her authority, and to know how to impose her method. Therefore, faced with an embittered, pain-in-the neck actor, it was better to have a young judge who lacked experience. She is qualified enough to hold down the job, but she isn't very assertive yet and can still be taken for a ride.

### **How did you end up choosing François Damiens and Géraldine Nakache?**

In general I try to avoid thinking about a specific actor at the writing stage. But I wanted a Belgian actor, for the interesting offbeat style they can offer, and naturally François Damiens was among the candidates. He has this off-the-wall quality I was looking for, as well as a strange body in reference to the way he occupies space. And he hasn't yet been typecast in this kind of role. I wanted his partner to be his physical opposite: Géraldine Nakache has a dark complexion, brown hair, he is blonder. They have this Sylvester and Tweety Bird quality I like! Géraldine has a comic energy, she's peppy, and can speak quickly with great ease. From the first reading she imposed this quick tempo. And the icing on the cake was that they really wanted to work together.

### **Their relationship is reminiscent of American comedies: always in conflict, always close...**

It's done on purpose: these specific actors were able to give a modern touch to this classic model, without anyone questioning their union at the end of the film. François and Géraldine were comfortable on the set, they tried things. When you are shooting a comedy, it's better not to be timorous: it forces you to let go, which isn't always easy to do. François is rather uninhibited, he's always trying something, and he is incapable of doing the same thing twice. The film was very written, but he loved to take things off track, and it was often very funny. The actors facing him had to be strong in order to follow him in those moments. That was the case for Géraldine, but also for Lucien Jean-Baptiste and Anne Le Ny.

### **Why did you cast Lucien Jean-Baptiste against type?**

It seemed more interesting to make him the film's serious element. Beyond the incongruity of a black policeman in a ski resort, it wasn't necessary to layer it on. He was a possible guilty party, and for the whodunit genre, the comic side had to be forgotten in order to heighten the tension...

### **Were the visually comic scenes written in detail in the script?**

Yes, I wanted it to be slapstick, almost in the vein of Blake Edwards. The script, of course, had to be adjusted once we were working on location. This was new to me, but I felt the need to concentrate on what the visual aspect of these unusual places could bring - the Jacuzzi, bar, etc. During a comic moment, something abstract comes about: the characters become pure performing bodies. The situation was ripe for this: it was about taking the place of a dead person. The direction then was limited to “down”, “up”, it’s close to burlesque cinema.

### **Are the reenactment scenes reminiscent of shooting a film?**

It’s very similar. There is a situation to recreate, an actor, a judge in charge directing, the police who make up the production team, the court clerk is the continuity person, the forensic photographer the cinematographer! I was amused by the similarities. There was also the idea of a touring theater troupe mixed in: a small group isolated in a ski resort like a drama company in a two star hotel. Moreover, the judges and lawyers that I met told me that a reenactment can actually be a place where a truth can be uncovered, mainly physical facts: the suspect couldn’t have lugged around the body alone, he couldn’t have lifted this rock, or shot from this angle, etc. Paradoxically, it’s the actor, whose job it is to lie, who ends up bringing the truth to light. A more experienced judge certainly would not have let him get away with so much. Here the actor has a leg up on the director. These reenactments are a bit similar to what can happen on a first film!

### **What biography did you imagine for François Damiens’ character?**

He started in an art house film, in which he was noticed, and he got a big head. Does he have talent? He has a talent, but maybe not what was expected of him when he was an actor. He has common sense that can at times be missing in the justice system...In a certain way this is the role of a lifetime: he plays several characters. He's Alec Guinness in *Kind Hearts and Coronets*! He plays all the dead members of a group of siblings, and then ends up playing a living person, right in front of the real person he is playing! The ice skating rink is a bit like a theater. He’s on the rink as if he were on stage. And it’s his last time on stage...

**A provincial whodunit has to concern the town notables as either victims or guilty parties.**

When you say provincial whodunit, there is the Jean-Pierre Mocky version, but I'm not wild enough for that(!), or the Claude Chabrol version, which is more my style. It includes the idea of scheming, a description of a social milieu that here is bound to include rich property owners and expensive chalets. The location sets lived up to our expectations: during this period, between the beginning of November and Christmas, Megève is really dead. We didn't even have to evacuate the streets! It's a ghost town.

