

LGM CINÉMA AND STUDIOCANAL PRESENT

JÉRÉMIE RENIER

# MY WAY

(CLOCLO)

A FILM BY  
FLORENT-EMILIO SIRI

148 MINS

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## SYNOPSIS

'My Way', one of the most famous and beloved songs of all times. Here's the fascinating story of the artist behind this legendary tune, Claude François, a man whose ambition drove him straight to the top, but ultimately led him to a tragic end.

The destiny of Claude François, who died at the age of 39, continues to fascinate fans more than 30 years later. He was a much-loved star and shrewd businessman, great showman and marketing magician, hit machine and magazine publisher, but also family man and ladies' man.

My Way is the portrait of this complex character; always in a hurry, ahead of his time and hungry for love.





## INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR FLORENT-EMILIO SIRI

When did you first hear about the project?

When you are a director, you spend your time looking for subjects that you can connect with. And then sometimes, a subject comes along that is glaringly obvious but is something you'd never imagined. Several years ago, I bumped into the producers Cyril Colbeau-Justin and Jean-Baptiste Dupont, and we decided we'd like to work together. They offered me some films and we talked. Then one day, they told me about MY WAY, and showed me the most amazing documentary about Claude François. I think the most important thing for a director is having something personal to say in their films and having their own way of saying it. So I began by trying to recall the memories I had of Claude François. I have to admit, these were mainly the same clichés we all have – the teenybopper, all that superficial kitchness, the sparkles and spangles. But I did have one childhood memory that really stood out: I must have been around 10 and desperately in love with this girl. I was very unhappy because she was completely ignoring me. And I remembered myself sitting down on the edge of the sidewalk, tears in my eyes, with “Je suis le mal aimé” going around in

my head. The more I hummed it, the more emotional I got. As I thought more about that, I realized that like many people, I know a lot of Claude François songs despite never having bought one of his records. But the real revelation was watching that documentary. I found out about his life and about this really cinematographic character with an amazing destiny, a face filled with contradictions, struck down so young, and someone so far removed from the clichés I mentioned. And I think that the most interesting characters in movies are those who are contradictory. I discovered that with Claude François, you might love him or you might hate him, but there was always a reason for that. For example, my previous film, INTIMATE ENEMIES, showed a character who was anti-torture and who ended up torturing people. Claude François' modernity and his visionary side also appealed to me. He was a pioneer on so many levels. He was the first to create a fan club and the first to get black people on French TV. Even today, there is no other character in the French music industry who can claim such a wide palette of talent as that man with his American showman

personality and his 40 hits; who could sing and dance; who produced his own music as well as that of other artists; who published a magazine for his own publicity and plenty of other things besides.

#### What appealed most to you about the character?

His life as a man. In fact, against all expectations, I identified with him in quite a few areas, and in particular, in terms of his rise in society. When you start with nothing, or with very little, and you finally get to live out your passion, that creates its own anxieties. I lost my mother when I was very young and I know that to become a man, the parental model is very important. When one of them is missing, I think you construct yourself in a different way. It's a terrible trial but bizarrely, it makes you stronger at the same time. I also identified with the artist in him whose first thought was for the audience. And the Italian side to his character, which came from his mother – that that narcissism, professionalism and fussiness along with the seriousness with which one approaches one's work. The thing I found fascinating about him was that despite the spotlight focusing on him, he ended up lost. He didn't like his body, he never really succeeded as a father, and he always remained more of a child. As a fan of soul music, I was struck by his sense of rhythm and by what he brought to French pop, which was in fact inherited from soul. One real revelation for me was the fact that he put his own life in his songs, such as "Comme

d'habitude" and "Le mal aimé". I'd never realized that before. I also never knew that he was born in Egypt. And when you find that out, you realize that he closed the circle with "Alexandrie, Alexandra," his last song which sheds light on quite a few things. He was also a pretty clean-living person who didn't take drugs and who didn't have a problem with alcohol. And that was very interesting because it allowed us to create a character who flies in the face of all those clichés you see in singer biopics, such as self-destruction, which is often used as an over-simplified characterization technique to highlight the difficulties the artist had in their life. Claude François had his own demons, of course, but they were subtler, more subterranean, because he was a man as I said before who had plenty of failings, cracks and neuroses but who desperately tried to stifle them though his desperate need to remain in control. And that's what's fascinating about Claude François – everyone has a clichéd opinion of him when in fact, he was anything but a cliché.

#### You've made social dramas, action films, thrillers and war movies and now you have made a biopic. Do you see every film as a new challenge?

