



goingsouth

MK2 and Ad Vitam Production presents



going south

A Sébastien Lifshitz Film

CAST

Sam YANNICK RENIER
Léa LÉA SEYDOUX
The mother NICOLE GARCIA
Mathieu THEO FRILET
Jeremie PIERRE PERRIER

Cinematography
Editor
Original Music

CLAIRE MATHON
STEPHANIE MAHET
JOHN PARISH
MARIE MODIANO
JOCELYN POOK
AD VITAM PRODUCTION
CANAL +
CINECINEMA

CREW

Director SEBASTIEN LIFSHITZ
Screenplay STEPHANE BOUQUET
VINCENT POYMIRO
SEBASTIEN LIFSHITZ

Producers ALEXANDRA HENOCHSBERG
JUDITH NORA
GREGORY GAJOS

Production Manager ARTHUR HALLEREAU
BENJAMIN LANLARD

Production Company
With the participation of

And the support of

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REGION HAUTE NORMANDIE
SOFICINEMA 4
AD VITAM DISTRIBUTION
CNC ECRITURE, AVANCE SUR
RECETTE APRES REALISATION
MEDIA DEVELOPPEMENT

PLEIN SUD • Runtime 90 MINUTES • Film format 35 MM • Aspect ratio CINEMASCOPE / 2 : 35 • Sound DOLBY DTS SR

SYNOPSIS

It is summer and 27 year-old Sam is at the wheel of his Ford, heading due south. Sitting in the backseat are Mathieu and Léa, a brother and sister he met by chance on the road. Léa is beautiful, sexy and very feminine. She loves men. So does Mathieu.

On their long journey, far from highways and major roads, making their way to Spain, they will learn to know, confront, and love one another. But Sam has a secret, an old wound that alienates him from the others a little more each day. Having been separated from his mother at a young age, this trip has one sole purpose for him: finding her.



INTERVIEW WITH SÉBASTIEN LIFSHITZ

What is the starting point in GOING SOUTH?

It is a simple, almost minimal story. Sam receives a letter from his mother, who he hasn't seen for twenty years. She informs him that she has left the psychiatric hospital where she was being treated. She says she is cured and would like to see him again. She now lives in Spain. For Sam, this letter is a shock to his system. It reawakens his traumatic past and all his childhood ghosts. It also reawakens his desire for revenge. His anger towards his mother has remained intact ever since he first held her responsible for the destruction of his family and his father's death. GOING SOUTH is, first and foremost, the story of a family. A family that has been lost and destroyed, but whose ruins continue to haunt Sam, the eldest son.

Was this linear narrative of a present-tense journey to the South, interrupted by the brutal eruption of past memories in the form of flashbacks, already present when you were writing the script?

The film is faithful to the screenplay, which was divided into twelve chapters, twelve "stations", for every time Sam stopped. The story brought us all the way to Spain from Normandy – where Sam is from – and each chapter opened with two or three memories before returning to its road-movie form.

But, contrary to most road movies, almost all the encounters occur before the film starts...

At the beginning of the film, the group has already been formed. There is never the idea that the film brings them together. With the exception of Jérémie, but the scene in the supermarket is extremely quick. Right from the first shot, we know he'll be part of the group. It's only a matter of waiting to see how Léa gets him to come. It's all quite clear right from the start.

The trip's destination remains a mystery for a long time. It is revealed to us in fragments.

The film plays with the codes of the Western. It is built around a secretive, hardened character who doesn't speak and who sets out to seek revenge. Is the mission he gives himself a good thing? Probably not. The further he travels, the more memories resurface. They pile up and back him into a corner. And these memories show us where he's from, where he's going and what he will do. Not unlike the hero of the western, Sam is a loner, a drifter, a man whose life has broken him. The type of man whose face very quickly becomes a mask. It is cold and impassive – but its beauty fascinates and mesmerizes everyone he meets, man or woman. Moreover, when I met Yannick Renier, I found he possessed the false airs of a young Clint Eastwood with his terse body and piercing eyes. I loved the idea of creating an opposition between Sam as an adult, an emotionless character, and his childhood memories, which show him to be more vulnerable and moving. I built the character using these two distinct times, like a collage. He embodies the present in a violent way and, in the past, on the contrary, he is like an open body, extremely fragile, a victim.

