



**Eurowide Film Production and Pathé present**



# **Attila Marcel**

**A film by Sylvain CHOMET**

**GUILLAUME GOUX ANNE LE NY BERNADETTE LAFONT HELENE VINCENT**

**DISTRIBUTION and International Sales**  
**Pathé International**  
**2, rue Lamennais**  
**75008 Paris**  
**Tél. : 01 71 72 30 00**  
**[www.patheinternational.com](http://www.patheinternational.com)**

**International Press : Touchwood PR**  
**andrea@touchwoodpr.com**  
**alma@touchwoodpr.com**  
**anne@touchwoodpr.com**  
**T +1 416 593 0777**

## **SYNOPSIS**

Paul, thirty or so, lives in a Paris apartment with his aunts, two old aristocrats who have raised him since he was two and who dream of seeing him become a virtuoso pianist. His life is made up of the same daily routine, between the grand piano in the living room and his aunts' dance class where he works as their accompanist. Cut off from the outside world, Paul has aged without ever having lived... Until the day he meets Madame Proust, his neighbour from the fourth floor. This eccentric woman has the recipe for a herb tea that, with the help of music, is able to conjure up the most deeply buried memories. With her, Paul will discover his past and find the key to live his life at last...



## **INTERVIEW WITH SYLVAIN CHOMET**

**What inspired you to make the move from animated movies to this live action feature?**

Shooting with actors was a childhood dream but I never thought it could come true. My background lies in drawing and, for me, this was a totally different profession. Claudie Ossard gave me my first opportunity in 2006 by asking me to direct an episode of *PARIS JE T'AIME*. Since animated movies cost more than live action ones, it was hard to get the project financed and, once we finally had the money, we had to deal with the problem of the deadlines which were much longer than for the other short films in the collection. I therefore suggested making a live action film to Claudie. "Eiffel Tower" was an amazing experience: I really felt that I was in my element.

***Is that when you decided to cross the line?***

Yes. At the time, I was working on THE ILLUSIONIST from a script by Jacques Tati. And Claudie Ossard just happened to know Tati well, having hired him to shoot commercials. We forged a friendship around our mutual passion for the man and his films. I told her about ATTILA MARCEL. She said, "Let's do it."

***ATTILA MARCEL was originally a song found on the original soundtrack for THE TRIPLETS OF BELLEVILLE.***

One day, I came up with the idea of the title. I jotted it down on a Post-It that I left lying on the dining room table thinking, "That will be a film one day!" That was in 2000, I was working on THE TRIPLETS and the song came to me. "My man is a real man / A tough guy, a hunk / I see death up close / In his burning eyes / He does things no one else dares / He covers my body with bruises / He knocks me out, turns my eyes black / Life with him is one big bruise." That pastiche of Edith Piaf did indeed feature on the original soundtrack of THE TRIPLETS. "Attila Marcel" then had a life of its own on YouTube. It was the song that won Claudie Ossard over.





***You didn't have a screenplay at that time?***

Just snatches of one: a few scenes - the dance class full of people with incredible physiques, say - were already sketched out. I also knew that it would involve wrestling and that there would be a lot of music. I never set out with a preconceived idea when I start writing a project. You could say I work more like an archaeologist: I find a little bit of bone and tell myself that there must no doubt be something below it. Each tiny detail then leads me to discover the rest.

***ATTILA MARCEL is the story of a young man who lives under the heel of his aunts and whose emotional development has remained blocked at the age of two when his parents died.***

His aunts have done the very opposite of what a mother must do: they have smothered him without trying to understand who he really is nor what he wanted to do. He no longer knows what affection is since his mother's death. Deep down, the film is the story of Paul's relationship with women - his mother, his aunts, Madame Proust, with whom he forges a genuinely loving bond and who is a sort of universal woman, and, of course, with Michelle, the young Asian cellist.

***Madame Proust is an incredible character.***

She's the antidote to the aunts! In her apartment, we're bathed in light, the very opposite of the apartment where Paul and his aunts live which is very dark, very clean, very bare (apart from a few paintings of their ancestors), in short, a sinister place! When Paul discovers her apartment, he is dazzled by it, his eyes actually hurt.