I have made five films in 15 years. When you are in the movie business, you soon realize the significance of time. It takes a long time to make a film. And I always say that I love cinema from A to Z, from Antonioni to Zinnemann, not forgetting



Ophüls and Scorsese. And I particularly love filmmakers like Renoir, Polanski and Truffaut, who explored many very varied genres. But the films I end up making are not determined by my desire to try everything. Above all, what appeals to me when I start a project is the subject. I didn't think, "Right, now I'm going to make a biopic." The project came to me and there were things in it that appealed to me, that I hadn't necessarily explored before, such as the notion of family. That theme alone is something that I feel very involved in now that I have my own family, whereas my first films were more about friendship. Also, MY WAY was a chance to make a film about the fate of a singer from birth to death. That's something I really like in movies, because it allows you to do something fairly epic, whilst remaining at the level of the individual, creating something intimate. A director like Franklin J. Schaffner, who made PAPILLON and PATTON was very good at those kinds of films. To put it simply, I wanted to make a film that had that breadth. And beyond the idea of a biopic, what I really wanted to do was make a musical film about a singer. I made around 30 music videos during the 1990s and I always dreamed of making a musical film.

[You don't make auteur films, you're more about genre movies and yet one senses you have a visceral need to identify with your subject and bring your own experience to it – would you say that's the case?](#)

I don't understand why people compare auteur cinema and genre movies. If you think about it, all movies have a genre. The greatest genre, the western, was born with movies and was subsequently explored from every angle, sometimes even adopting a thriller, action or sci-fi approach. And on the way, these so-called genre movies have produced some great auteurs who took the genre and were able to imprint their own unique style on them. As for me, I humbly try to add something to this legacy and when I tackle a subject, I need to find the element that will allow me to get to the heart of it. If I hadn't managed to identify with Claude François, I think I wouldn't have made the film. You might call it my stance: I talk about myself but through the characters and through the way I reveal their sensibilities.

[Another recurrent aspect of your films is a tendency to throw yourself into imaginary sequences in a very naturalistic way, such as the scene when Claude François plays "My Way" to the ghost of his father. Tell us about that.](#)

Often in my films, I look at things from my characters' points of view because I think that identification and empathy are what

work best in movies. But you can't make a film completely from that perspective. You have to take the time to step back from it and see things from the audience's point of view, watching the person responding. And I love doing that because that way, the times when you really click with the character take on this incredible relief. And in MY WAY, I tried to do that on several different levels: in a realistic way when we are with Claude François and we share his desire for success for example; and also on an imaginary level, to better demonstrate what music evokes for the character. It's about making the audience feel what he might have felt the first time he heard Frank Sinatra's version of his song. Hence that scene which starts with the universal fantasy of wanting recognition, when everyone who has lost a parent in their youth dreams of being able to share their success with them. And that's something I really like doing with the psychology of my characters. Sometimes I go in really close on them and I show them through the tiniest details. Then I take a much wider view of them, getting some perspective. The film that had the most effect on me when I was younger was Hitchcock's REAR WINDOW, because everything is based on people's points of view and there is nothing more cinematographic than that. And I also love those moments in cinema when you can use the image to surprise or destabilize the spectator, and take them into another dimension. There is a scene that illustrates this in Luis Buñuel's DEATH IN THE GARDEN. The characters have been in this kind of jungle for an hour, they are lost and completely surrounded by forest. Then

suddenly, we see a full frame shot of Paris, with the Place de l'Étoile, car horns and engines, and city life going on as usual. Suddenly, the viewer is completely disoriented and wonders what's going on. Then the street sounds start to distort and then they gradually fall silent, the camera pulls back and we see a postcard of Paris in the hand of one of the protagonists who is still lost in the forest. And that's cinema – a constant game between what the audience can see and what they can't.

[MY WAY lasts 148 minutes but it's fast-paced film with lots of music, edited shots and sequence shots – why was that?](#)

One thing that was very important for me was to work to Claude François' rhythm. Julien Rappeneau and I discussed that during the writing process. In order to understand the character, it is very important to get into his rhythm. Julien started by structuring the story with long ellipses, adding sections that were distant to Claude François' life. Then we gradually tightened it up, year on year, month on month and day by day, to obtain that funnel structure that gives a special dynamic and originality to the film. Julien wrote a fantastic screenplay that I could base my directing on. For example, he wrote doing several sequence shots for the 1970s, the most intense and fast-paced period of his life, and placed them at key moments so the audience has to watch in real time, as if they are looking over Claude François' shoulder. Because those are often the completely over-the-top moments. At that





time, he was starting to lose his way. He was earning too much money, there were too many girls hanging around and he was living a fantasy life in which he was all-powerful. Hence the sequence shot when he was chasing his wife by car through the streets of Paris. Or the one when he's driving his car and touching the hands of the hoards of young girls waiting outside his house. Those are the incredible moments that the audience has to be constantly experiencing. In the same way, I organized my edits so that each sequence started with a revelation such as, "Oh, he does concerts!", "Oh, he owns a building!" or "Oh, he runs a magazine!" I didn't want to recount all that in a long progression because once again, we had to follow the rhythm of the character and as we move through the story we see how he's racing ahead, rushing faster and faster, and of course, because of the rhythm he sets himself, he's burning out.

