

EDMOND WAS A DONKEY

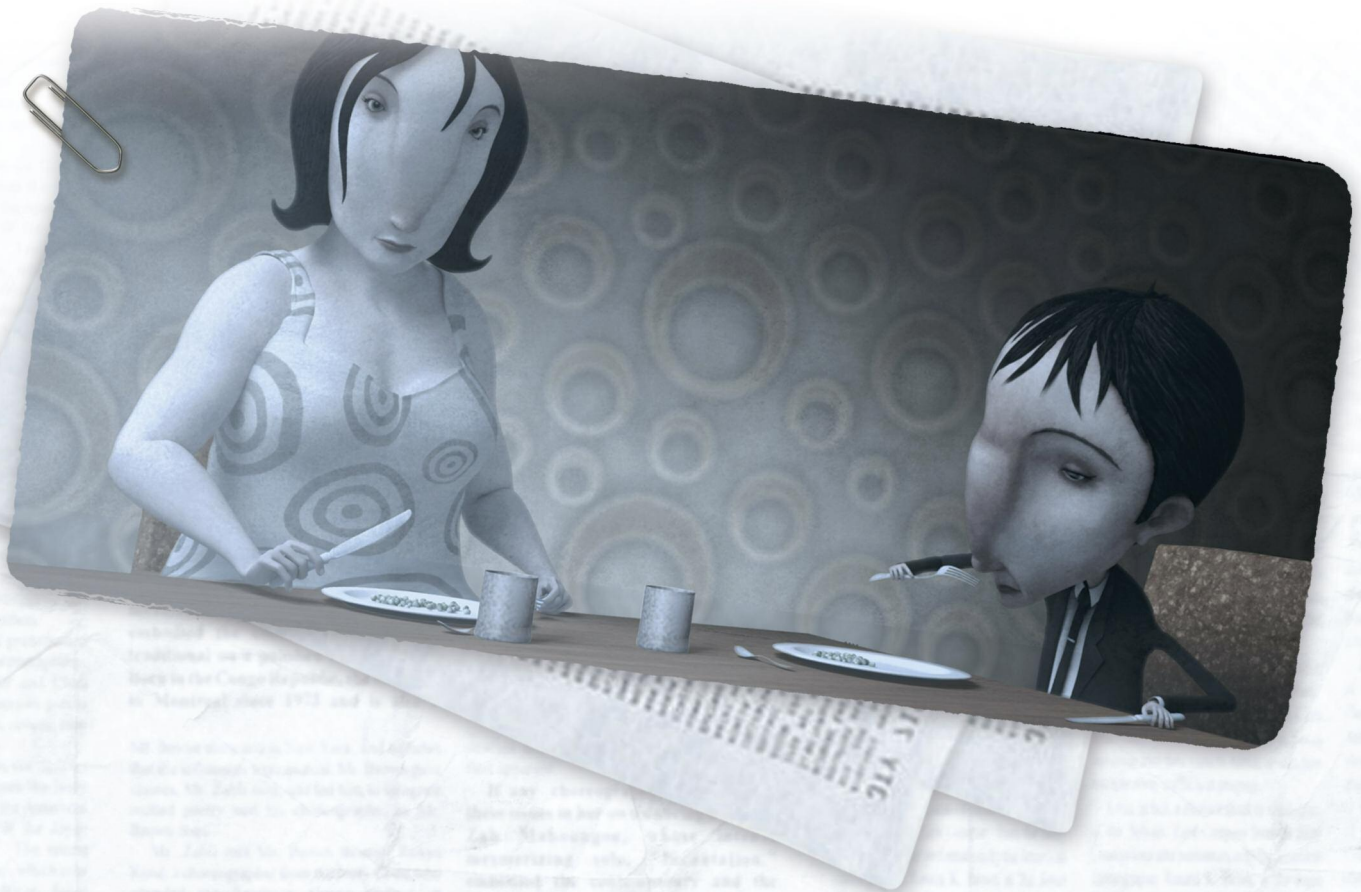
A FILM BY
FRANCK DION



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Co-produced by POPY3D PRODUCTIONS, ARTE FRANCE
and THE NATIONAL FILM BOARD OF CANADA





THE FILM

Edmond is not like everybody else. A small, quiet man, Edmond has a wife who loves him and a job that he does extraordinarily well. He is, however, very aware that he is different. When his co-workers tease him by crowning him with a pair of donkey ears, he suddenly discovers his true nature. And though he comes to enjoy his new identity, an ever-widening chasm opens up between himself and others. Screenwriter and director Franck Dion's empathetic portrait of this sweet-natured individual illustrates the challenges of being true to oneself in a world filled with social conformists. Edmond just doesn't fit in: he's a donkey in a world of horses. People stare at him because of his strangeness, and are alternately curious, amused, embarrassed and uncomfortable. Since he can't bring himself to be what others expect, Edmond makes the only possible choice.

