

JEAN DUJARDIN

THOMAS LANGMANN  
PRÉSENTE

BERENICE BEJO



# the ARTIST

UN FILM DE  
MICHEL HAZANAVICIUS

REINE

Studio 37

LA CLASSE  
MAGASIN

JD PROD

Film

CANAL+

cinéma

DUJARDIN

BERENICE BEJO



THOMAS LANGMANN

presents

JEAN DUJARDIN

BÉRÉNICE BÉJO

# The ARTIST

A film by

**MICHEL HAZANAVICIUS**

**JOHN GOODMAN**

**JAMES CROMWELL**

**PENELOPE ANN MILLER**

**MISSI PYLE**

Produced by **Thomas Langmann**

a La Petite Reine - Studio 37 - La Classe Américaine - JD Prod - France3 Cinéma - Jouror Production - uFilms coproduction

Written and directed by **Michel Hazanavicius**

Director of Photography **Guillaume Schiffman, AFC**

Original Music **Ludovic Bource**

Casting - **Heidi Levitt, c.s.A**

Production Designer **Laurence Bennett**

Costume Designer **Mark Bridges**

Editors **Anne-Sophie Bion, Michel Hazanavicius**

Associate Producer **Emmanuel Montamat**

Executive Producers **Daniel Delume, Antoine De Cazotte, Richard Middleton**



SÉLECTION OFFICIELLE  
**COMPÉTITION**  
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

**Running time : 1h40**

## THE PR CONTACT

All Suites Residence

12, rue Latour Maubourg,

Email: [festival@theprcontact.com](mailto:festival@theprcontact.com)

Phil SYMES Cell: + 33 (0)6 22 11 95 25

Ronaldo MOURAO Cell: + 33 (0)6 24 66 88 22

Virginia GARCIA Cell: + 33 (0)6 24 56 85 43

Cristina SIBALDI Cell: + 33 (0)6 21 76 95 28

**International Sales**

**WILDBUNCH**

**Cannes SALES OFFICE**

4 La Croisette – 1st floor

Phone: +33 (0) 04 93 99 43 13

Fax: +33 (0) 04 93 68 98 01

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### Hollywood 1927.

George Valentin is a very successful silent movie star.

The arrival of talking pictures will mark the end of his career.

Peppy Miller, a young woman extra, becomes a major movie star.





*Interview with*  
**MICHEL HAZANAVICIUS**  
*Director*



**What did you want to do originally? A silent film? A black and white film? Or both?**

Right at the beginning, seven or eight years ago, I fantasized about making a silent film. Probably because the great mythical directors I admire most all come from silent cinema... Hitchcock, Lang, Ford, Lubitsch, Murnau, Billy Wilder (as screenwriter)... But mainly because as a director it makes you face your responsibilities, it makes you tell the story in a very special way. It's not up to the screenwriter, nor to the actors to tell the story - it really is up to the director. In this genre everything is in the image, in the organisation of the signals you're sending to the audience. And it's an emotional cinema, it's sensorial; the fact that you don't go through a text brings you back to a basic way of telling a story that only works on the feelings you have created. It's a fascinating way to work. I thought it would be a magnificent challenge and that if I could manage it, it would be very rewarding. If I said it was a fantasy more than a desire, it's because each time I mentioned it.

I'd only get an amused reaction - no one took this seriously. Then the success of the two "OSS" films changed the way people reacted to: "I want to make a silent film." It wasn't perceived in quite the same way. But above all, Thomas Langmann is not a producer like the others. He didn't only take what I said seriously, I saw in his eyes that he believed in it. It's thanks to him that this film became possible. It was no longer a fantasy, but a project. I could start working. I told him I would look for a story, that as soon as I'd found it and it seemed to work, I'd come back and see him...

**When did you go from a silent film to a black and white silent film with cinema for its theme?**

When I started to think about what this silent film would be, I had two possibilities. Either pure entertainment, a spy film in the vein of SPIES by Fritz Lang - which inspired Hergé to create Tintin in my opinion; or a film dealing with more serious issues, probably involving more work. This was more appealing to me, because as a result we would move away from "OSS": I wanted to work with Jean again but didn't want to end up doing the same things. I didn't want this project to be perceived as a whim, or a gimmick, so I started looking for a story that could fit into this format.

Jean-Claude Grumberg, screenwriter and playwright, but also a friend of my parents, had told me the story of how one day, while he was talking to a producer about a silent movie actor who had been wiped out by the arrival of the talkies, the producer had replied: "That's wonderful, but the '20s, too expensive, couldn't it be set in the '50s?"

I remembered this story and started to work in that direction, to look into that episode of the arrival of the talkies. I don't make films to reproduce reality, I'm not a naturalistic director. What I love is to create a show and for people to enjoy it and be aware that's what it is, a show. I am interested in the stylization of reality, the possibility of playing with codes. That how this idea of a film set in the Hollywood of the late '20s and early '30s, in black and white, was formed. I wrote very quickly, in four months. I don't think I've ever written a screenplay so quickly. My starting point, linked with the desire to work once more with Jean (Dujardin) and Bérénice (Bejo), was: a silent movie actor who doesn't want to hear anything about the



talkies. I circled around this character but as soon as I got the idea of this young starlet and the crossed destinies, everything fell into place and made sense, even the themes - pride, fame, vanity... An old-fashion vision of love, very pure, that also held with the form. Indeed in my opinion, the silent movies that have not aged much, those that have withstood the test of time, even if I don't want to compare myself to them, are the melodramas. The genre is ideal for this. Simple love stories that are accomplished films, even masterpieces. Moreover, if this could encourage audiences to watch these films again... In any case they gave me the desire to go in this direction, everything being lighter, more optimistic, more joyfuf despite everything...

