
60 Internationale Filmfestspiele Berlin
Panorama
Family Tree
A film by Olivier Ducastel and Jacques Martineau

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Panorama

Family Tree

L'Arbre et la Forêt

A film by Olivier Ducastel and Jacques Martineau

with **Guy Marchand** • **Françoise Fabian**
Sabrina Seyvecou, Yannick Renier, François Negret
Catherine Mouchet, Sandrine Dumas and Pierre-Loup Rajot

LENGTH : 97'
2010 • FRANCE • IMAGE FORMAT: 2:35:1 • CINEMASCOPE • DOLBY STEREO

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Synopsis

Frédérick is a tree grower who for almost sixty years, has also been cultivating a secret. His wife and eldest son are the only ones around him who know the truth. Pushed by the death of this son, with whom he had a difficult relationship, he finally reveals to his close relatives what he had never been able to say.

Interview with Olivier Ducastel & Jacques Martineau

Why did you choose the title, Family Tree?

Olivier Ducastel: We came up with the title very early on in the project. It's practically programmatic. It's the story of a man who planted a tree that is linked to his secret. And who then spent his life planting trees to earn a living. The title describes the film's two main themes . In other words, one's everyday life and secret life.

Jacques Martineau: In the title, we hear the idiom "can't see the forest for the trees". This is due to the secret, but other reasons explain the title as well. A forester, like Frédérick, devotes himself to a strange activity. He plants trees that only future generations will see fully mature. This fits into an act of passing down, from one generation to the next. However here, the act of transmission is broken. Generations' worth of work crumbles to nothing because of his secret, which is revealed much too late.

Why does Family Tree take place in 1999?

Olivier Ducastel: The idea for this film goes back to quite a while ago. Jacques had already brought it up while we were shooting Jeanne and the Perfect Guy. Over the next ten years, the project evolved enormously. We found its current form only after 2001. In fact, that year a crucial event took place: the French government officially recognized its role in the deportation of homosexuals during the Second World War. From that time on, the need to bring this out into the open no longer existed. Without taking away from the importance of continuing to make people aware that men had been deported solely for their sexual orientation, we thought we could focus our story, , on the question of silence, secrets, and their consequences. We didn't want Frédérick to be the hero of a cause, nor the standard-bearer of a specific claim, as legitimate as it may be. Nor did we want to explain his silence; we just wanted to show the ravage and destruction silence can cause in future generations.

Jacques Martineau: However, we still wanted to situate the film's story ten years ago, at a time before an official position was taken on the question. At a moment in time when it was still something left unsaid, still silenced. Also, we didn't want the main character to be too old. If the film had taken place today, Frédérick would have been more than 80 years old. His confession would have taken on a different meaning, one we weren't looking for, as if it were his legacy.

It was preferable for the confession to occur as a result of a family trauma – the death of the eldest son – and for it to appear as an almost desperate attempt on Frédérick's part to finally rid himself of the secret that had been affecting his entire life. Finally, 1999 is also a strongly symbolic year, the passage from one century to the next, the infamous storm in France...

Was the family's quasi-isolation part of the initial project?

Jacques Martineau: In early versions of the screenplay, the film was much more focused on the political aspect. But during the writing process, we realized that the more we refocused the action in a single location, and on the family, the more our narrative came to life. This choice is thus greatly justified from a theatrical standpoint. Remaining in the middle of the trees, and at the heart of this family was without a doubt the best way to convey the violence of the outside world, and its sanction of silence.

The film asks a question about the transmission of a very old and traumatic event that took place in a family.

Jacques Martineau: The film explores a reoccurring theme found in movies, that of family secrets; but revelation doesn't necessarily mean resolution. The revelation occurs only halfway through. In a certain way, what interests us the most is what happens after the secret is revealed. What the revelation leads to. For, in the scheme of inheritance from one generation to the next, Frédérick's revelation is too late. Is the family appeased, or reconciled at the end of the film? Nothing is less certain. Surely something has been shared. Money has been given. But when Frédérick decides to give this donation, while it is generous and very loving on his part, it is also a bit cowardly, because he is trying in his own way to settle his disastrous relationship with his youngest son, Guillaume.

Olivier Ducastel: It is evident that the existence of this family secret has led to disaster. Interrupting the process of the transmission of events which have structured individuals is extremely harmful, whether this occurs within a family, or to a greater extent, within society.

Jacques Martineau: What Guillaume seems to have missed is knowing his father, knowing his truth, and without a doubt demonstrations of love that he never felt because of this gap. Replacing this with an inheritance, money, is a very upper middle class reflex. Frédérick feels that he has done what was necessary by finally speaking out, whatever the consequences and harm it may produce in others. Frédérick is not entirely good. It is not wholly innocent that he listens to The Valkyrie, and in particular, the ending, where the main character, Wotan, takes the shape of a vengeful god.