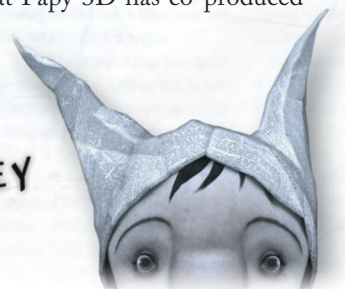
FRANCK DION

Franck Dion was born in Versailles in 1970 and has worked as an actor, theatre set designer and illustrator. In 1999, he launched the first version of his website, *Les voyages imaginaires de Franck Dion* (www.franckdion.net), which was awarded the Golden Net prize for best artistic website in 2001. In 2003, he made his first short animated film, *L'inventaire fantôme*, which won the Youth Jury Award at the Annecy International Animation Film Festival, and was nominated for the Cartoon d'Or. In 2006, together with a few friends, he founded Papy 3D, the company that produced his second film, *Monsieur Cok* (2008), selected for the Sundance Film Festival and the winner of several awards. His third short film, *Edmond Was a Donkey* (2012), is the first film that Papy 3D has co-produced with the National Film Board of Canada.



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INTERVIEW WITH THE FILMMAKER

**When you start a film, what comes first?
Do you always work in much the same way?**

A priori, it's always the character who triggers the story. The character comes first, the script follows. I often start from a drawing or sketch, which I then explore to gradually discover a personality for this being who has appeared on the blank page. In the case of *Edmond Was a Donkey*, it all started with an illustration of a little man wearing donkey ears. He did not look too put out by this state of affairs: indeed he even seemed quite proud of it.

A pair of donkey ears, or a dunce cap, is a rather anachronistic symbol that hasn't been seen for many years. Where did you get the idea of reviving it in the film?

About 10 years ago I worked with Maryse Bergonza and Isy Morgensztern on a documentary entitled *Gloires aux ânes*. At the time I shared the common prejudice, believing that donkeys were both stupid and bad-tempered. Working on that film, I learned that they were thoughtful creatures in the sense that they always considered the pros and cons before acting, that they were sensitive and fastidious and had many other qualities that I had not expected. At that moment I began to take an interest in donkeys and consequently in the symbol of donkey ears or the dunce cap. When Edmond appeared, I liked the notion that a man could be interested in the appearance and behaviour of an animal, running counter to the anthropomorphism that is common in animated films. That this animal has a rather unfortunate reputation added to the interest of the undertaking.

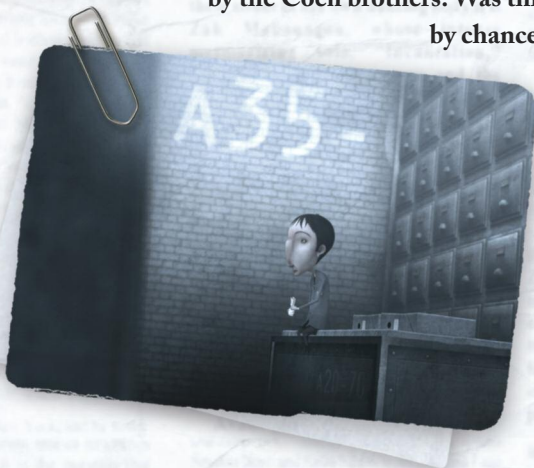
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Robert Bresson's *Au hasard Balthazar*, starring a donkey, is a film that has become famous in the annals of cinema. Did you watch it again while making your film?

Looking closely at the sets of *Edmond Was a Donkey*, the environment in which the character develops, we are reminded of Terry Gilliam's *Brazil* and of *The Hudsucker Proxy* by the Coen brothers. Was this by chance?



We get the impression that the action in *Edmond Was a Donkey* is not really contemporary (largely because of the omnipresence of reams of paper instead of computers). The film has a retro look to it. The architecture is not recognizably French; it looks more like North America.

***Edmond* is different from other people. What does this mean in a deeper sense?**

In the film, Edmond's singularity is expressed visually, mainly by his size: it seems as if he's moving about in a world of giants. What was your aim?

Yes, of course. I actually saw it several times while filming *Edmond*, looking for pointers, but aside from the pleasure I derived from seeing this great film again, it became a hindrance. The plot was so different from mine that referring to it made no sense. The same was true of Victor Hugo's poem "The Donkey," which I would have liked to quote, but which would have given the film an inappropriately intellectual slant.

It's true that my inspiration comes more from live action than from animation, which I know less about. But it is also true that I was trained as an actor, and my mental picture of business administration derives from my reading of writers such as Gogol and Dostoevsky. Indeed, one of my earliest jobs at the age of 16 was as a filing clerk. I always felt that shelving had a beauty all its own. My first screenplay, which was never shot, took place in a records office and featured a character I called Mr. Pion. Later on, when I made my first film, *The Phantom Inventory*, I returned to shelving. I did the same with *Edmond* because it enabled me to emphasize the studious, sensitive side of the character, and also because the setting evoked a sanctuary where he could isolate himself.