#### Can you tell us about the casting?

I had two conditions that absolutely had to be met in order for me to agree to do this film. Firstly, I wanted to work with scriptwriter Julien Rappeneau whose work I much admired, and secondly, I wanted Jérémie Renier for the lead. This wasn't only for his physical similarity but for his huge talent and capacity for work. I saw what he did with the Dardenne brothers and I was very impressed. Right from my first meetings with him, I realized he's an incredibly hard worker who agreed to learn loads of new things like dance and percussion in order to create his

character, and that he would completely immerse himself in his role with astonishing courage. To do that, he really needed to get under Claude François' skin. As soon as I saw him appear on set in costume, I was delighted because he was already in the role before the clapperboard had even fallen. He spoke like him and moved like him. As for Benoît Magimel, I always wanted him to play Paul Lederman, Claude François' impresario. Benoît is part of my cinema family along with other actors like Marc Barbé who plays Claude's father, and Éric Savin who was in my first film, UNE MINUTE DE SILENCE. But in fact, on this film, even before I had come on board, it was Jérémie Renier who suggested Benoît. They are friends and have a similar relationship to that between Claude François and Lederman: Benoît is a bit like Jérémie's big brother in the movie world. In fact, Benoît has been in all my films. Even in HOSTAGE with Bruce Willis I managed to get him in to do the voice of one of the main characters. For the rest of the casting I was very keen to have fresh talent. I must have seen almost 400 actors and those I chose really knocked me out. Like Monica Scattini, a great Italian actress who is known for her work with Ettore Scola, and who plays Claude François' mother, completely immersing herself in the role. Or there's Ana Girardot, who plays Isabelle, the mother of Claude François' children, and Joséphine Japy who plays France Gall. I wanted to avoid having the audience playing at spotting which well-known actor was playing which well-known character as is often the case in biopics. I didn't want the audience to become disconnected from the film.

You talk about a cinema family for actors but it's also the case for your crew – why do you feel you can only work with people you know?

I've been working with the same people for the past 15 years. Alexandre Desplat does the music, Giovanni Fiore Coltellacci the photography, Olivier Gajan the editing, Éric Tisserand and Germain Boulay the sound, etc. I have always thought of myself as a craftsman, and when you want to be a good craftsman, you first have to be a good apprentice. And that's why, during my years of apprenticeship, I observed the work of the great directors and I read a lot of books about them. And that culture of working in a team was something I inherited from Jean Renoir, a filmmaker about whose work I am extremely passionate. He said that the thing he found hardest was getting his crew together. It's tricky to find the right people but once you've got them together, it's great. Not just because it saves you time but because your partners drive forward your vision, bringing you things that you didn't necessarily expect and which give a boost to what you do.





## INTERVIEW WITH JÉRÉMIE RENIER

You were one of the first people to get on board the Claude François biopic project...

Yes. In fact, the subject was presented to me for the first time 13 years ago for a project that didn't have much to do with the film we ended up making. A few years later, the producer Cyril Colbeau-Justin called me and said he was trying to get a Claude François biopic off the ground and that he wanted to meet me. That was three years ago.

Cyril discussed it with Julien Rappeneau and Florent-Emilio Siri. They wanted to work together and for around 18 months, they worked on developing the project. They gave me a first draft of the screenplay that explored all parts of Claude François' character, his immense popularity but also the more shadowy, mysterious side of his character. And it was this approach to the man and not just the artist that really appealed to me. It would have been easy to have doubts about a film like this – Claude François wasn't an Edith Piaf or a Jacques Brel. Above

all, he's a very public persona with a very populist appeal, that you either love or you hate. But the film really brings everyone together because it's also the story of a man and very quickly, preconceived ideas will give way to some surprises, even a certain respect.

How did you prepare for the role?

We already had a smart and powerful screenplay. All we needed were the means to bring to life a Claude François who would be as close as possible to and who measured up to the real-life man.

Perhaps there are some physical similarities but that's far from being enough to embody such a role. If my resemblance to him is striking then it's mainly down to the very detailed work of the stylists, accessories people, hairdressers and make-up artists who worked on the film. The accessories really helped – I had five different wigs and around 80 tailor-made costumes.