**Do you write a silent movie the same way you write a talking picture?**

Yes and no. Yes because I didn't alter the way I work, the only difference being that at a given point, contrarily to what I normally do, I didn't write down the dialogues. And no because, I didn't stop during writing to ask myself pure directorial questions: how to tell this story knowing it is not possible to insert intertitles every twenty seconds? If there are too many new developments, if the range is too wide, too many characters, a complex plot, you just can't do it visually. That was the complexity. I watched and re-watched many silent films to try to assimilate the rules of the form, to understand what I was going to be confronted with. I quickly observed that as soon as the story starts to grow unclear, you lose interest. It's an unforgiving format, particularly today. People didn't have too many points of reference at that time, they took the films that were given to them. But habits have changed today, codes have changed. The

challenge was to determine the acting range; after that it was quite simple. What was also complicated was to keep telling myself that this project was worth it, that it could be completed. The film goes so much against current trends, almost anachronistic. We were right in the middle of the AVATAR craze, in full 3D mania. It was as if I was at the whell of a 2CV with Formula One cars roaring around me!

**Didn't that add to your excitement?**

Yes, but with time, over one and a half years, you can't escape questioning, having doubts. Thankfully, what prevails most of the time, is the excitement of doing something special, of being different, and gradually seeing the film becoming a possibility, then a reality, and the amused expressions turning into interested ones...

**What are the films that nourished your imagination and your work the most during the writing of THE ARTIST?**

There were many. Murnau's films, particularly SUNRISE, which was considered to be the most beautiful film in the history of cinema for a long time, and CITY GIRL, which I tend to prefer... Frank Borzage's films, which are in the same vein even though they've dated more. Murnau is timeless, modern even. Moreover William Fox, the founder of Fox, encouraged Borzage and John Ford to watch Murnau at work. Fox had brought Murnau to America because he was "the best director in the world." After this experience, Ford made FOUR SONS, a magnificent film that really resembles a Murnau film, like one director replying to another. It was very moving. At first I watched anything that I could find, the Germans, the Russians, the Americans, the British, the French, but after all, it's the American silent cinema that nourished me the most, because it suits





me more and it is the one that imposed its reality right away... a closeness to the characters, the story... THE CROWD by King Vidor is a moving example. Chaplin's films also. But Chaplin is so far above the rest that I was wary of him, because I think that what is true for him is true only for him. His work is unique. Then there are Eric Von Stroheim's films. One of my favourite is by Tod Browning, THE UNKNOWN, with Lon Chaney. There are also some absolutely incredible Fritz Lang films. They nourished me tremendously, even if they have nothing in common with the film I made. It's films like these that I showed the actors and the crew, more as references than as models of course.

### Did you also do much research into Hollywood in the '20s and '30s?

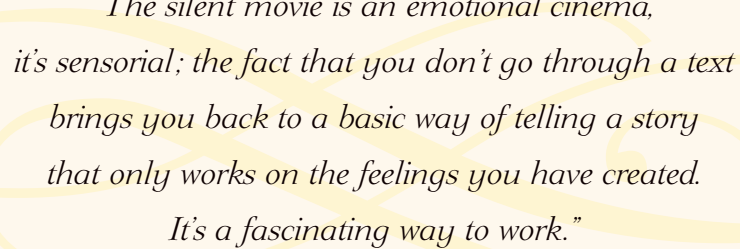
An enormous amount. I read a lot of books - actors' and directors' biographies, but not exclusively. Research is very important. Not so much for historical accuracy, not to be realistic, because this is not at all what I'm after, but as a springboard to the imaginary, like foundations for a house.

I needed to conduct all this research. To feed the story, the context, the characters - in THE ARTIST there are echoes of Douglas Fairbanks, Gloria Swanson, Joan Crawford, and distant echoes of Greta Garbo and John Gilbert's story. So that I would know what I was talking about, so that I would be able to answer all the questions that people were going to ask me during the preparation and the shoot. Things are quite simple when you are on your own in front of your computer, but when you are faced with 300 people asking you hundreds of questions, you have to know what you're talking about a little bit. Set designers, costume designers, props people, they will also do their own

research and ask you questions. The more research you have done, the more you can play with it all.

The "OSS" films are pastiches, whereas THE ARTIST, even if it gives a few winks – notably about anything to do with words and silence – is in the main a beautiful and poignant love story. Did you find the tone of the film quickly?

Indeed, this is not a pastiche - except when we see George Valentin's silent films, but I didn't keep a lot of that. I didn't want to do something ironical like "OSS", a parody, if only because I thought we'd run out of breath rather quickly. All the same I have a hard time not considering this film as a continuation of my work. Sure, it's a different type of story - I don't plan on making pastiche movies all my life, or to always be the guy who makes you laugh at the dinner table - but it's a way of exploring the language of cinema and playing with it. It's good to respond to our desires when we have them. Again, this is to do with the format. When you watch Chaplin's films, you tend to remember the comic parts but the stories are pure melodramas, where young girls are not only orphans but also blind! The funny things are always in counterpoint to a poignant story. This is the vein that seems to me to suit the film I wanted to make. Besides, regardless of my wanting to make a silent film, I've wanted to do a melodrama for a long time, if only because I love to watch them. I wrote with that in mind but, at first, I was slightly nervous of making this world mine. Until the day I no longer even asked myself that question. As for the winks you mentioned, I very much liked the idea of this guy's issues, caught between silence and sound, and playing with all that. I pushed it to the extreme in the nightmare scene...