Was the choice of an American car also, to a certain degree, another code of the Western genre?

It is the hero's horse and, it's true, it makes reference to an American aesthetic. In any case, the film is not at all anchored in social realism. The outside world, questions related to money – how they live, how they earn their living – are never asked. But I wanted to give Sam a certain economic credibility, a character with no money, driving a jalopy, and departing from the North where you can still find cars like the one in the film. Furthermore, in older cars, the interiors are often dark and can bring out the pale skin of the characters' faces.

It's quite simply more "cinegenic". We are in a French story, with French characters and landscapes but, using Cinemascope, I tried to affirm the beauty of the bodies, the old Ford, or an object like a revolver, to use – almost naively – the codes of American cinema. I wanted to create a hybrid form, an improbable encounter between a French story and "a defined American aesthetic". French cinema often privileges a discourse. The actors are there to convey a text. They are less present as bodies than as speaking persons. What interested me was the opposite: first and foremost, the presence of bodies and faces. Eroticizing all the bodies in order to question desire, my own desire for them.

Although this is an expedition linking Normandy and Spain, the trips are interiorized, as if the outside world didn't exist.

I deliberately avoided settings that were too contemporary in order to render the journey more timeless. Just the roads, empty plots of land, a beach and the Ford station wagon. And the presence of elements like water, fire and the wind which surround the characters and exacerbate the lyricism of the images. The story is about the characters' inner movements, and the settings are used to amplify their innermost moods and emotions. For me, these aesthetic choices reinforce Sam's internal drama and give it a more tragic dimension. Nothing in this story justifies moving towards some sort of social realism. Society is not the issue in GOING SOUTH.

The world has been evacuated, and so has the group, eventually. They are just solitudes travelling together – a car full of frustrated desires.

The idea of the group was there to confront the main character with everything he isn't. These young people who travel with him possess a freedom, an insolence, a lust for life that he has lost. Sam is a prisoner of his own story. He lives like a recluse in his past, incapable of giving himself up to others. In the

end, this trio – these hitchhikers he should never have picked up – forces him to protect himself from his self-destruction, already in motion. Even if his only aspiration is to be alone, this trip terrifies him. Mathieu, one of the boys in the group, wants nothing more than to bring him back to life, towards love. But Sam is heading straight towards death. The only thing he thinks about is revenge, perhaps even killing. This is his only obsession. Except at the beach. This is a suspended moment, a possible Eden. But that only lasts one night. And, in the end, it only makes the task he must accomplish all the worse.

Sam kicks them out rather brutally, as if nothing else were possible before finding his mother.

This is a scene of sacrifice: he renounces the possibility of happiness in the name of the mission he's set out for himself. When he meets these young people he isn't living in the moment. He is incapable of "living".

Each of these characters seem to be hiding a wound of some sort.

Léa is in a state of permanent dissatisfaction. Her experience of being pregnant forces her to question her relationship with others: is she capable of taking care of something other than herself, is she even capable of loving someone? She doesn't seem to be sure. She struggles with all this, as if she wanted to cast off this incomplete part of herself. On the other end of the spectrum, there's Mathieu who is a romantic obsessed with his own feelings. Even if the world knocks him down, he still re-affirms his desire, no matter what. And this obstinacy eventually touches Sam. Jérémie is the most neutral and balanced character. But the film's center of gravity is Sam and the others who only reinforce who he is through their differences.

There is the present, the past, and, between the two, the video: the film in the film.

This was used as a way of better characterizing Mathieu and playing with the distance he sometimes puts between himself and the group. It was also another way of manifesting his obsession with Sam. His feelings for the young man are nothing but frustrated desire, so at least the camera allows him to possess him a little more.

How was the group created for the film?