Visibly both sons, Charles, who died, and Guillaume, have suffered. Did Frédérick's inability to reveal his secret to them obliterate any possibility for the transmission of paternal love?

Olivier Ducastel: Undoubtedly. It is what François Negret told himself while preparing for the character of Guillaume. He proposed ideas to us concerning the pressure the character feels, or whether the character would be inclined to tears, which went further than we had imagined. For example, in the scene where he denigrates himself in the car with his wife Elisabeth, played by Sandrine Dumas. We had imagined that he would play the scene in a more distanced way, but gradually as we shot various takes, we understood that we were going to choose the one that was the most heartrending.

Jacques Martineau: Something has blocked Frédérick in his ability to express his feelings for Guillaume. At the same time, the father seems to love his youngest son very much. He shows it even, but Guillaume is unable to see.

Why did you show the dead son's body?

Jacques Martineau: He couldn't be the focus of everything without being shown at some point. We had to film him, show the body, even if it is a bit of fantasy: the corpse is dressed in black, the suit he wears for burial in the coffin. He is represented by the last image his parents have of him, and this is how he appears to them in their minds.

What made you decide to choose François Negret for the role of Guillaume?

Olivier Ducastel: We hadn't seen François Negret in a film in ten years or so. During this time he did a great deal of television and stage work. Our producers, Kristina Larsen and Gilles Sandoz, were the ones who suggested he would make an excellent Guillaume. François had just shot a scene in Cédric Khan's film, Regrets, and both of them were impressed by his work. Through him, Guillaume became a tortured and tormented soul.

Jacques Martineau: We found the Guillaume we had been looking for when we met François. We were often told by those who read the screenplay that Guillaume was a monstrous character. Yet for us, he was a fragile character. Whatever he says, we don't think he is hateful. In fact, for the viewer to understand that, Guillaume had to be interpreted by an actor who immediately and visibly incarnates a real fragility. We can feel something broken in him. He's a suffering being.

How did Guy Marchand react when you offered him the role of Frédérick?

Olivier Ducastel: He was neither surprised, nor worried. A year and a half had gone by between our first meeting and the time when the film went into production, the time it took us to make Born in 68. When we saw Guy afterwards, we realized that he had regularly reread the screenplay, had thought a great deal about it and his desire to make the film had increased ten-fold. When it was time to start shooting, he didn't just enjoy playing the role, but he also discovered something that was quite new to him: what it meant to "be the star". Among the movies he's made, there aren't that many of them where he played the leading role. He liked that a lot , and in particular, the scenes where he listened to music. He was very amused by all the close-up shots of him!

Jacques Martineau: Actors also choose roles according to who they are, their career paths and experiences. And yet, in the collective film imagination, and as a singer, Guy is the incarnation of macho, which is very far from who he is in real life. This is undoubtedly what also attracted him to the role: working on an aspect of his personality that is very true in his real life, but not at all known in his film work.

The female characters seem to make it through the ordeal better than the men. Aren't they stronger, more independent?

Jacques Martineau: We've always had the feeling that women are stronger than men. What's more, it's a permanent feature in our films. They are better at resisting the type of disaster that the characters in Family Tree must live through. This said, although Frédérick's wife, Marianne, makes it through well, and her daughter-in-law, Françoise, had cut her ties with the family long before, the granddaughter, Delphine, is much more affected by it all.

Olivier Ducastel : Concerning the character Françoise, played by Catherine Mouchet, there was a lot that was written into the role. A certain ironic distance entered into it, as well as a bit of feminism and a bit of liberty given to the character from the beginning. Catherine also brought a great deal to the role in this sense, giving the character constructive criticism. A great deal of her work involved giving depth to the analytical distance brought about by her character.

Yannick Renier and Sabrina Seyvecou are part of your "family" of actors. How did you work with them?

Olivier Ducastel: With Yannick, we relied upon what we know about him: the great attention and kindness that he shows towards others, his generosity. That is what we wanted to film in him. As for Sabrina Seyvecou, among her qualities is the ability to cry in a very sincere way. At times she isn't able to do it; but if she cries, she is truly moved. And we like to film actors who show real emotion.

In what way do you see Marianne? And how did working with the "couple" Françoise Fabian and Guy Marchand go?

