

PAN-EUROPEENNE PRESENTS

MICHÈLE LAROQUE

OSCAR
AND THE LADY IN PINK

A FILM BY
ERIC-EMMANUEL SCHMITT

AMIR IN THE ROLE OF OSCAR
AMIRA CASAR

WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF
MYLÈNE DEMONGEOT & MAX VON SYDOW

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PRESS KIT, PHOTOS AND FILMOGRAPHIES AVAILABLE FOR DOWNLOAD FROM WWW.OSCARETLADAMEROSE.COM

SYNOPSIS

Oscar, a 10-year-old boy, is staying in the children's hospital. Neither the doctors nor his parents dare speak the truth about his illness. Only Rose, the grumpy woman who delivers his pizzas, talks straight to him. To take his mind off things, Rose suggests playing a game with Oscar: They make believe that each day from now on counts for 10 years. Through this, she offers him a whole life in the space of a few days. To encourage him to open up, she also suggests that he should write to God. In his letters, Oscar admits to his pain, his worries, and talks of his joys, his first love, the passing of time. A unique friendship grows between Oscar and Rose. Neither of them have any idea just how much this complicity will change their destiny.

INTERVIEW WITH ERIC-EMMANUEL SCHMITT

What first made you want to work in cinema?

Perhaps it comes from the fact that as a child, in my family, cinema was something I had all to myself. Neither my parents nor my sister watched films, especially not those screened in the film club series on television. So I savored my film-buff hours alone, during which time I discovered Lubitsch, Max Ophüls, Cocteau, Sirk, and cycles of Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich films. It was always the directing that interested me in film; how to tell a story and at the same time make it gripping.

As a result I dreamt of making films, and then I forgot all about it! I forgot because I took up another form of expression: Writing. I wrote first for the theatre, then novels. I remained a film-lover as someone who went to the movies a lot, and it was through a sort of misunderstanding that I fell into it when ODETTE TOULEMONDE came along. People put faith in me because I'd had a string of successes in bookshops and on stage. So on this, my first film, I knew I had to learn the ropes of this new craft: Working as a team, the techniques – even though I'd mugged up on that a bit –, directing actors, editing, and so on. It was a huge stress. I had to prove that they'd been right to put faith in me.

Where did the idea to adapt OSCAR AND THE LADY IN PINK come from? Was it a reaction to the previous adaptations of your books, or was it simply what you wanted?

It was pure desire, and not a wish to correct anything or give any lessons. No way. I had the feeling that I was destined to make OSCAR AND THE LADY IN PINK for a long time but I didn't want to take the risk on it as a first film. I first had to get my hand in on an easier subject, something light and simply charming, which I tried to do with ODETTE TOULEMONDE.

What memories do you have of creating OSCAR AND THE LADY IN PINK?

OSCAR was an unexpected and runaway success. Unexpected because it deals with a taboo subject; that of a child's illness, and inexorably, his death. In writing it – for an internal necessity – I said to myself: “If there's a book of mine that the public could turn down, it's this one.” Yet it was the complete opposite. OSCAR AND THE LADY IN PINK totally changed my career. I became a popular author. This tale went to people's hearts. The first to read it were doctors who bought it by the dozen to give to their personnel in clinics or to certain patients. Unusually, this non-medical book received an award from the Academy of Medicine, the Hamburger prize, which considered that OSCAR AND THE LADY IN PINK contributed to the humanization of the hospital and helped understand the position of the sick person. The second path of its success was with the young. Children of Oscar's age, 10 years old, started to read it and recommend it to each other, then gave it to their parents and grand-parents. As a result, the book became trans-generational. It stayed for 160 weeks on the best-seller list. And it has been translated into some 40 languages and is being continually reprinted.

You say: “I had some images in my head at the time of writing the novel.” Did they come back to you during the adaptation process?

Yes. The whole hospital environment, the doctor, the children, the running away. I had completely visualized all that from the first draft, whilst thinking: “In a film, these sequences will allow us to move out of the hospital.”

Was the adaptation easy to write?

It required a long period of maturing. What’s more, in the beginning, when producers and filmmakers were asking me for rights to the book, I told them it couldn’t be adapted. In all sincerity. I told them: “You can’t show a child suffering; if you can see him, you’ll no longer hear what he’s saying.”

Did you pose yourself these questions during the writing of the film?