Every character's body had to express the fundamental traits of who he/she was – a sort of immediate incarnation. Yannick Renier is a charismatic person. His physique had this mix of beauty and brutality that was ideal for his character. Léa Seydoux also has this nervous and terse side, the physique of a Lolita, which we highlighted through her clothing and acting style. Théo Frilet, a bit like St-Exupéry's "Little Prince", with his angel face, immediately embodied the romantic side of his character. Pierre Perrier, he's the "earthy" boy, well-built, the surfer. They all represent a certain cliché of today's youth. But, little by little, something deeper emerges out of these figures. In my previous film, *Wild Side*, this movement was the same. I started with three marginal archetypes – a transsexual prostitute, a clandestine Russian immigrant, and a North African junkie – in order to progressively allow each individual character to be revealed. Three portraits disconnected from all social references.

Is this idea that a body is the immediate incarnation of a role also the reason behind choosing Nicole Garcia to play the mother?

I really like Nicole Garcia and her scary, gravelly voice. She knows how to act with a certain perverse quality. Moreover, she's often been used for this kind of role: the troubled character. I found it interesting to confront her with the role of a broken, violent, estranged mother. Since there weren't many scenes with her, I needed something instant. I couldn't afford to progressively expose this character.

The memories are hard and cruel; they're Sam's memories. The only memories he has are violent ones, full of the same violence that is pushing him to take this trip and find her again. Nicole would sometimes tell me, "But this mother is nothing more than an embodiment of destruction and violence." She was right, that's all she is because that's all her son can remember. Obviously, she is something else, but this is the only thing he wants to remember.

We recognize a few recurrent obsessions in your work, including in this film.

In GOING SOUTH, I dwell on themes that are dear to me, like the past flooding into the present, or the destruction of a family. But what is different this time around is that I immediately distanced myself from those margins of society I had filmed in Open Bodies and in Wild Side. There is something less trashy in this group of young people. To a certain degree, they're more banal. I wanted to approach more normative characters, even if their insolence and violence also gave them a certain singularity. For me, everything always comes back to the question of forgiveness and the liberation of the self. Only, my hero is a morbid and violent character who is incapable of moving forward towards forgiving and forgetting.

You've said that the credits in a film bore you. And yet, the credits in GOING SOUTH are very striking.

There are some magnificent credit sequences in cinema which are practically works of art in themselves. The ones in GOING SOUTH are very basic. It has a 1960s, New Wave element to it. It immediately gives a sort of energy and aggressiveness to the film with its big, yellow letters on top of this "pop art" image. It is clear from the very beginning that things are amplified here. The title cards do not last very long, Léa's dance is extremely suggestive, and the tone is biting. The film's eroticism, the beauty of the characters' bodies... everything is there to grab us.

SÉBASTIEN LIFSHITZ writer / director

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|------|---|------|---|
| 2009 | GOING SOUTH (original title: "Plein Sud") | 1999 | COLD LANDS (tv, original title: "Les Terres froides") |
| 2004 | WILD SIDE | 1998 | OPEN BODIES (original title: "Les Corps ouverts") |
| 2001 | THE CROSSING (original title: "La Traversée") | 1996 | IL FAUT QUE JE L'AIME |
| 2000 | COME UNDONE (original title: "Presque rien") | | |



LÉA SEYDOUX



“Léa is lost, very instinctive, wild, and slightly borderline. You never know where you stand with her. There is something about her that’s not quite right, but this mess is who she is.”

Léa in GOING SOUTH is interpreted by Léa Seydoux. Born on July 1st 1985 in Paris, her first role in a film was as an elf, at the age of six. After graduating from high school, a friend suggested she sign up for acting lessons. Very quickly, she was noticed in a music video for French singer Raphaël, directed by Olivier Dahan, and was won her first speaking part in the 2006 film, *Mes copines*, by Sylvie Ayme. She was selected to participate in Talents Cannes 2007, and continued to make noteworthy appearances in a Levi’s commercial and an American Apparel ad campaign. She was cast in Catherine Breillat’s *Une vieille maîtresse*, 13 French Street by Jean-Pierre Mocky, and *De la guerre* by Bertrand Bonello. But it is her modern interpretation of the *Princesse de Clèves*, in Christophe Honoré’s *The Beautiful Person*, that has made her the most important

French actress of her generation. For this role, she was nominated for the Most Promising Young Actress award at the 2008 César Awards and won the 2009 Trophée Chopard, a prize given to young, up-and-coming actors at the Cannes Film Festival. She was then cast in one of the leading parts in *Lourdes* by Jessica Hausner, which was selected for the 66th Venice Film Festival.