*“The silent movie is an emotional cinema,  
it's sensorial; the fact that you don't go through a text  
brings you back to a basic way of telling a story  
that only works on the feelings you have created.  
It's a fascinating way to work.”*

**Michel Hazanavicius**





In any case, you can't remake films exactly the way they were made 90 years ago. Audiences have been exposed to so much; they are sharper, quicker and a lot smarter. It's exciting to stimulate them. And the films I like the most are often films that are part of a genre where, inside that genre, the directors wander around and dare to make what they want while respecting the genre throughout, without betraying the promise.

### **Is it easy to gauge?**

No, it is not easy because you never know if you've succeeded until you've seen the whole film. In fact, this balance is achieved during editing. So I followed my idea, started with the writing, I didn't close the door on what could happen during shooting and later, I made the definitive choice in the edit. But in order to have the choice during editing you have to have different possibilities.

### **Did you write with Jean Dujardin and Bérénice Béjo in mind?**

Yes, but also keeping in mind the fact they could have refused, particularly with a project like this. Anyway, when I gave Jean the screenplay I wasn't sure of anything at all. I told him: "I'd like it if you'd do it but don't feel you have to! If you don't feel like it, that's no problem." He read it very quickly in the train that was taking him to the south of France and called me when he got there to tell me he loved it and wanted to be part of it!

### **It's the first time you've had him play an emotional part...**

Yes. I really love him when he acts like Vittorio Gassman, extroverted, solar-powered, and brilliant. My idea was to start from there and bring him into

something more introverted, more enclosed...

### **What made you think they were the ideal actors for the characters of this story?**

For a start, Jean is an actor who is as good in close ups, with his facial expressions, as he is in long shots, with his body language. Few actors are good with both. Jean is. He also has a timeless face, a face that can easily be "vintage". Bérénice also has that quality. We're happy to accept the idea that Hollywood is going to choose her and make a big star out of her. She exudes freshness, positivity, goodness, almost too much! These characters are in a way close to who they really are, in any case, to the idea I have of them. George Valentin and Peppy Miller are, in a way, Jean and Bérénice fantasized by me!

### **Was shooting in Hollywood another fantasy?**

Of course! Here again we have to give thanks to Thomas Langmann. If he had said to me: "OK for the film but we'll shoot it in the Ukraine!" I would have gone to the Ukraine to shoot it. It's he who did everything within his power to allow us to shoot it where it should be shot, where the action took place.

**And this was not only shooting a film that talks about Hollywood in the '20s and '30s in Hollywood, but right in the heart of Hollywood, in the streets of Warner and Paramount.**

For sure, for someone who loves cinema, scouting locations for this film seemed like a fantastic package tour! We visited all the studios. We went to Chaplin's offices, the studios where he shot GOLD RUSH, CITY LIGHTS, etc. We visited the offices of Harry Cohn, Mack Sennett, Douglas



Fairbanks' studios: it was incredible... Peppy's house in the film, that's Mary Pickford's house, the bed where George Valentin wakes up, that's Mary Pickford's bed... We were in truly mythical places... Then, once you start shooting, you're working and the fantasy fades somehow, inevitably, even if sometimes you have moments of clarity when you think: "We're in Hollywood!" And to top it all with Dujardin. Jeannot in Hollywood! In a French film!

### **What was the reaction of the Hollywood community?**

We felt they were curious and touched. First because they have a slightly schizophrenic relationship with French cinema and, because in this famous debate between art and industry, France holds a unique place. Then because of the fact that this project was very different: a silent film, in black and white, about Hollywood... We had lots of visitors, tons of phone calls, we were told many stories that didn't go back to the silent era but... The father of James Cromwell (who plays Valentin's butler) moved to Hollywood in 1926 and before becoming a director, wrote intertitles for silent films. That we were talking about their memories, the memories that make their lives, really touched them. And for people involved in cinema, making black and white images today, it's not insignificant. Quickly, everybody realised there was great work for all the trades: for the set designers, costume designers, make-up artists, electricians...

**Your crew included some American actors - James Cromwell, John Goodman, etc - and many American collaborators - set designer, costume designer, the 1st AD, etc. How did you choose them?**

I had castings organised, I chose certain people but there also were people who chose the film... Things are different in the US for the sets. There's a production manager who oversees the visual part and picks the set designer. I hired Larry Bennett first. But I already had a very precise idea of what I wanted and the locations we had picked helped. Mark Bridges is Paul Thomas Anderson's costume designer. A great reference! He is really good and impressive to watch at work. At first we started pre-production with a very small team - three or four people - that became gradually larger as we were getting closer to shooting. In the end, Hollywood is very small, and today, mostly TV series are shot there. Everybody found out about this quickly, and got very excited. Soon we saw people arriving who wanted to work with us, like Jim Planette, the gaffer. The gaffer is a very important job in the system; he really is the DP's right arm. People from the camera department offered to make special lenses for us, old projectors were pulled out of cupboards... The casting director told me that Malcolm McDowell wanted to meet me. I only had a very small part to offer him, almost an extra, and he was delighted! With John Goodman, things moved very quickly. I sent him the screenplay, he read it and a few days later it took three minutes to settle in his agent's office! With James Cromwell, I was the one who was being interviewed. He liked the screenplay and the project and asked to meet me. We met, he asked me questions for an hour and a half, precise questions asked in a precise way, we started to understand each other little by little, to appreciate











each other and in the end he said: "OK, I'll be your lady!"