Jacques Martineau: While writing the screenplay, we became aware of the fact that we were going to tell a story about something we had never told before: a love story between two people who have shared a very bizarre life, with minimal sex, yet two people who harbor a very strong feeling of love for one another. In the film, Marianne is the one who expresses this feeling the strongest: she's the one who chose Frédérick, who chose to continue to love him when he told her that he was homosexual and that he had adventures. She was and still is able to make their couple work. It seemed to us that Françoise Fabian gave the character a great deal of sincerity.

Guy Marchand was very impressed by the fact that she would be playing his wife. He is a great admirer of hers. So he was a bit nervous. But Françoise is also someone who is shy and nervous. Guy realized this the first day of shooting, and he became very protective of her. As a result, they developed a strong bond and sharing between actors. On screen this translates into a powerful impression of realism of the couple that they create , and the fact that they have spent 50 years together.

How did you work with the actors during the numerous monologues and listening sequences?

Olivier Ducastel: Although it may not appear that way, listening to narrative monologues in film can be gripping. We shouldn't be afraid to direct long monologues. I had already experienced this in a documentary film I directed a few years ago, about the Allied bombings on the city of Le Havre. When people have stories to tell, you simply want to set your camera down before them, listen to them, and then make sure they are heard. So we decided to structure the film around the transmission of memories, in thinking about how words would be expressed and received. Having Frédérick relate everything ran the risk of it becoming too theatrical. So the narration had to be distributed among the members of the family.

All the group sequences were filmed with one camera, with every actor present for every take. First we directed the scene. Then, we filmed the monologue. Afterwards, we took shots of the actors listening during the entire course of the scene, as opposed to just certain extracts that we may have decided would be more interesting than others.

A single setting, characters who speak or who listen to music: the film could have been static. Yet, on the contrary, one has the impression that it flows. How were you able to achieve this?

Olivier Ducastel: From the beginning we had the intention of making a film mixed with static shots and travelling shots. We wanted Frédérick to speak while standing still, but also while walking. As we don't care for cameras that are handheld, or steadicams, this meant travelling shots on tracks, including in the forest. We also used travelling shots for the scenes when he listens to music. And, at times, just before Frédérick speaks, to highlight a feeling or an intention. There are also some circular shots travelling around the dining room table. This adds constraints to the shoot, but on the screen one has the impression of fluidity, and one enjoys shots with a classical filmmaking aspect to them. We tried to find a balance between cuts and sequence shots. We opted for cinemascope, which allows for listening shots with two actors, thus making it possible for us to eliminate a greater part of the editing. But as what interested us above all was what could be read in the actors' eyes, we also had to be facing them more or less, when they were speaking or listening. Thus giving us the possibility to film long portraits.

Jacques Martineau: Fluidity is obviously linked to camera movements and how they are used, as well as the movements of the actors. But shot reverse shot doesn't hinder fluidity, because there is continuity in the acting. And when you hear the music of a character's voice, although passing from one character to the other, it gives, I believe, a feeling of fluidity.

Filmography - Olivier Ducastel & Jacques Martineau

1998 **Jeanne and the Perfect Guy**
(Berlin 1998 – official competition • César nomination 1998: Best first film and Best original score)

1999 **Funny Felix** (Canada) or **The Adventures of Felix** (USA)
(Panorama - Berlin 2000, The Siegessäule Reader's Prize and Teddy Jury prize)

2003 **My Life on Ice**
(Locarno and Toronto 2002 – official competition)

2005 **Crustacés et coquillages** aka **Cockles and Muscles** (UK) **Cote d'Azur** (USA)
(Panorama – Berlin 2005, Label Europa Cinema)

2008 **Born in 68**

2010 **Family Tree**
(Panorama – Berlin 2010)

Juste la fin du monde
(Film for television adapted from the play Juste la fin du monde by Jean-Luc Lagarce)

Cast list

Frédérick : ..... **Guy Marchand**
Marianne : ..... **Françoise Fabian**
Delphine : ..... **Sabrina Seyvecou**
Rémi : .....**Yannick Renier**
Guillaume : ..... **François Negret**
Françoise : ..... **Catherine Mouchet**
Elisabeth : ..... **Sandrine Dumas**
Charles : ..... **Pierre-Loup Rajot**

Credits

Written and directed by: .. Olivier Ducastel with Jacques Martineau
Cinematography: ..... Matthieu Poirot-Delpech (AFC)
Editor: ..... Mathilde Muyard
First Assistant director: ..... Sébastien Matuchet
Sound: ..... Régis Muller
Sound mixer : ..... Olivier Dô Hùu
Production designer: ..... Dorian Maloine
Costume designer: ..... Elisabeth Mehu
Production manager: ..... Olivier Guerbois
Produced by: ..... Kristina Larsen with Gilles Sandoz

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