Obviously! Since I’d spent years telling others it was un-adaptable, I asked myself these questions and, gradually, I resolved the difficulties of the adaptation. What completely made my mind up was when I had the idea that the film would tell not only Oscar’s story, but that of the lady in pink too, whereas the book only deals with the child’s point of view. The film would then inspire the same basic emotions as the written version, but would add something more: The trajectory of the lady in pink. How does someone manage going to a children’s hospital every day? How can one bear the unbearable? How does one find within oneself the strength to help others, to believe in life when it’s not going to last? I didn’t want the lady in pink to be a saint: She’s alive, she has a sexuality, she has financial problems, just like everyone. And she’s not “making up for” an error that she reproaches herself for. The child will reveal her to herself. Their love story is double-edged: Rose changes Oscar’s life, Oscar changes Rose’s life. This kid makes her discover that she has a gift for reflection, for accompanying, that she has within her an unimagined store of generosity. In fact, she is reborn. Meanwhile she helps him to die. When I realized that, I said to myself it’s worth doing.

One of the main difficulties was finding the right actors. At what stage did you think of Michèle Laroque?

Michèle was an obvious choice even before starting writing. She has that acidic, sharp, irritable, gruff side that I saw in the character, but at the same time with a certain elegance, a real tenderness and humanity. I thought she has both the thorns and the petals necessary to play a rose.

What about Amir in the role of Oscar? How did you find him?

My greatest concern was not being able to find the child. As we moved ahead with preparation, I would repeat: “How do you expect me to make a film without knowing who has the lead role. I don’t even know if he exists!” I first saw Amir on cassette, in a still shot. I remember saying to myself: “He’d better be good, because physically, he’s exactly right.” And as soon as he opened his mouth – his timbre, his voice, his intelligence, his joyfulness – I was convinced right away. I was amazed. And I was just the first: Everyone who worked on the film was staggered. Michèle was completely under his charm. Max von Sydow, a man of great stature, said: “He’s one of the best actors I’ve met in my whole life.” Amir, as his name suggests, is a prince!

You brought together a very eclectic cast for this film. His talent alone justifies your choice, but why Max von Sydow?

He's part of one of my greatest cinematic memories. In the film club cycles that I mentioned earlier, there were the films of Bergman. Bergman loved cinema because, as he used to say: "It's the theatre of faces." I wanted to make films to get closer to faces. And among them there is Max von Sydow's – who furthermore nearly acted in one of my plays. He carries in him the pain and powerlessness of Dr Düsseldorf, the true and beautiful human weakness in the physique of a giant. He fitted into the logic of my tale. So I contacted him, and found myself talking to one of my readers. Max had read OSCAR AND THE LADY IN PINK, and The Gospel According to Pilate. There was an immediate bond between us.

Where did you get the idea for Amira Casar in the role of head nurse?

The way the role was written you could think it required a woman of 55, somewhat ravaged and frustrated. But I envisioned a pretty woman, a sort of "duty first" person. So I thought of Amira, whose beauty is a joy to behold on screen, and she loves composite characters. She and I created together this female character, who was at first functional, vaguely enamored with Dr Düsseldorf, and unable to understand how this dope Rose can have a better rapport than her with the patients.

Mylène Demongeot also belongs to the cinema of your childhood, in the Fantomas films.

Yes. I thought she could play Michèle Laroque's mother and I wrote the role for her. A mother who is stuck in childhood, a bit cutesy, a grown-up fairy. She allows us to understand Rose's resistance to any sentimentality. What they have in common is that they're both gruff, and have a lot more heart than they like to show. They protect themselves from their emotions, from life, from love. But there are moments when you can't protect yourself. Mylène, as a woman and as an actor, understands that.

Was shooting the scenes between Oscar and Rose difficult?

It was extremely taxing, emotionally. But we were really eager to get on set every morning. I noticed that, on the difficult scenes, it was often the children who put us at our ease. The day when I showed Amir his final costume, in white, he said to me: "Great! My pajamas for dying!" It's we, the adults who often complicate things. Children are happy to be acting, telling a good story, playing characters, expressing feelings, and so on. Why do we lose this carefree approach on the pretext of maturity?

At the editing stage, was it hard to find the right emotional balance?

Getting it right is my obsession. The precision of dialogue, precision in the acting, the right balance of emotion is what I'm after at all costs. But that is something subjective, not like hitting the right note in music. What a job! Constantly trying to seek something imponderable... To come back to the editing, I tried to leave room for the spectator to feel his own emotions. Michel Legrand helped me a lot. As he first watched the edit, he asked me to allow him the time to experience his feelings, to write the music accordingly. Michel Legrand and I have been friends for several years, and for OSCAR, it was he that pushed me, the writer, to trust in images without dialogues – in other words, to trust the music.