In the summer of 2008, Léa met Sébastien Lifshitz.

“When I read the script for GOING SOUTH, I was intrigued by the character because I felt I could do something very different, without really knowing what. Later, Sébastien and I spoke about her, as if she was a girl we both knew, a mutual friend. That’s how I found this character.”

Léa, the only girl in the film, then met the three male leads and began to work with them on the choreography of the scenes.

“The good thing about Sébastien is that he’s searching with us. He is like my character: a real force of nature.”

When production was completed, Léa went on to be picked out by Quentin Tarantino to act in *Inglourious Basterds* and then by Ridley Scott to play Princess Isabella in his version of *Robin Hood*. While in Hollywood, Léa described GOING SOUTH as a challenging cinematic journey where she felt of her element.

“I really felt like I was giving birth to a character. I felt very different from this girl. At times, I even found her vulgar. I was no longer thinking when I was acting. It was all intuition. When you’re out in the middle of nature, you rediscover primordial sensations. I’ve never been in a film where I was in such close contact with nature. I constantly had the feeling of simply being there.”



YANNICK RENIER



“Sam is constantly haunted by his past. He has given himself a quest and he believes that completing it will free him from his childhood ghosts. He, therefore, charges headfirst without paying any attention to the people around him because he is incapable of loving. Mathieu, his sister, and Jérémie will turn him off the path he is on.”

Yannick Renier is Sam. Born in Brussels, March 29th 1975, he studied Dramatic Arts at the Royal Conservatory of Brussels from 1993 to 1996 and graduated top of his class. Starting in 1995, he made his theatre debut in *Le procès d’Oscar Wilde* by Bernard Mouffe. This was followed by a long period in theatre, where his talent quickly drew attention. In 1997, Yannick won the award for Most Promising Young Actor for his role in Racine’s *Phèdre*. In 2005, he reached an even wider audience with his role in the Belgian TV series, *Septième ciel* Belgique. But in 2007, he burst onto the big screen in Joachim Lafosse’s *Private Property*, going on to collaborate with the director once more in his next film, *Élève libre*.

This was followed up by performances in *Love Songs* by Christophe Honoré, *Coupable* by Laetitia Masson, and *Born in 68* by Olivier Ducastel and Jacques Martineau. Martineau’s next film, *L’Arbre et la Forêt* will reunite the two.

Last year, Yannick met Sébastien Lifshitz.

“At a café in Paris, we talked a little about this and that. I wasn’t really sure if he was offering me the part or if it was just a meeting. He asked me to read the screenplay and to call him back. Which is what I did less than two hours later. Right from my first reading, I liked the brutal, very frank, raw quality of the script. I very quickly grew attached to Sam and to the little group of people he encounters.”

At that stage, a long period of preparation began for the director and his protagonist.

“He’s a perfectionist, and that’s something I like. He’s always trying to look for precision in his actors. Before we began shooting, he talked to me at length about how he saw Sam’s character – the harshness in his voice and in the way he looks at people. I then had the time to dream about it and, once I was on the set, we understood each other most of the time without having to say much.”

Since the production of *GOING SOUTH*, Yannick Renier has played in *Welcome* by Philippe Loiret and will soon be starring in *Une petite zone de turbulences* by Alfred Lot. He will also be acting in his step-brother’s (Jérémie Renier) feature film debut, *Les Carnivores et les Edentés*, which he also co-wrote.

During production, Yannick Renier made the same inward journey as his character, Sam.

“I’ve been transformed by the complicity between myself and the people with whom I shared this adventure. Our journey in this jealousy with Sébastien and the crew, between Bordeaux and Spain... The car was dying and, like kids, we were shooting scenes in total freedom. The line between fiction and reality had virtually disappeared.”



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