Aside from the purely physical appearance, it's the whole framework of a character that really matters. It's about really getting to grips with all the rest, walking in his steps, working on his gestures, voice and diction – the whole psychological aspect in addition to the physical performance. And he was an incredibly talented dancer! Claude François did a lot of sport, he led a very healthy life, he didn't smoke and he hardly drank apart from a whisky and coke before going on stage. So I had to get into all of that, and get under the skin of a character who was very demanding of himself.

I had never danced nor sung before. I've always done more physical roles. And even with less physical roles, I always connect with a character through the body first. I really like the physical approach. I'm an actor who is more instinctive than cerebral. Florent and I discussed all that and I realized the huge undertaking that was awaiting me, not to mention the physical preparation! So we pushed back the shoot and I embarked up on five months of intense preparation. I had several different coaches – a voice coach, one for drumming and percussion, another for singing, a dance coach and one for the fitness.

They all worked very closely to find the best way to work together. It was fascinating and I really needed it to feed into the role. For example, working on percussion and drumming

really taught me a lot because Claude François was a man who worked at a certain tempo, in his way of speaking, moving, dancing and singing. Each discipline helped with the others. The closer we got to the shoot, the more intense it became. I even surprised myself, doing 1,200 sit-ups every morning! Sometimes it was exhausting but a great deal of coherence came out of it. I acquired more endurance during those five months without which I'd have never been able to manage all those hours of performances. On the shoot, a concert scene took a whole day, doing the same movements and the same dance steps over and over again and sometimes continuing the following morning.

#### What kind of research did you do?

There was a huge amount of material. Claude François made over 400 TV appearances in 15 years, there were loads of books about him and mountains of photographs. The biggest challenge was to have to play a character over time, from the age of 17 until his untimely death at 39. It was captivating to see him evolve through the interviews we had available and to get to know him. I learned so many things about this amazing man and I developed a great respect for him through all of that. I had no idea of the extent to which he participated in the evolution of popular music in France, in his marketing, in his exposure across all media and his PR. He really loved



music and understood the way he had to approach it in order to make a living from it. He was a real pioneer in many areas. I discovered the origins of many songs that one has hummed since childhood without knowing that most of them refer to important or painful times in his life. The film also deals with that.

But the danger when there is so much information available is that you could drown in it. There are so many references you can pick up on or compare that you end up becoming obsessed. Luckily, I soon realized that I couldn't "become" Claude François, even if I might have fantasized about that at some point – like most actors in biopics, probably. I ended up accepting that you can't take on a character without leaving a little of yourself as an actor in it. So the character of Claude François is a perfect blend of what he was and what I am. I think it would be difficult to make someone appealing and sincere on-screen without leaving something of yourself with them.

#### [How did Florent-Emilio Siri direct you?](#)

On set, he generally left me to it, given the preparation we'd done beforehand. Florent is a director who is open to suggestions. Sometimes Benoît Magimel and I improvised and he always gave us a lot of freedom to do that. Freedom that

he could give us because he has such great mastery of the subject. I have rarely encountered a director who knew his subject so well and in such depth. Sometimes it was quite freakish! He told us all these anecdotes with such passion. Florent is a real filmmaker who takes great care of his shots, is able to direct his actors with both conviction and openness and will do more takes when requested, whilst preserving his own vision of a scene. He loves beautiful images and complicated shots but doesn't pursue them to the detriment of the story, which is pretty rare in France! As is the calmness he gives off, especially on a "big" film like MY WAY, where there's not nearly enough time, where you're shooting scenes one after the next. He knows how to ease off the pressure when necessary and relaxing the crew before getting back to work. To sum him up, he puts as much energy into creating a feast for the eyes as he does into constructing a feast for the emotions.

#### [Claude François' sons, Marc and Claude Junior, advised you on the film. Were they worried about how their father would be portrayed?](#)

Unfortunately, they didn't know their father well and their experience of him is mainly down to his image and the anecdotes they have heard. Everyone involved in handling Claude François' image and legacy pays a great deal of attention to what is done, said and written about him. Claude

Junior told me about it. He was worried that his father's image would emerge altered and damaged by this film, and I can totally understand that. After some lengthy discussions, firstly with the scriptwriter and then with Florent and me, we all came to the conclusion that it was important to not just talk about his father the artist and idolized star, but to explore the man he was through the story of his childhood, his weaknesses, his fears and his struggles. The fear of disappointing his fans by revealing Claude François' humanity with everything that brings in terms of weakness was very real for his sons, but it's that angle that makes him all the more touching, interesting and surprising. His long-standing fans will love him all the more and those who were initially resistant to his sequined charms will almost certainly warm to him, will learn a lot about him and will judge him differently.