At the start, I imagined this story happening in New York, in 1968. In the end it was much less precise than that. I discovered New York not long ago and I really fell in love with it. When I began to work on *Edmond*, I thought that the verticality of the city would allow me to underline the character's short stature. The date, on the other hand, was more important. The year 1968 was a time of social upheaval, in France of course but also in the United States. It was an era characterized by the civil rights movement, the opposition to the war in Vietnam and the hippie movement. I felt that it was a period that encouraged emancipation and Edmond seized the opportunity.

At first I was thinking about transgender issues: the fact of being born in a skin that is not one's own. The film can be read in this sense; it's the most obvious reading, but I soon realized that this interpretation could be extended to cover all sorts of differences. I think it's easy to see ourselves in Edmond. Whenever we feel out of step with our companions, or in terms of what people expect of us, we can identify with him to some extent.

I wanted to make him a donkey in a world of horses. Once I had that idea, it became easy to compose not only the character but also the other people, the city, and so on. The world is disproportionate for him. In that sense it is an Expressionist film.

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Did you design Edmond's world yourself?

I drew a lot of illustrations at the film's development stage and also made photo montages and 3D models. All this work served as a basis for Vincent Duponchel, who created the models for the characters and the props. Since I am not an animator, that aspect of the job was assigned to Studio Traintrain (I had worked with them on my previous film). The 3D rendering and the rigging were entrusted to Vanilla Seed. Finally I worked on painting the sets and composing the images.

Music plays an important part in *Edmond Was a Donkey*. What is your approach to music?

The music gives structure to the film; it is an actor in its own right. In general, I don't want it to be redundant. It has to be part of the whole story. This is the third time I've worked with Pierre Caillet, who had composed the music for my first two films. We start well beforehand, as soon as I have an idea for the screenplay—even before it's written. We talk it through and discuss the sort of music we want to evoke. For *Edmond* we decided on sacred music, partly because at that stage of the process I was still considering using the reference to the Victor Hugo poem. After that, Pierre began working on the plans, and we continued to discuss them up to the final recording. As I had inundated him with *Stabat Maters*, Masses and oratorios, it was somewhat complicated for him. That grew to be quite an intimidating association of ideas. For my part, I never fully realized how hard it had been for him because the music he created for me was an absolute delight.

You are also the producer of the film. What does this commitment mean to you?

I am one of the associates of the production company Papy3D, noted for its policy of entrusting the executive production of a film to its director. In co-operation with Richard Van Den Boom (the company's manager and administrator), my role as executive producer allowed me to organize the production in terms of the film's requirements and to choose my artistic and financial partners. This responsibility, together with the freedom of choice, suited me very well. For *Edmond*, I had the opportunity, thanks to H el ene Vayssi eres (head of short films at the ARTE channel, one of the film's co-producers), to meet Julie Roy, who became the Canadian co-producer of the film. That was how I had the good fortune to work with the NFB people on the soundtrack. It was a very rewarding partnership.



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THE TEAM

Scripted, designed, edited and directed by
Franck Dion

French voices
Bérangère Bonvoisin
Benoit Brionne
Gaëtan Gallier
Patrick Bouchitey

English voices
Kathleen Fee
Richard Dumont
Kent McQuaid
Daniel Brochu

English adaptation, casting and voice direction
Kathleen Fee

Animation
Gilles Cuvelier
Gabriel Jacquet
Samuel Guénolé
Claire Trollé
Studio Traintrain
le studio qui n'a pas peur du quotidien

3D modelling
Vincent Duponchel

Rigging and 3D rendering
Rémy Guttin
Hélène Emain
Jean-François Sarazin
Vanilla Seed

Textures, sets and compositing
Studio Salon Caulaincourt

Intern
Marine Blain

Original music
Pierre Caillet
performed by
Le Quatuor Modigliani
Philippe Bernhard: violin
Loïc Rio: violin
Laurent Marfaing: viola
François Kieffer: cello

Song
Sandrine Gianola

Music recorded and mixed in
Studio Sequenza by **Thomas Vingtrinier**
assisted by **Mélanie Plais**

Sound design
Pierre Yves Drapeau

Foley
Lise Wedlock

Re-recording
Serge Boivin

Digital imaging specialist
Pierre Plouffe (NFB)

Technical co-ordinator
Julie Laperrière (NFB)

Administrator
Diane Régimbald (NFB)

Line producer
Francline Langdeau (NFB)

Executive producer
René Chénier (NFB)

Producers
Franck Dion
Richard Van Den Boom (Papy3D Productions)
Julie Roy (NFB)

A co-production of
Papy3D Productions
the National film Board of Canada
ARTE France
Film Programs Unit
short programs representative **Hélène Vayssières**

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Marine Blain, Vincent Duponchel, Rémy Guttin,
Hélène Emain, Jean-François Sarazin,
Pierre Yves Drapeau, Danièle Gergaud, and
Nadège Dion

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DISTRIBUTION

PAPY3D PRODUCTIONS (International)

- FESTIVALS AND INTERNATIONAL SALES
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