**Did Jean Dujardin and Bérénice Béjo have real lines, even if we can't hear them?**

Sometimes they did, sometimes they didn't. They asked for some all the way through prep but I didn't want to give them any. I thought: "They're actors, they're going to work on their lines," but, on this project, the last thing I wanted was for them to work on text. In the end, they worked on other things, if only tap dancing. We didn't do a classic reading, of course, but we talked a lot. About the characters, the situations, the sequence shots, the style of acting, etc.. I tried to reassure them that they would not have to play "silent" and that if I had got the screenplay right, they wouldn't have to act in a special way. Bérénice, who has followed the project since day one, probably had more points of reference, but for them, shooting this film was a very particular exercise. It's as if they no longer had any points of reference. I know Jean well, once he has placed his voice, he's in character right away. He couldn't do that here. For most actors, the voice is a great asset. Suddenly, they had to make do without it. They didn't need to worry if they were "in key" or not. In the same way, they had to leave the text aside. Text is an essential aid to convey feelings, but here, everything had to be conveyed visually, with no help from words, breath, pauses, tone, all the variations actors normally use... I think that what they had to do was very difficult, even more so than usual. Their acting takes meaning really only in the frame, in a shot that will be edited later. Thankfully, Jean, Bérénice and I trust each other completely.

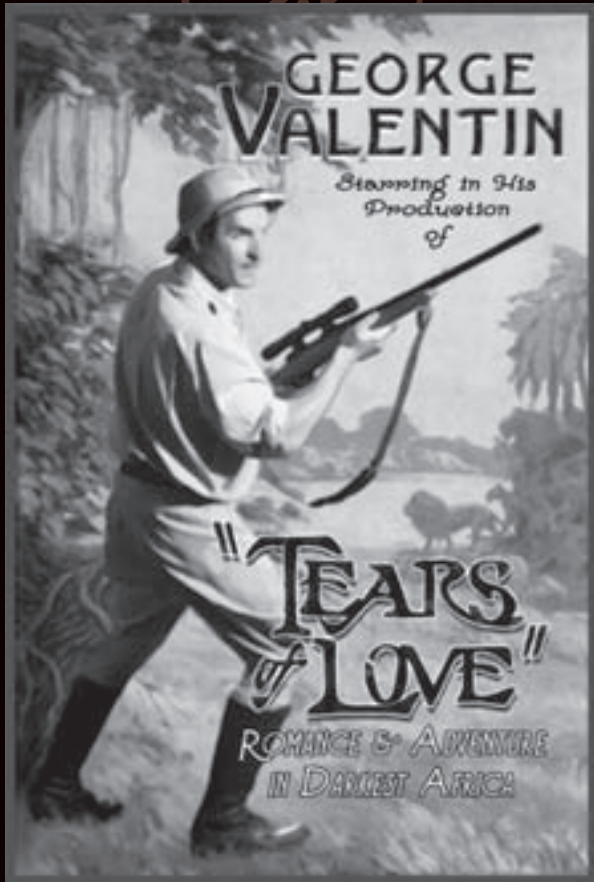
**Has working with them on a silent film and on an emotional level change the way your work?**

It was inevitably different. I think that for Jean, working with Nicole Garcia and Bertrand Blier has changed him a bit. He accepts venturing more into intimate and deeper territory... more vulnerability... He probably works more easily without a safety net. It might also be due to the nature of the film. Bérénice wanted to work from the initial stages. She hired a coach; she did tons of research, watched silent movies at the Cinémathèque, read lots of actresses' biographies. Afterwards, she just had to forget about everything to capture the character from the inside. It was beautiful to see all of a sudden, in a scene, during the first days of shooting, the character clicking into place and appear before our eyes. For Bérénice it was in the restaurant scene where Peppy is being interviewed, when she becomes aware of her new star status. She completely let herself go, had great fun, and suddenly all of us saw the character appear. For Jean, it was the scene where he pulls off the sheets covering his pieces of furniture that Peppy has just bought at auction. He was so inhabited by his character in that scene that everyone on the set felt a real thrill. The only difficulty for them afterwards - as a matter of fact for everyone, for me, for Guillaume (Schiffman, the DP) - was to keep up the same level, to keep this ambition the whole way through, during the seven weeks of shooting... In short, to keep the promise.

**The shoot being silent, did you give your actors much direction during the takes?**

What I did was play music on the set and it literally carried them. So much so that at the end, they couldn't do without it! I played mostly





Hollywood music of the '40s and '50s: Bernard Herrmann, Max Steiner, Frank Waxman, but also George Gershwin, Cole Porter... I used SUNSET BOULEVARD a lot but I also played THE WAY WE WERE and even Philippe Sarde's music for THE THINGS OF LIFE. It's a beautiful melody and I knew Jean has a particular relationship with that theme. I didn't warn him the first time I played it and I knew that by playing it on set I'd trigger something during the take. That's exactly what happened. I did the same with Bérénice when she arrives in hospital; I played the theme from LAURA, which she loves. It was a real bonus for them, I think. At other times I also played some of the first themes that Ludovic Bource composed. To act in a scene while music is being played is a wonderful way to help you find the mood. For the actors, it was their relation to acting that was different, more sensitive, more intimate, and more immediate. It was really lovely for me to watch them blossom thanks to the music. When you find the appropriate theme for a sequence, it can be a lot clearer than all the explanations you could think of. In fact, I realized on this film that talking is something wonderful but also fundamentally simplistic.