#### [Did MY WAY stand out from the start as a pivotal film in your career?](#)

It was the first time I've taken on the lead role in such a "major" film and it is certainly the film in which I have invested the most. Yes, there's no doubt it's a very important film for me both because I put so much energy into it and because it's a film that really moved me as a viewer. For it to become a pivotal film, the same magic has to happen with the audience. Moreover, I have always been attracted to roles that offer

me the opportunity for a physical transformation. It's more exciting, it's an additional challenge and it helps bring you out of yourself more easily and become someone else in an even more believable way.

#### [To finish, what is your best memory of the film?](#)

It was the first time we shot a concert scene. We were in Belgium and Michaël Viger, the first assistant director, warned me that the crowd would go mad when I appeared on stage. I walked out there and hundreds of extras were there in front of me, yelling "Cloclo! Cloclo!" The camera wasn't even rolling. And that's when I took this huge charge of energy head on, and felt the adrenalin that only pop stars can feel. It was incredibly powerful and it acts like a brilliant springboard to get you right into the character.



## INTERVIEW WITH SCREENWRITER JULIEN RAPPENEAU

*How would you define the character of Claude François?*

That's impossible to do in one word. He was an incredible perfectionist, a relentlessly hard worker, a man who never stopped looking forward, a true showman with a lifelong passion for music, and a singer with a great head for business. He was also a mass of contradictions; he was authoritative, he had a fierce temper and he drove people mad, yet people were drawn to him and he was deeply fragile. He was often gripped by doubt, always fearful of losing everything and constantly searching for love. I'd say he was someone who worked very hard at constructing his public persona, and that persona was very close to who he really was, but was also the result of a great deal of thought about what he believed he should be: a pop star. There is a part of the film that I really like and which says a lot, I think. Claude François' driver asks him why he always runs to his car, and the singer answers, "Imagine if people saw me dawdling in the street, if they saw I was just like everyone else - where would the dream be then?" Claude François wanted to give his public a dream and to do that, he

had to always be a star, always look impeccable, and always be in control of his image, and he had to do that virtually 24/7. Of course that has a bearing on your life.

*How did you get involved in the project?*

The producers from LGM, Cyril Colbeau-Justin and Jean-Baptiste Dupont called me. I'd worked for them before and they said they were making a film about Claude François and they wanted me to write it. They were already thinking about Florent-Emilio Siri for director and I had always admired his work greatly. Then they told me that once the story was written, they were going to offer the lead to Jérémie Renier. I took some time out for research because I didn't know that much about Claude François' life. I remembered his death, which had shocked everyone. I was seven years old at the time and it's one of my first memories of an event that everyone was talking about. But aside from a couple of facts and his biggest



hits, I didn't know anything about the singer's life. So I watched a program about him made by Mireille Dumas with archive footage and recent interviews with people who knew him. I was struck by his energy, by the range of things he initiated and by the complexity of his character. I immediately realized he was a great character to portray on film and had a very powerful story to tell. And naturally I was very excited at the idea of having Jérémie Renier play him, if he agreed. And because I already wanted to work with Florent-Emilio Siri, I very soon agreed to be part of the adventure.

#### How was your first meeting with Florent-Emilio Siri?

It was great. We had lunch together along with the producers and Cyril Hauguel (Artistic Director at LGM), and I think we immediately felt we wanted to make the same film and that we shared the same cinematographic perspective. Florent and I wanted to tackle all of the character's complexity and contradictions, and stay as true as possible to his psychology. It was not about writing an idolizing biography or a creating a caricature. We wanted it to be both intimate and spectacular.

We thought it was important so show the less pleasant sides of his character but at the same time, to reveal his weaknesses and failings and to show what it was that made him so appealing. Firstly, because that's how we felt it should be, and also because the viewer had to engage with the character. After that, I started doing research. And in parallel, I met two or three times with Florent to talk about the films we liked, to discuss a potential universe for the movie and mainly, to get to know one another. At this stage, I still didn't know what type of biopic the film was going to be. But pretty quickly, rather than concentrating on a precise period in the singer's life, I decided that we had to take in his whole life from start to finish, because Claude François had a romantic destiny that made a perfect story with real breadth. As I structured the screenplay, I shared certain anecdotes that I'd gleaned with Florent, to see what he thought. But he wasn't that into it because I think he didn't want me to give anything away by telling him snippets of the story. He preferred to wait for the first version of the screenplay to discover it. It was great to work with Florent. He's a really hard worker, he has this incredible precision and rigor in his directing. I was very impressed because there came a point where he had total possession of the film, both in terms of the narrative and the shooting script. The result was that there were no superfluous shots – everything was thought out. And to crown it all, visually the film is very beautiful. I really hope we'll have the chance to work together again.