When I first started writing, Madame Proust was the main character in the film and Yolande Moreau, with whom I had shot "Tour Eiffel" was supposed to play her. Little by little, the casting of Guillaume Gouix as Paul and Yolande's departure changed things. Paul's character filled out until he took centre stage.

***You thank Yolande Moreau in the credits. You even refer to her as your "muse".***

I wrote ATTILA MARCEL with Yolande's specific music in mind. But it took a long time to get the financing together and she was no longer free when we started preparation since she was busy shooting her own film, HENRI. Claudie Ossard then thought of Anne Le Ny, which was a great idea. From that point on, I developed the character differently: my initial Madame Proust was more

violent, harsher and more of a militant too in relation to ecology. A much more unsavoury person. Anne Le Ny's Madame Proust is more feminine and more elegant.

***You were just talking about how Paul's character gained in importance...***

Contrary to general opinion, which considered him too hoodlum-like to play the grandson of aristocrats, Guillaume Gouix, whom I had noticed on the Net, seemed the obvious choice to me: there is something incredibly touching in his gaze and I fell in love with his eyes. Guillaume reminds me of Lino Ventura. The latter was extraordinary in comic roles and Guillaume has that same power within him: it's not easy to make people laugh without a single line of dialogue!

***Let's get back to Madame Proust whose name comes from the madeleines that she gives to her clients to supplement the herb tea that she uses to awaken their memories.***

Yes. The character's name is a small tribute to the writer and his madeleines whose meaning we hijack a little here since the memories are not triggered by smell but by sound.

***Madame Proust keeps a kitchen garden on the fourth floor of a Paris apartment building, concocts unbelievable beverages, fights to save the planet and charges for her consultations...***

Simon Jacquet, my editor, whose wife is a psychoanalyst, kept exclaiming, "This is a film about psychoanalysis!" And I felt like adding, "Yes, and on top of the rest, it works!" Except that we know what she puts in her tea - we don't hide the fact that it contains traces of LSD. As a slug line for the film, I would have loved to write: "ATTILA MARCEL, a film in praise of drugs, Buddhism and the ukulele!" Madame Proust clearly has a very personal vision of Buddhism.

***The entrance to her apartment is more like a closet door than that of a normal dwelling.***

We imagine that she is more or less a squatter. She must have smashed down a wall to get into another building – we actually see the marks left by a sledgehammer in the waiting room. There is a mystical side to Madame Proust's apartment: as in Buddhist mythology, you have to follow a long corridor to reach the light. Arriving in her apartment is like a rebirth. She has had to remove floorboards to install her kitchen garden and the janitor has turned a blind eye, despite knowing that it is illegal. After she passes, the apartment is painted white, the colour of mourning for Buddhists. It is empty: it has lost its soul.

***With the characters of the aunts played by H  l  ne Vincent and Bernadette Lafont, we rediscover your passion for old ladies: the one in "The Old Lady and the Pigeons", Rose Triplette in THE TRIPLETS OF BELLEVILLE...***

Elderly people have a strength and wisdom that reassures me. And they have an energy that many people of 20 don't have. While writing "The Old Lady and the Pigeons" and THE TRIPLETS, I thought a lot about my grandmother whom I didn't really know and whom I fantasized about a lot. For the aunts, I took my inspiration from a dinner party that a friend had invited me to when I was still very young. His family came from a very aristocratic background and I was struck by the way in which these people and their friends spoke. Originally, I wanted the aunts to be played by twins. Then, when H  l  ne Vincent and Bernadette Lafont came on board, I decided that they would simply be two sisters. We all know sisters like this who have spent their whole lives together, who don't seem to

have ever been in love, who dress in exactly the same way and whose gestures seem to be synchronized. Olivier Bériot, the costume designer, has done some extraordinary work on their clothes; in a similar manner, he has managed to give Guillaume, who is physically strapping, a cramped aspect that suits Paul perfectly - we barely recognize him when he plays Attila Marcel.



***The two sisters are frightening!***

They're not evil women - but the situations are. What I like about the film is that all the characters remain very human.

***The dance class is a great moment.***

The class is pathetic! On top of the rest, they're odious with their students who are clearly lost and come there to meet other people. Instead of giving them a good time, they teach them the minuet!