Where you anxious about filming Oscar's death?

It was terrible. Max was distraught. Michèle, each time we cut, would give in to the emotions that she was holding back during the take. As for me, for once I stayed riveted to my monitor because if I talked to anyone on the set I started to cry. The technicians stared at the ceiling, their eyes red. We ended up laughing about it, naturally: With Michèle, we called these moments "onion days"! Everyone on the shoot, from the children to the crew, wanted to tell this story, and that meant dealing with a lot of emotional peaks. For me, it was harsh; I'm used to feeling moved all alone when I write.

Here, with cinema, I discovered the beauty of sharing these emotions.

Did the child in you find a kind of wondrousness in OSCAR AND THE LADY IN PINK?

The child in me took an infinite pleasure in filming the wrestling matches! In diving into the burlesque and embracing it. In fact, it was Oscar who filmed those scenes. When medicine can no longer save you, you can still be saved by humor and imagination.

ERIC-EMMANUEL SCHMITT

Born in 1960, graduate of the Ecole Normale Supérieure, doctorate in philosophy, Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt has become one of the most widely-read novelists and playwrights, both in France and abroad. His books have been translated into 40 languages and his plays are regularly staged in some 50 countries. All his works are published by Albin Michel.

Film

2009 OSCAR AND THE LADY IN PINK
2007 ODETTE TOULEMONDE

Theatre

2008 LA TECTONIQUE DES SENTIMENTS
2006 MY LIFE WITH MOZART
2004 L'EVANGILE SELON PILATE
LA NUIT DES OLIVIERS
2003 PETITS CRIMES CONJUGAUX
OSCAR AND THE LADY IN PINK
1999 HÔTEL DES DEUX MONDES
MONSIEUR IBRAHIM AND THE FLOWERS OF THE KORAN
1998 FREDERICK OU LE BOULEVARD DU CRIME
1997 LE LIBERTIN
MILAREPA
1996 ENIGMA VARIATIONS
1995 GOLDEN JOE
1993 LE VISITEUR
Molière Awards for Best Newcomer, Best Playwright
and Best Show in an Independent Theater
1991 LA NUIT DE VALOGNÈS
Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt was awarded the "Grand Prix du Théâtre
de l'Académie Française" in 2001 for his oeuvre.

Literature

2009 THE SUMO WRESTLER WHO COULD NOT GAIN WEIGHT
2008 ULYSSE FROM BAGDAD
2007 LA REVEUSE D'OSTENDE
2006 ODETTE TOULEMONDE ET AUTRES HISTOIRES
2005 MY LIFE WITH MOZART
2004 NOAH'S CHILD
2002 LORSQUE J'ETAIS UNE OEUVRE D'ART
OSCAR AND THE LADY IN PINK
2001 THE ALTERNATIVE HYPOTHESIS
MONSIEUR IBRAHIM ET LES FLEURS DU CORAN
Grand Prix du Public à Liebzig
2000 THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO PILATE
1997 MILAREPA
1994 LA SECTE DES EGOÏSTES

Essay

1997 DIDEROT OR THE PHILOSOPHY OF SEDUCTION

INTERVIEW WITH MICHÈLE LAROQUE

Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt says he wrote the adaptation of OSCAR AND THE LADY IN PINK for you. Did you know that?

Yes. Eric-Emmanuel suggested I play the character even before he'd written the adaptation. He said it was the obvious choice for him, so I then had total faith in him. Since I'd read the book, I agreed without even knowing exactly what the character was going to become, apart from the fact that he wanted to make her younger. The chance to act such a role is one of the best gifts you can give to an actor.

Did you have any apprehension when you came to read the screenplay?

No. I had no doubt. There are so many magical things that have happened since the beginning on this film. What's more, I had the same impression when I saw it for the first time. Oscar is sublime, like something out of this world.

How did you approach the character of the lady in pink?

Like a curious child addressing another child. The first time she meets Oscar, he tells her he spent the morning in a cupboard and she replies: "And was it nice?" No adult would react like that. It's very important to keep the part of childhood which is within us – it puts things in perspective and allows us to go through life in an extremely playful and happy way.

When you have to play a character confronted with such tough situations, is it easy to get right, and not go too far?

As long as you feel some real emotions, and it's sincere, you can't go wrong. That's true with any kind of emotion, whether it's laughter or tears. I'm a comedy actor and all comedy actors have a great deal of reserve, so there's no worry about going too far with emotions or of wallowing in it. What's more, Eric-Emmanuel has an approach to the subject which is very soothing and light, airy even.