There is a contradiction in the biopic genre between the reality one draws inspiration from and the fiction one creates. What difficulties does that bring about in terms of writing the screenplay?

There are several difficulties when writing a film like this. One of them is managing to deal with a life in all its breadth whilst preserving the rhythm and audience's interest. Another is finding the right distance between biographical truth and fiction. We always said we wanted to make a real movie and not a documentary. But of course, you must always keep in mind that you're dealing with real people and you can't just say what you like. Nonetheless, you gradually have to detach yourself from the purely biographical aspect to take a few liberties in the narration to serve the story, the rhythm, the understanding or the emotion. Of course, in terms of people's private lives, you have to invent scenes and conversations between people. But the important thing is staying true to the idea you have of how these real people might have been feeling, in the way you personally have empathized with and understood them. However, you can't take liberties in terms of the facts, by inventing a key event that didn't actually happen, for example. That would be deceitful. Undeniably, it takes time during the writing process to find the right balance between fiction and biographical reality.

How did you go about the task?

I started by reading everything that had been written about Claude François, watching shows, reading documentation and meeting people who knew him, both professionally and personally. It was like being a journalist and researching someone for a big story. I also went with Florent to meet Fabien Lecoivre, Claude François' biographer, to ask him a whole load of questions about the man. Once I'd digested all this material and worked out the key thrusts of the story, decided on the facts that I wanted to include in the screenplay and selected the supporting characters, I started to construct the text and set about writing the first draft. Once that was finished, Florent read it and then we reworked it together, to add certain things that were missing, to get rid of others and to hone the script. The bulk of the film was there but Florent had to get into it and integrate it into his narrative, familiarize himself with the character and his contradictions and find the space to develop his direction.

The music is omnipresent, both in the soundtrack and through the narrative. Was it there right from the start of the writing process?

Of course. You can't make a film about Claude François and ignore his songs or avoid dealing with the showman that he was. Whether you like his songs or not, you still have to



recognize his contribution to French pop, mainly through his culture of English-language music and his incredible sense of rhythm. Right from the start, Florent and I wanted to make a film where music truly had its own place. I listened to all of his work while I wrote – over 300 songs, I think. That was also a good way to get to know the character and find the film's tempo. My neighbors must have thought the building had been invaded by a totally obsessive Claude François maniac! Right from the writing phase, the choice of songs and the way they accompanied each scene was established. It involved selecting songs depending on their importance in the singer's career, either because they expressed emotions or because they talked about things that served the narration. Of course, Florent and I then discussed the choice of songs according to his own tastes and what he wanted to include in the film.

#### What was your main aim as screenwriter?

Right from the start, I thought it would be great to be able to write a film that would appeal to anyone, even someone who had never heard of Claude François before, who'd never heard a single one of his songs. The destiny, career and depth of the character should be sufficiently powerful to bring the viewer on board. We just had to tie all that together. Furthermore, by choosing to tell the story of his whole life, we knew that the film would probably last around two hours and twenty minutes. I tried to ensure the screenplay had a good rhythm and that it

was structured like a real story and not just a stack of sketches or a succession of vignettes to illustrate Claude François' life. So it was clear that the tempo of the film would be a crescendo, mainly in the part that deals with the 1970s when he became really highly charged, when it became increasingly difficult to manage what he had constructed, both in terms of his private and his public life. My aim was to define the major thrusts around which the film and the character could be constructed. You could call that the structure of the film. The tense storyline surrounding his father, who died having refused to speak to his son because he chose to become a musician; the major role of his mother, whom one might think was the most important woman in his life; and finally the way in which Claude François meticulously constructed his public image are the key themes I chose to pursue during the writing process.

#### Did Claude François' sons have any say in the screenplay?

It was very clear right from the start that Florent and I were going to make the film that we wanted to make. As I said before, we owed it to ourselves not to betray reality. But Claude François' family, and his sons in particular, also owed it to themselves to respect their father's memory, which is completely understandable. They read the script but they didn't comment on it, apart from to add certain biographical details. They could have raised certain elements that they weren't happy with, on the understanding that we would have

explained our point of view and why it was important to include them to evoke certain aspects of the character. But it was clear for both sides, that the film wouldn't be a glorification of the life of Claude François, nor would it be a caricature, or a documentary. It's a movie; our interpretation of what Claude François was and what he experienced.