**You said so yourself, in a silent film, everything rests even more than normal on the light and on the direction. How would you define your aesthetic choices?**

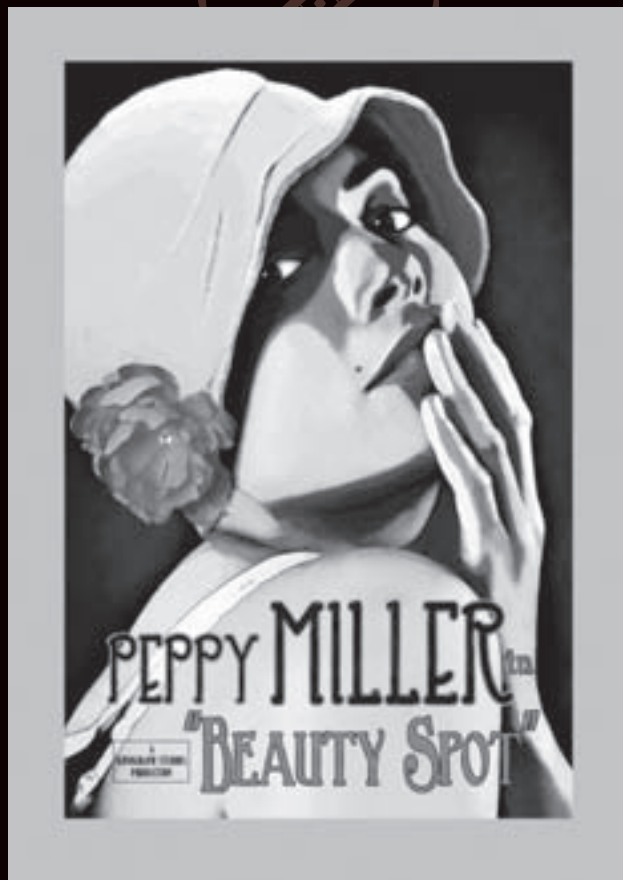
The direction, the framing, the cutting could only be the continuation of the screenplay. Of course

I had to leave some doors open for myself and I took all the liberties I wanted but I had storyboarded everything. I had to know that everything could be told. That everything was

understandable. We couldn't count on dialogues. I like to compose the frames, I like to define each shot, I like each shot to have meaning... to play with contrasts, shadows, place them in the frames, find a visual writing, codes, meanings, I love it! So I tell myself lots of stories to be able to direct and try to have the most coherent, the roundest one which seems the simplest possible. For lighting, with Guillaume (Schiffman), it's more than just collaboration. THE ARTIST is my third film with him, we've done ads together, and we know each other very well. As soon as I had the idea of this film, I talked to him about it. He also did a lot of research. I gave him tons of films to watch, he came to the Cinémathèque to watch them on a big screen, found out about the techniques, cameras and lenses of the time. He has a special place in the process; he's like a sparring partner who would have the technical responsibility of the camera and the lighting on top. I love the way we work together. The idea was the same for all: do some research, nourish ourselves, understand the rules thoroughly in order to be able to forget them at the end. What must prevail in the end is the clarity of the story, the accuracy of the situation, the impact of the shot...

**What was for you the greatest danger on this film?**

What I always strive for is to avoid letting myself be swallowed by the mood on the set, because the mood on the set has nothing to do with the mood of the film. The danger in fact is, the promise of the film being great that we have to live up to it. Yet there are so many ways of not reaching what we strive for... There was also the danger, in order not



to make the crew wait around for hours, in order not to lose time, of giving up on what was needed, of not redoing a set when it wasn't working, of not spending the time to find another idea when you realize that what's been planned doesn't work fully, because in this film the picture is paramount, every element says something. The two great dangers? Indulgence and laziness.

**In a silent film, music is crucial. How did you proceed?**

As usual, I called Ludovic Bource. I'd been talking to him about this silent film fantasy for a long time! We talked about it a lot. From the initial stages of the writing I gave him the records I listened to while writing. The ones I mentioned to you earlier: Waxman, Steiner, etc. He went back to the musicians who had inspired them: Prokofiev, Debussy, Ravel, and after having done research, he did the same as everybody else, he digested the lot to serve the story that we wanted to tell. Even if he wrote a few themes before we started shooting, he needed even more than usual to see the scenes edited before being really able to compose. Our collaboration was a little more complicated than usual. In a film like this, there is music pretty much all the time. It is quite unusual. And more importantly, it has to take into account each mood, and also all the fluctuations, the ruptures, the conflicts, all the changes of direction at each shot - either to move away from them, or to accompany them. Each time, a choice arises and it's a script choice, it can't just be left in the hands of the composer! So I structured the film in narrative blocks indicating to Ludovic and his arrangers what mood

I wanted and defining the points of correspondence between the music and the images that seemed vital to me, as well as the moments when, on the contrary, the music had to move away from any commentary, in order to avoid being tiresome or embarrassing. This required a lot of going back and forth between them and me. I didn't make it easy for them but they did a remarkable job.

**What are you most proud of?**

First of all, that this film exists! And that it resembles the idea that I had of it. I think it's a beautiful thing, it keeps its promise.

**What is producer Thomas Langmann's strongest asset?**

He has no limits; he is mad and gives himself the means to be! He has panache and he sprinkles that panache everywhere. He's cheeky, obstinate, respectful of work, but mostly his desire to see cinema surpasses everything. More than a producer, he reminds me of a Florentine prince, a patron... I love him.

**If you were to keep only one moment from the whole adventure, what would it be?**

There are too many. The first that comes to mind is the party at the end of the film. We shot this film in 35 days, we finished exhausted, but we were there, in Hollywood, only a few French among the Americans, but we were a team. And we made the film we were hoping for. I liked the way we looked at each other that evening, I thought it was moving. But there were a lot of strong moments. A lot... And I hope it's not over!