How did the shoot unfold?

I didn't feel like I had a lot to do. Everything was very clear. In general, when you play a character that has to feel strong emotions, you have to work hard to go and find them. Here, I spent my time trying to rein them in.

You are starting to play characters, like the pink lady, who are more open to emotions.

It's true. I'm certainly less afraid these days to be confronted with my hypersensitivity and I manage better. But I couldn't have done it aged 20 or 30. Fortunately, it's only now that I'm being offered these roles which allow me to express that side. It's no doubt something that emanates from within me.

Having already acted with a child in Alain Berliner's MY LIFE IN PINK, did that help things?

Yes, and I trusted Eric-Emmanuel. I knew that he would choose a child who is sublime, out of the ordinary. Little Amir is so smart!

What was your first meeting with Amir like?

We did a little test. The scene with the choir where he introduces me to all the other children, and he was perfect right away. When he was asked to do something different, he did it immediately. He understood everything. I just had to reply, to react, and it was spot on. It's easy to work opposite him: You don't act, you just be! It's a real love story with Amir. There's something very strong between us, even if we don't see each other much now. I

know that making this film was a very intense experience for me, not only as an actor. It's the human adventure that we shared which stays with me when I see OSCAR AND THE LADY IN PINK.

What kind of a director is Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt?

He's very confident, very calm, very gentle. He's also very precise: He knows exactly what he wants, but at the same time, he knows how to listen and take on ideas. I was talking about it to the set designer, Jean-Jacques Gernolle, who said to me: "It's incredible, the amount of room he gave us after all." It's his subject, he knows it inside out, he wrote this book, he dreamed of filming it and yet he had no fear, he didn't transmit any stress to us, no tension. When on occasions the dialogue didn't quite work, Eric-Emmanuel explained to us admirably how to put things back on track, in a way few directors are capable of.

Tell us about working with Max von Sydow.

It was a fantastic encounter, and a great honor to work with him. His regard towards others is truly exceptional and generous. And we had a lot of fun. When we were filming, Max would say to me: "It's fabulous, Michèle, knowing that we are making an extraordinary film. And you should always remember this, because it's very rare." When Max von Sydow tells you that, with the stellar career he has had, you grow wings! He never told me directly what he thought of my character and the scenes we had together, but he told Eric-Emmanuel who passed it on, and that encouraged me. Even if I don't have any doubts, I remain full of humility towards my craft. On set, I give everything, but sometimes I know I screw up certain things, I'm not always happy with my work. Then a little encouragement obviously does me good, and all the more so when it comes from Max von Sydow.

Do you come back down to earth when you find yourself acting a scene with a dying child?

In fact, no. Since the dialogue was extremely soothing, that lightens everything, it removes the fears that one might have. What Rose says to that child is also a way of reassuring herself. That wisdom means that it doesn't slip into pathos, which is the idea people have of death and illness. It's an extremely reassuring film.

What about Mylène Demongeot? Is she a reassuring mother?

She is magnificent! It was a pleasure watching her on set. Seeing her in the role, you understand why life is complicated for the lady in pink. And at the same time, she made her character funny, a child. She's the most childish of all of us.

Did the child within you have fun playing a wrestler?

Yes, of course! It was like a comic strip. The ex-director of Cirque du Soleil worked on those scenes with marvelous results.

But wasn't it, after all, the most difficult part because of the technical constraints?

That's true. We were shut inside a studio in Canada, it was long, it was -30°C outside! But on the other hand, it was fun wearing those costumes, and working with some extraordinary acrobats. I found that great.

What is your reaction having seen the film?

Encountering a character like this is unique in the life of an actor. OSCAR AND THE LADY IN PINK is a film that carries a soothing, lighthearted message, which takes away your fears and leaves you happy. And if there's one thing which makes me happy in life in general, it's passing on a message like that.