## INTERVIEW WITH CLAUDE FRANÇOIS JR & MARC FRANÇOIS

How did you come into contact with the producers?

The first contact was indirect. In March 2008, Julie – one of the last remaining “Clodettes” [Claude Francois’ dancers] – came to see us at a gathering we’d organized for them and she said that her son-in-law worked in the movies and that we shouldn’t be surprised if he got in touch with us soon, but that we shouldn’t say anything to anyone. Then, when a few weeks later, the son-in-law in question, Cyril Colbeau-Justin got in touch with us, we acted completely surprised at his invitation. Right from the start, Cyril and his associate, Jean-Baptiste Dupont, believed that in our father’s story, there was this incredible destiny, a larger-than-life personality and that a big part of his life was relatively unknown, all of which offered the potential for making a big movie in the style of RAY. They were very convincing and proposed that we develop the project along with them. We knew a little of their work since 36th PRECINCT – a film we loved – and the idea of collaborating with this new generation of French cinema was very exciting.

Tell us about how the project progressed. Did you have anything to say about the screenplay?

Before the screenplay was even written, we defined a way of working together that would associate us with the project, which we wanted to be involved in from A to Z. So we started by sending them a bible with the key events in his life, the key characters, locations and influences, etc. Then we organized some meetings with those key people who were close to him so that Julien Rappeneau and Florent-Emilio Siri could absorb their stories and feelings. They also met with Fabien Lecoivre who has a real knowledge of our father’s life and the biggest collection of photographs of him, and who showed them thousands of photographs so they could get a really good idea of the atmosphere, the sets, the costumes and his physical evolution over time. Then there were a few months of silence before we received the first version of the screenplay. It was then that we realized LGM, Cyril and Jean-Baptiste’s company, had made the right choices and that we were on the right track. In all, we had six meetings about the script. It

was very constructive and we learned a lot because we had a shared desire but somewhat different imperatives. They taught us how to integrate the rules of writing for the cinema and we thank Julien and Florent for having the patience to listen to us and understand what we were trying to say. We were very keen for the story to be true and faithful to real events. We were absolutely determined that his personality should be portrayed in a balanced way. It can't have been easy for them because to them, we were just a couple of stakeholders with no professional justification to judge their work, much less to make suggestions. It wasn't always easy but in the end, that was a good thing. It was important for us to have those exchanges of opinion, and in some ways, it was comforting to see them defending their artistic vision. At every stage, it was all about respect, about openness and about objectivity. Moreover, even our very last discussions with Florent at the end of the editing process were constructive. We were lucky that directors are all-powerful in France.

[Were you ever afraid your father's image would be tarnished by this project?](#)

No. Let's be clear here – there was never any question of making a film that focused on the darker aspects of his character. And in the same way, there would have been no point making a eulogy to him either because that would have made him lifeless and boring. His life was made up from trials and traumas, especially in emotional terms, which played a critical role in defining his personality. It was absolutely key to put his anxieties and weaknesses into perspective in order to better understand and better accept the few flaws he had in order to make him more human, more fragile and more appealing, which often turned out to be the driving force of his career. Because this is also a story about turning the tables, and it's also a success story. He was a man stuck between a past he was trying to escape and death which he feared and misunderstood. He lived his life to the full, through his passion.

[What did you think when you saw the film, particularly when you saw Jérémie Renier as your father?](#)

Florent put together a team of the best people who were very involved and extremely enthusiastic about the project. It was great and also very reassuring to see the level of rigor and the pleasure the team experienced on the shoot. And the result is amazing! Jérémie Renier is an actor who is heaven-sent. He





had all the right qualities for the role, especially that little fire in his eyes, that interior intensity that was essential to play our father. We've followed his career for several years and now he is the perfect age to play the character from the age of 17 to 39. But beyond the physical connection, aged just 30, he has acquired a wealth of experience with over 30 films to his name. He's a real worker who relies on his instincts. This role is a great boost for his career which would have taken off anyway, sooner or later. But in terms of this project, we'll say it again – he was truly God-given!

[Deep down, why did you eventually agree to greenlight this project?](#)

Having witnessed the wave of biopics over the past few years, we knew that there was the potential in our father's story to make a great movie. But it needed partners who shared our vision and who would be able to put together the means to make it. When Cyril Colbeau-Justin and Jean-Baptiste Dupont told us what they wanted to do, we realized we were on to something serious. When we looked at what Florent-Emilio Siri had made, we understood that he was one of those rare French directors who would be able to make the dream come true. And when Jérémie came on board, we were off and running.

(Claude François Junior)

Deep down, I wanted to make this film for two reasons. The first was to give our father the chance to tell his story on the big screen for future generations, and primarily, for my children and my children's children. The second reason was to give him the chance to cross the borders of the French language and reach the audience he was about to break into when he died.