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and for people to enjoy it and be aware that’s what it is - a show.  
I’m interested in the stylization of reality,  
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That’s how this idea of a film set in the Hollywood of the late ’20s  
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**Michel Hazanavicius**

*Interview with*  
**JEAN DUJARDIN**  
*George Valentin*



**Do you remember the very first time Michel Hazanavicius talked to you about wanting to make a silent film?**

I think the first time was between two takes during the filming of "OSS 117", but I didn't believe him! You never know if Michel is serious! It became something more concrete after the release of "OSS", when we were wondering what we were going to do next. Michel isn't a big talker, so when he mentions this desire, when he says he's thinking about a story, there isn't much else to do but wait, for however long... Michel is a worker, a man who thinks, who nourishes himself with a ton of things. I knew he was reading a lot of books on cinema, that he went to the Cinémathèque regularly to watch silent movies, that he wanted to make not only a silent film but also one in black and white, set in '30s Hollywood. It was still somehow abstract. Then one day, he came with this story of *THE ARTIST*, almost apologetically. Until now we've made comedies where we had a lot of fun with characters and situations and here, we had to take on a love story, a real melodrama. He handed the screenplay to me, slightly feverish: "Read this, but don't laugh, do you think it's possible? What do you think of it? Would you be ready to do it?"

**What was your reaction?**

I read it in one go and first thought it was really gutsy to have pursued his fantasy all the way. Then I told him, like everybody else he talked to about his project: "It's a great idea but do you think we'll find the financing?" All the same, because it was such a great idea, it had to be done! Luckily, our paths crossed the madness and the ambition of

Thomas Langmann... As was the case with each of Michel's scripts, I thought it was really well written, with everything perfectly in place. But I was very surprised: Michel and I work happily with irony, with pastiche, and here we had a story loaded with new developments and tons of action but mainly full of emotion. That was something new for Michel.

I was touched by the promise of the project, the crossed destinies, the meeting between George Valentin and Peppy Miller, and by all it said about cinema, its history, the actors... I wanted him to tell me more, I wanted him to talk to me about his deep beliefs, to tell me that it was not a showy piece, that it was first of all a story he wanted to tell, and how he was going to do that. Even if there was really nothing to worry about, because if there's one thing Michel can do, it's to tell a story with pictures, and he always wants to make the actor look good. Then came all the questions you can imagine, especially with regards to a project like this, and for me - a novice in the subject, the two geniuses Chaplin and Keaton aside... What is a silent film? What was it like, for actors before the talkies? I wanted him to tell me, I followed him to the Cinémathèque, and he showed me Murnau's *SUNRISE* and *CITY GIRL*, *THE CROWD* by King Vidor, and lots of others. I discovered a silent cinema other than slapstick or mime... It was also probably to reassure me, to show me that we could follow a story without words for an hour and a half, that we could be surprised and touched... I was very moved by these films. Without words, one thing is left in the end, the most important thing: acting and



pure emotion. That touched me even more because I'm very fond of physical acting, and I could see personal expression and sensuality in these films.

**What difference did it make for you to find yourself, at least for most of the film, acting an emotional part, about serious matters?**

I think that's the little fear the three of us shared, Guillaume Schiffman, Michel and I. Amongst ourselves, we joke constantly, we always teasing each other, and here we knew we had to beat each other to it, we had to catch each other in the act of letting yourself be carried by emotion. During shooting I actually noticed new expressions on their faces. It was very interesting to discover this side of ourselves. To see Guillaume Schiffman with slightly teary eyes, Michel, who is very discreet, becoming emotional too; to have Bérénice, who is full on, playing opposite, was very encouraging, it allowed me to take it all upon myself. It doesn't feel like emotionalism at all, just telling this story the way it should be told. It is very pleasant and there wasn't just emotion, there are also some comedy scenes... Silent! I knew from the start that I would have to comply with certain rules, but it's very exciting to have a project that scares you a little bit.

**Were you scared?**

A little, but it was mostly exciting. What was a bit troubling is that I usually like to prepare my roles, almost scholastically, and to know where I'm going. Here, I couldn't prepare anything at all because I had nothing to lean on. I knew I would be deprived of lines, I knew I was going to be deprived of a voice. That's not nothing! I wondered how to make this character real without the words to save me, without

the sound to pull the audience into the story. All the same I had the feeling this project was happening at the right time, that it was tailor-made for me, with this face of mine that was often judged too expressive, too animated when I started. With this pleasure I take in physical acting, with this wanting to go further, to let go of modesty... Because I couldn't prepare much for the role, I told myself that the tests with lights and costumes would be decisive. I waited to get to L.A., I waited for the hairstyle, the costumes, I waited to see what all that would be like. We also had the question of speed - when you shoot at 22 frames per second you can't act quite in the same way and with the same pace that you normally use, you wonder sometimes if you shouldn't slow the movement down. All this was decisive but I had to wait until pretty much the last moment to know where we were going, that's what I was scared of. But let's not exaggerate, there are worse fears, there are bigger risks than being sent to L.A. for three months, to shoot a French film at the Warner or Paramount studios! I'm not going to complain here!