***Each time he is at the piano, Paul gorges on chouquettes.***

I liked the idea that, to compensate for his boredom, Paul eats non-stop. Chouquettes leave crumbs and, once you eat one, you can't stop. Moreover, the very sound of the word chouquette amused me. When Bernadette Lafont pronounces it, the word is simply extraordinary. There's also a childish aspect to chouquettes: Paul is allowed to go to the baker's to buy them and to go to the park. Those

are the only moments of freedom that he is granted. And this is what will lead to his loss or rather his salvation.

***Even though it is a live action film, ATTILA MARCEL harks back to the world of THE TRIPLETS OF BELLEVILLE: the same humour, the same poetry, a certain darkness too.***

More than anything, I didn't want ATTILA MARCEL to look as if it had been drawn. On the contrary, I needed to break away from the graphic aspect of my previous features. Despite the outlandish nature of the sets and situations, everything had to appear plausible. But you cannot escape your style and ATTILA MARCEL is indeed fairly close to THE TRIPLETS. It's a film that feels like my child. On the other hand, I discovered everything that one does not have in an animated film: the pleasure of dialogue that I had moved away from on leaving the world of comic strips; the even more subtle pleasure of the actors' performance - no one will ever get an animated character to perform the way an actor does. It's an amazing thing to be able to film the actors' eyes and see something appear in them!

To return to the darkness that you mention, I feel that I could not make a comedy about a happy subject, that's just the way I am.

***Since the start of your career, you've been influenced by German expressionism, Italian realist cinema and the Monty Python team. And, of course, we think of Caro and Jeunet...***

...who also come from the world of animated film! I lived for a number of years in the United Kingdom. To be honest, I feel above all influenced by British humour: a particularly black form of humour that I find very salutary.

***There's the slightly anachronistic off-key air that we find in all your films...***

I like to go to the cinema to explore another world.

***ATTILA MARCEL was mostly shot in the Bry-sur-Marne studios.***

The only things we shot on location were the dance class, which we filmed on Rue du Cygne in the Halles district of Paris, the façade of the aunts and Madame Proust's building, and the scenes in the park with that magnificent tree in Levallois-Perret. It would have been impossible to construct the sets of Madame Proust's and the aunts' apartments other than in a studio; there were too many different elements. Carlos Conti, the set designer, has done a remarkable job.

***There is always an abundance of detail in your films: the huge piano in the aunts' apartment, for instance, that resembles a hearse...***

The piano symbolizes the loss of Paul's youth. It's hideously ugly. I saw it as an animal, something evil. The film's villain is that piano!

***On a daily level, it becomes a genuine instrument of torture for the character, just like the apparatus that he is given as a present, designed to strengthen his fingers and on which Schumann apparently broke his ring finger.***

Paul is subjected to the everyday existence of concert pianists who are forced to practice on their instruments eight hours a day and that, even more painful, of those kids who are forced to play the piano, who become very skilled on a technical level without ever really having the motivation for music. His only source of happiness is his desk: as soon as he opens it, light appears, everything becomes much warmer.



***In the end, on finding a concert in a cartoon from his childhood in his memory, he manages to find a creative impulse.***

Yes, he finally finds within him the necessary madness for music.

***Music always plays an important role in your films.***

Without being a musical - there is only one sung part of the film, the scene around the crib - I indeed see ATTILA MARCEL as a musical film. With Franck Monbaylet, who wrote all the piano pieces, I made sure that each character would have his or her own theme and that each piece of music, including

the disco tune, would be in triple time: when you dance in triple time, you sway, a little like when you rock a child or take someone in your arms. It's warm, almost maternal.

***As you were saying earlier, you've made a film in praise of the ukulele.***

I've chosen to film the most cumbersome instrument possible - the piano - and the world's smallest guitar - the ukulele - a wonderful, happy instrument that, like thousands of people around the world, I have fallen in love with. Children should be taught the ukulele, not the damn recorder!

***An additional flashback to musicals lies in the numerous dance numbers.***

They were choreographed by Dominique Hervieu, a choreographer whose shows I had seen in Edinburgh. In her company, you find dancers with extraordinary physiques - tall, fat, thin - and that's exactly what I wanted for the beach scene. They had to be real people dancing.

***There's a nostalgic side to this return to the seventies.***

There's always something melancholic about seeing images of the people who have left us. But I refuse to view this as a backward-looking attitude. ATTILA MARCEL, on the contrary, is a film open onto the future.