(Marc François)

Our father has a place in France, a unique place in the audiovisual world. I don't know where this film will take us but what I do know is that thanks to everyone's hard work, it will allow us to show the world who he was without the slightest embarrassment about what the film says or about its quality.



# CAST

CLAUDE FRANÇOIS  
PAUL LEDERMAN  
CHOUFFA FRANÇOIS  
JOSETTE FRANÇOIS  
ISABELLE FORET  
FRANCE GALL  
JANETTE  
AIMÉ FRANÇOIS  
JEAN-JACQUES TILCHE  
KATHALYN  
SOFIA  
TICKY HOLGADO  
CHRISTIAN MORISE  
FRANCK SINATRA  
SYLVIE MATHURIN  
JEAN-PIERRE BOURTAYRE  
NICOLE GRUYER  
GROS MINET  
JERRY  
HASSAN  
ALAIN DOMINIQUE PERRIN  
ERIC, JOSETTE'S HUSBAND  
VLINÉ BUGGY  
JACQUES REVAUX

JÉRÉMIE RENIER  
BENOÎT MAGIMEL  
MONICA SCATTINI  
SABRINA SEYVECOU  
ANA GIRARDOT  
JOSÉPHINE JAPY  
MAUD JUREZ  
MARC BARBÉ  
ÉRIC SAVIN  
SOPHIE MEISTER  
JANICKE ASKEVOLD  
ÉDOUARD GIARD  
JÉRÉMY CHARBONNEL  
ROBERT KNEPPER  
ALISON WHEELER  
ALBAN AUMARD  
FLEUR LISE HEUET  
BRUNO FLENDER  
SHANE VIVES-ATSARA WOODWARD  
IDWAR ISKANDAR  
THOMAS JOUANNET  
BERTRAND NADLER  
LÉTITIA COLOMBANI  
BERTRAND CONSTANT



# CREW

DIRECTOR FLORENT-EMILIO SIRI

SCREENPLAY AND DIALOG  
ADAPTATION JULIEN RAPPENEAU  
JULIEN RAPPENEAU  
AND FLORENT-EMILIO SIRI

PRODUCED BY CYRIL COLBEAU-JUSTIN  
JEAN-BAPTISTE DUPONT

ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS CLAUDE FRANÇOIS JR.  
MARC FRANÇOIS

LITERARY & BIOGRAPHICAL CONSULTANT  
ORIGINAL MUSIC FABIEN LECOEUVRE  
ALEXANDRE DESPLAT

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY GIOVANNI FIORE-COLTELLACCI

SET DESIGN PHILIPPE CHIFFRE

EDITING OLIVIER GAJAN

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER DAVID GIORDANO

PRODUCTION MANAGER MARTIN JAUBERT

FIRST ASSISTANT DIRECTOR MICHAEL VIGER

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR DOMINIQUE CARRARA

SOUND ANTOINE DEFLANDRE  
GERMAIN BOULAY  
SERGE ROUQUAIROL  
ÉRIC TISSERAND  
WILLIAMS SCHMIT

COSTUMES MIMI LEMPICKA

HAIRSTYLING GÉRALD PORTENART

MAKE-UP  
CASTING KAATJE VAN DAMME  
ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS OLIVIER CARBONE  
MAYA HARIRI

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS BELGIUM

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RIAD BAHOUN  
WALID MONEIMNE  
ADRIAN POLITOWSKI  
GILLES WATERKEYN  
SYLVAIN GOLDBERG  
SERGE DE POUQUES

LGM CINÉMA  
FLÈCHE PRODUCTIONS  
24C PROD ED  
STUDIOCANAL  
TF1 FILMS PRODUCTION  
ROCKWORLD  
JRW ENTERTAINMENT  
EMILIO FILMS  
UFILM BELGACOM  
UFUND  
CANAL+CINÉ+AND TF1  
A PLUS IMAGE 3  
SOFICA COFICUP - BACKUP FILMS  
THE WALLONIA REGION  
AND LE FONDS D'ACTION SACEM

LGM

TF1

emilio

u

24C

ROCKWORLD

image

NEZUS

UP

TF1

JRW

A PLUS

COFICUP

WALLONIA

SACEM

STUDIOCANAL

CLAUDE FRANÇOIS SOLD 67 MILLION RECORDS.  
MY WAY, THE ADAPTATION OF HIS HIT *COMME D'HABITUDE*,  
IS THE MOST FAMOUS SONG IN THE WORLD.  
MORE THAN 2,000 VERSIONS HAVE BEEN RECORDED.