**And you were able to learn how to tap dance...**

Of course, that's one of the things I love about my work! By the way, that was one of the first questions Michel asked : "Would you like to do some tap dancing?" Of course, you accept, excitedly without realising that later you're going to have to get down to it, learn the basics of tap dancing for a few months, start with shuffle, step, shuffle, step, doubt, feel like you're not progressing at all, then start again, work on bits of choreography with Bérénice and let yourself be carried away by the pleasure of something new. Even if I know I'll never be Gene Kelly! That's not





what was required of me anyway! That's not to say that the final number was what I dreaded the most. Four months of tap dance training, it's not six years but you have to give the illusion that it is. It's only a two-minute scene but it's a beautiful promise, you just have to keep it. We knew that Michel would cut as little as possible, which made it more exciting. We went at each take full tilt, and by the fifteenth take we weren't even tired! We had to remember our steps and dance as well, which is not quite the same thing - you need expression, grace, feeling... And of course there were two of us playing that scene: not only did we need some know-how but also to find complicity. Luckily, it's easy with Bérénice. We were the first to say at the end of each take: "Let's do it again!" You arrive there, you're French, there are three hundred people on the set, you've rehearsed in Debbie Reynolds and Gene Kelly's studio - you do feel the pressure! The only thing we told ourselves, if only for reassurance, was that if the technique is not perfect, we had the desire and the generosity. The camera captures generosity well, particularly Michel's camera.

**When the film starts, your character, George Valentin, is a successful silent movie star. Did you draw inspiration from famous actors?**

Douglas Fairbanks of course! Flamboyant, full of panache, never hesitant to wink now and then at the audience... That was a lot of fun to do, particularly for the films-within-the-film. I could really go over the top. I watched all of Douglas Fairbanks' films; they're not always great movies but he allows himself anything he wants. It's like life only better, flashier, I like that. I did my shopping and got all

these films but afterwards, it's always the same thing, you have to know how to get rid of your references and let the character inhabit you. For all these scenes - when he's driving his Bugatti, when he's caught in the quicksands, when he fights against the savages, or even the evening of a premiere - you give it all you've got, you let go! We started with that and that was fun. I was completely at ease. That's when we were close to the "OSS" style. But I knew that afterwards, I had to invent everything of George Valentin's life. Most exciting was to start with this character who is always showing off, in front of the camera, with his fans, with his wife, but then slides gradually into cloudy waters... darker, more painful regions... To start almost childlike, then to embody the character more and more.

At first I dreaded those sombre, more serious scenes, for which I had no lines to hold on to, but finally I discovered that silent film was almost an advantage. You just have to think of the feeling for it to show. No lines come to pollute it. It doesn't take much - a gaze, an eyelash flutter - for the emotion to be vivid. We all trusted each other so much, Michel, Bérénice, Guillaume and I, that we could go ahead without fear. For these scenes, music was a wonderful prop. It's a great luxury, the shooting of a silent film: you can play all the music you want during takes. You just have to play THE THINGS OF LIFE by Philippe Sarde and I'm in floods of tears immediately!

**What touches you most in George Valentin's character?**

His fall. And the fact that we don't see it coming. At first he doesn't ask himself a lot of questions. He's





sure of himself but he's not arrogant, he is confident in the charm that he assumes without difficulty, he's showy, always acting. It's as if he was only an image, a face on a poster and then, little by little, step by step, this confidence, this lightness start cracking and he's going to go down until he reaches the bottom... Luckily, there's an angel watching over him. At the end he is not just a photo but a man, only a man... I like this path.

**Does the fact that he's an actor touch you even more?**

Yes, of course! I hope it is not premonitory! But of course, we all know it's a precarious profession... What surprised me was that after twenty days of playing the fall of George Valentin it started to affect me. However much I tried to protect myself, it caught up with me eventually. You come home in the evening slightly unsettled, and the next day you have to start again with the same troubles. Your house is burning, the dog is barking, you ask for some Léo Ferré songs on set, bizarrely you're hurting yourself and at one point you think: "Careful, you too could go to the other side." It's a bit dangerous because you end up being quite happy to be unhappy!

**To shoot at film about Hollywood in the heart of Hollywood is obviously very special, but after a couple of days, does it become a film like any other?**

Oh no! For a start because it is not a film like any other! And even after two weeks, I can assure you that you wolf down your meal quickly to be able to have a little more time on set by yourself, to look at the sets, feel the patina of the walls, wander around of the studios, to take everything in and tell yourself: "I really am in Hollywood!" I was well aware of that. An extra's cap, a cop's uniform, a street angle...

everything reminds you of cinema. I love those instants where life meets cinema - or the reverse - it's fascinating. I took the time to enjoy all that. I couldn't have been blasé, it also was my first trip to L.A. I was discovering everything all at once. That's why I arrived early enough before shooting, to be able to work, meet people, familiarize myself with the city... And let's not forget that I'm in the shoes of a Hollywood actor of the '30s. By the way, I lived in a '30s house, in the Hollywood Hills and I think Michel put me in that isolated house on purpose, so I would stay in George Valentin's shoes. I think it worked very well. We're a bit schizophrenic in this profession. It reinforced the mirror effect: this film is also a chapter of the history of Hollywood. As if the talkies arrived too soon, there were still things to do, and not only for those actors... the proof is, Michel makes a silent film 90 years later. All pretentiousness aside, it's uncanny. I think he has found a tiny missing link. Maybe that's why we could feel that all the Americans, actors first like John Goodman or the classy James Cromwell, but also the technicians, we could feel real interest, great excitement, real love for this project. Like a kid's pleasure at being a part of this crazy and unconventional film.

**Besides Bérénice Béjo and James Cromwell, you are also playing opposite a dog....**

Jack. His real name: Uggy ! He's a star! He's been in numerous movies. We had three dogs in the plans, and we shot with him. A smart fellow, Jack! He's a great actor, he can steal a scene, no problem! Frankly, it was very simple. I just had to listen to the trainers who did their job very well. The only problem was keeping bits of sausage in your pocket all day long





so he would obey. Some days I felt like I was just a great big sausage!