**How did you work with Bruno Coulais?**

Pragmatically, without preconceived ideas. The only thing we knew is that we didn't want comedy music. I sent him rushes; he thought about it, sometimes about an instrument – here the saxophone - that helped him to find the theme. Curiously, the first raw cut of the entire film, without music, felt less cruel than usual. That freed us so that the music could be a counterpoint. In the end, his music is a good whodunit genre marker.

## Director's Biography & Filmography

Jean Paul Salomé was born in Paris in 1960 and studied film in Sorbonne Censier University. Best known internationally for *Belphegor*, *Phantom of the Louvre*, *The Adventures of Arsène Lupin* and *Female Agents* is president of the Association of Authors, Directors and Producers (L'ARP) from 2004 to 2012, he is now president of France's powerful film export body Unifrance.

CRIMES ET JARDINS [*Crimes and Gardens*] (TV movie)

Directed and written by Jean-Paul Salomé

Produced by Monique Annaud

With Zabou, Magalie Noël, Jean-Pierre Aumont, Maurice Baquet, Ginette Garcin, Michel Robin, Daniel Gélin

GIRLS WITH GUNS

Directed and written by Jean-Paul Salomé

Produced by Monique Annaud

With Catherine Jacob, Clémentine Célerié, Nanou Garcia, Alexandra Kazan, Annie Girardot, Jacques Gambin.

1994

LA GRANDE FILLE [*The Big Girl*] (TV movie)

Directed and written by Jean-Paul Salomé

Produced by Serge Moati

With Zabou, Christian Charmettant, Michel Robin, Judith Magre

1995

LA VÉRITÉ EST UN VILAIN DÉFAUT [*The Truth is a Nasty Habit*] (TV movie)

Directed by Jean-Paul Salomé

With Sam Karman, Emmanuelle Devos, Jean-François Balmer

1998

RESTONS GROUPÉS [*Stay Together*]

Directed and written by Jean-Paul Salomé

Produced by Alain Sarde and Frédéric Bourboulon

With Emma de Caunes, Samuel Le Bihan, Bernard Le Coq, Claire Nadeau, Bruno Solo, Judith Henry, Michel Robin

- 2001                    BELPHEGOR, PHANTOM OF THE LOUVRE  
Directed and written by Jean-Paul Salomé  
  
Produced by Alain Sarde  
  
With Sophie Marceau, Michel Serrault, Frédéric Diefenthal, Julie Christie
- 2004                    ADVENTURES OF ARSÈNE LUPIN  
Directed and written by Jean-Paul Salomé  
  
Produced by Stéphane Marsil  
  
With Romain Duris, Kristin Scott Thomas, Pascal Greggory, Eva Green, Robin Renucci
- 2008                    FEMALE AGENTS  
  
Directed and written by Jean-Paul Salomé  
  
Produced by Eric Névé  
  
With Sophie Marceau, Julie Depardieu, Deborah François, Marie Gillain, Moritz Bleitreu, Julien Boisselier
- 2010                    THE CHAMELION  
  
Directed and written by Jean-Paul Salomé  
  
Produced by Marie-Castille Mention-Schaar, Pierre Kubel, Ram Bergman  
  
With Marc-André Grondin, Famke Janssen, Ellen Barkin, Emilie de Ravin, Nick Stahl
- 2013                    PLAYING DEAD  
  
Directed and written by Jean-Paul Salomé  
  
Produced by Michel Saint Jean, Luc et Jean-Pierre Dardenne  
  
Avec François Damiens, Géraldine Nakache, Lucien Jean-Baptiste, Anne Le Ny



## CAST

François Damiens	Jean Renault
Géraldine Nakache	Noémie Desfontaines
Lucien Jean-Baptiste	Lieutenant Lamy
Anne Le Ny	Mrs Jacky
Nanou Garcia	Zelda
Corentin Lobet	Servaz
Judith Henry	Caroline

## CREDITS :

Director	Jean-Paul Salomé
Screenplay	Jean-Paul Salomé
In participation with	Cécile Telerman & Jérôme Tonnerre
Original Score	Bruno Coulais
DOP	Pascal Ridaou, AFC
Costumes	Charlotte David,
Set	Françoise Dupertuis, ADC
Sound	Miguel Rejas, Paul Heymans, Thomas Gauder
Editor	Sylvie Lager
Producer	Michel Saint-Jean (Diaphana, France)
Co-producers	Luc and Jean-Pierre Dardenne (Les films du fleuve, Belgium)