***Tell us about the shoot.***

I refused to do a storyboard: I didn't want to run the risk of stiffening my work by returning to drawing methods. Because of that, Antoine Roch, my director of photography, and I improvised a great deal on the set and that brings freshness to the film. But I refuse to talk about actor direction: if the cast is right - and it was extraordinarily right, Gérard Moulévrier did a wonderful job - and if the desire is there - Hélène Vincent and Bernadette Lafont threw themselves into the whole adventure as if it were their first film - there's no need to do anything. At most, I gave them a few indications in relation to the volume: "A little higher", "a little lower"; mere adjustments, like on an amplifier.

***And editing?***

A whole new world. When you make an animated film, there are very few surprises in editing: the final cut is virtually already there. With live action, editing is an incredibly creative process: you can really make forty films from the material that you've shot. In the hands of Simon Jacquet, ATTILA MARCEL has thus become a very tender film. The aunts, for instance, have turned into victims whereas I had made monsters of them on paper. I can't wait to sit down at a cutting table again with Simon.

***Do you already have a new project?***

Yes, a homage to the western with country dancers. I'm going to shoot in the south of France and use the same actors, giving more important parts to those who had supporting roles and vice versa. There was incredible energy in ATTILA MARCEL. I want to preserve that.



## CAST

Paul / Attila Marcel

Madame Proust

Aunt Annie

Aunt Anna

Mr Coehlo

Anita

Michelle

Mr Kruzinsky

Gégé, Attila's friend

Doctor

Janitor

Mr Chassepot de Pissy

Mr Pineton de Chambrun

Mr Berkoff

Guillaume GOUX

Anne LE NY

Bernadette LAFONT

Hélène VINCENT

Luis REGO

Fanny TOURON

Kea KAING

Jean-Claude DREYFUS

Vincent DENIARD

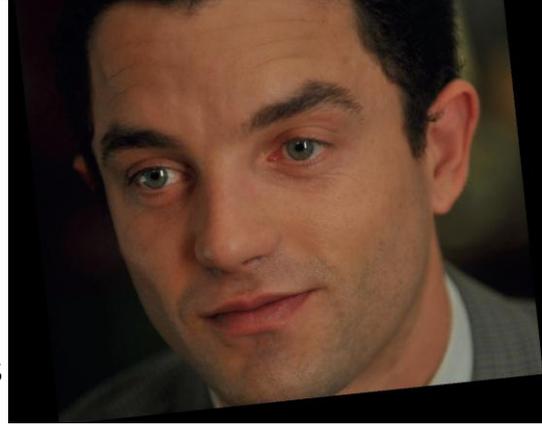
Cyril COUTON

Philippe SOUTAN

Guilhem PELLEGRIN

Jean-Paul SOLAL

Jean-Pol BRISSART



## **CREW**

Director	Sylvain CHOMET
Producer	Claudie OSSARD Chris BOLZLI
Executive producer	Eurowide Film Production
Co-producer	Florian GENETET-MOREL
Associate producer	Romain LE GRAND
Line producer	François-Xavier DECRAENE
Screenplay & dialogue	Sylvain CHOMET
1 <sup>st</sup> assistant director	Mathilde CAVILLAN
Casting director	G�rard MOULEVRIER
Production designer	Carlos CONTI
Director of photography	Antoine ROCH
Costume designer	Olivier B�RIOT
Editor	Simon JACQUET
Original score	Sylvain CHOMET & Franck MONBAYLET
Sound	Jean-Paul MUGEL
Sound editors	Olivier WALCZAK & S�bastien WERA
Mixer	Emmanuel CROSET
Script supervisor	Christine SIVAN
Key makeup artist	Myriam HOTTOIS
Key hair stylist	Michel DEMONTEIX
Choreography	Dominique HERVIEU
Post-production supervisor	C�dric ETTOUATI
Unit managers	Christophe ANZOLI & Logan LELI�VRE
In co-production with	PATH�, FRANCE 3 CIN�MA APPALOOSA D�VELOPPEMENT
With the participation of	CANAL +, CIN� +, FRANCE T�L�VISIONS
In partnership with	HOCHE IMAGES, COFINOVA 9, MANON 3
With the backing of the	PROCIREP

PHOTOS :   ETIENNE GEORGE