MICHÈLE LAROQUE - ROSE

Selective filmography

2009 LIBRE ECHANGE by Serge Gisquière
PREMIÈRE by Marc Quentin
OSCAR AND THE LADY IN PINK by Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt
DANS TES BRAS by Hubert Gillet
2008 A WIDOW AT LAST by Isabelle Mergault
2007 MA VOISINE DU DESSOUS by Eddie O'flaherty
2006 LA MAISON DU BONHEUR by Dany Boon
HEY GOOD LOOKING! by Lisa Azuelos
2005 L'ANNIVERSAIRE by Diane Kurys
2004 PEDALE DURE by Gabriel Aghion
MALABAR PRINCESS by Gilles Legrand
2001 J'AI FAIM ! by Florence Quentin
THE CLOSET by Francis Veber
2000 MARRY ME by Harriet Marin
1999 DOGGY BAG by Frédéric Comtet
1998 SERIAL LOVER by James Huth

FALLAIT PAS !... by Gérard Jugnot
DEATH IN THERAPY by Francis Girod
PEDALE DOUCE by Gabriel Aghion
1995 NELLY & MONSIEUR ARNAUD by Claude Sautet
MADAME PETLET'S TRUE STORY by Camille de Casabianca
1994 NOBODY LOVES ME by Marion Vernoux
LIFE'S LITTLE TREASURES by Michel Deville
EVERY MAN FOR YOURSELF by Jean-Michel Ribes
1993 LOUIS, THE CHILD KING by Roger Planchon
TANGO by Patrice Leconte
1992 CRISIS-GO-'ROUND by Coline Serreau
MAX AND JEREMY by Claire Devers
1991 WONDERFUL TIMES... by Gérard Jugnot
1990 THE HAIRDRESSER'S HUSBAND by Patrice Leconte

1997 MY LIFE IN PINK by Alain Berliner
1996 THE BEST JOB IN THE WORLD by Gérard Lauzier
LES AVEUX DE L'INNOCENT by Jean-Pierre Améris

CAST

Rose
Oscar
Mme Gommette
Lily
Dr Düsseldorf
Oscar's mom
Oscar's dad
Victor
L'annonceur
Peggy Blue
Peggy's dad
Peggy's mom
Pop Corn
Einstein
Bacon

Michèle Laroque
Amir
Amira Casar
Mylène Demongeot
Max von Sydow
Constance Dolle
Jérôme Kircher
Thierry Neuvic
Benoît Brière
Mathilde Goffart
Bruno Metzger
Catherine Israel
Eric Remi
Jonas Wertz
Martin Nissen

CREW

Director	Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt
Screenplay	Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt
Based on his novel	<i>Oscar and the Lady in Pink</i> published by Albin Michel
Photography	Virginie Saint-Martin
Editing	Philippe Bourgueil
Sound	Patrick Rousseau, Louis Gignac
Sound designer	Marie-Claude Gagné
Assistant director	Thierry Guérinel
Set design	Jean-Jacques Gernolle
Costumes	Jean-Daniel Vuillermoz
Make-up	Emmanuelle Velghe
Hairdressing	José Luis Casas
Casting	Olivier Carbone, Gerda Diddens, Mickaël Bier
Set photography	Kris Dewitte, Nathalie Eno, Jan Thijs
Making of	Jules Eerdenkens
Original music	Michel Legrand
Executive producer France	Jean-Yves Asselin
Executive producer Belgium	Climax Films – Olivier Rausin
Associate producer	Nathalie Gastaldo
Produced by	Philippe Godeau
Coproduced by	Olivier Rausin, Bruno Metzger, Denise Robert, Daniel Louis, Arlette zylberberg

A FRANCE – BELGIUM - CANADA COPRODUCTION
PAN-EUROPEENNE, STUDIOCANAL, OSCAR FILMS, TF1 FILMS PRODUCTION, CINEMAGINAIRE, RTBF (Belgian Television)

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MUSIC

Musical supervision: Valérie Lindon for Ré Flexe Music

Original music composed, arranged and conducted by Michel Legrand

Recorded and mixed at the Guillaume Tell studios by Roland Guillotel

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LE CANON DES ECOLIERS

Words by Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt

Music by Michel Legrand

TREPAK (RUSSIAN DANCE)

Extract from THE NUTCRACKER OP.71 by Piotr Ilitch Tchaikovsky
Performed by the Kirov Orchestra, St Petersburg (directed by Valery Gergiev)

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WALTZ OF THE SNOWFLAKES

Extract from THE NUTCRACKER OP.71 by Piotr Ilitch Tchaikovsky
Performed by the Kirov Orchestra, St Petersburg (directed by Valery Gergiev)

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HAPPY BIRTHDAY THIS DAY

(Frédéric Vercheval)

© & © Frédéric Vercheval

LA BERCEUSE D'OSCAR

Words by Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt

Music by Michel Legrand

DANCE OF THE REEDS

Extract from THE NUTCRACKER OP.71 by Piotr Ilitch Tchaikovsky

Arrangements: Frédéric Vercheval

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L'ENTREE DE CASSE NOISETTE

(Frédéric Vercheval)

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