### **How do you and Michel Hazanavicius complete each other?**

I think I am some kind of projection of his fantasy of himself as an actor. I think if he were an actor, I would be that actor. He knows how to draw you very well, he lights you well and I know he looks at me as if I was a woman, like an object of desire - he'll never admit it though! This is the third film we've made together. We saw a lot of each other in the meantime, we're friends, but we always feel the need to win each other over. My question for this film was to wonder if he was going to like me in this register. I know, from having done it with Nicole Garcia and Bertrand Blier, how to go about it. But he didn't know me in this register, he's always seen me, chest first, playing the cheap Sean Connery... At the same time because he knows me well in real life, he knows how to lead me to it. He puts you, with great elegance and without any wickedness, on the track of these darker feelings, painful emotions, and he lets you go and find them yourself with no hesitation in asking you to go even further. What is very pleasant with him is that he leaves you get on with your work as an actor. It's your job to get it right. Besides, it's very convenient to have the writer, the director and the editor on set. He has a great understanding of his film. He is discreet, Michel, so am I. There are many things we don't talk about, that we understand and that we don't necessarily have the need to discuss. We have fun admitting we have a Bluetooth link with each other. He thinks of something and I do it without him having to ask. It's real tandem work! We talk a

lot before shooting and on set we suggest things, we refine, we nuance each other rather than overturning each other. That's the interesting work on set: always striving to improve the scene. He knows me so well that when he sees one of my eyebrow rise he thinks: "He has a little rat in his head, let's relax him!" and he throws some joke at me that makes me roll on the floor with laughter. As if he was saying: "It's no big deal, we're just telling a story, everything's fine." He puts things in perspective all the time, there's no unnecessary pressure, and no complacency between him and me, ever. But a true demand, shared, relaxed, in complicity. He takes a voluptuous pleasure in making, not films, but pictures... As for Guillaume Schiffman, I have the feeling that this film has brought them together even more. His pleasure has to go through other's pleasure. And everyone takes pleasure in it, be it the actors, Guillaume or all the other professionals. I love that. It creates benevolence on set and I need to be surrounded by good people, to feel that what you're doing, you're all doing together. It's very reassuring to be with someone who never seems to doubt. I call him "The Unruffled One". He is never afraid. He could have felt the pressure: arriving with a small team of six French people in L.A., to work with an all-American crew, with the promise of a black and white film, that's something! It could have been an arrogant project but it wasn't. I never saw him worried because he was always sincere and honest. He never shows off, he's always even-tempered, always focused on his story and asking himself the right questions all the time: Where am I going? What am I going to do? What am I saying?



If you were had to keep only one moment from this adventure, what would it be?

The last tap dance scene with Bérénice and what both of us went through at that moment. And because I'm selfish, I would add coming out of the premiere at the Orpheum Theater, at the beginning of the film. It was the evening at Warner's... the sets, the crowd, the flashes, the faces of the extras, the music going full blast, the '20s cars, the cops... I was in an old movie, I was in the picture!



*Interview with*  
**BÉRÉNICE BÉJO**  
*Peppy Miller*



**Do you remember the first time Michel Hazanavicius talked to you about wanting to make a silent movie?**

It was at a party for the first "OSS": he told Jean and me that he'd been dreaming of making a silent movie for ten years. We thought it was madness and never imagined such a project could ever be achieved. But after the success of both "OSS" films, Michel thought that this would perhaps be the right time to try to get the project started. Once a director has had successes he's taken more seriously and becomes more credible. But it was a long road before the project could go all the way to the end; just a few weeks before we started shooting, Michel and I would always use the conditional: "If we go to L.A..." "If we begin filming..."

You have to be crazy, passionate about cinema like Thomas Langmann, to agree to throw yourself - in the age of 3D and special effects - into a silent, black and white project! Before Michel met him, he had met quite a few interested people, but no one really prepared to throw himself into this.

**When did he talk to you about the character of Peppy Miller, this young starlet who becomes a star that he intended you to play?**

He hesitated between two stories for a long time then one day, he told me he'd found the right one; he was going to tell the story of the silent movie star who doesn't believe in the talkies when they arrive and, instead of going with the times and jumping on bandwagon, stays behind. And suddenly everything collapses for him. He added: "There will be a girl who will appear here and there. It will only be a small part but I'd really like you to do it." There also was a little dog in the story and I would joke: "Even the dog

has a bigger part than me!" Later, Michel told me: "It's strange when you write, you create characters, a story, but at a given point they become stronger than the hand that writes them." The story of this silent movie star has thus become a love story between him and this young extra. And that's how, from version to version, Peppy Miller gradually became more and more important! It was very moving because she's a truly remarkable character....

**Why?**

When you do improv you're taught never to say no and take everything that is offered to you, accept it and play with it. Peppy applies this rule, she uses all available means...When she finds herself by chance on the red carpet next to George Valentin and photographers start taking pictures of her she thinks it's funny and starts playing with the situation. She is not in any way calculating; she has fun with everything... Stars often have that quality. They're not where they are by coincidence, they have enormous self-confidence, they grab what's available to them, that's how they climb the ladder and become stars. Peppy had this amazing quality, she took everything that life threw at her, she was confident in herself, in her fate...

**It's uncanny; you talk about her as if she really existed...**

Yes, I know. She's a character I've known since she was born, I saw her grow - I haven't missed a single stage in how the project came into being. I nourished her so much that I made her mine. Peppy was good for me. Michel sees her, I think, as a guardian angel watching over George Valentin. To me she is like a

meteorite, she passes, doesn't ever stop, grows and burns away, always in an extraordinary way. I liked her right away; she stimulated me. She gave me the will to believe in this and to give. I really love her. I'm very touched by the way she behaves. It is so rare to give love this way, to share it without false modesty, consistently... It was difficult when I thought of her at the beginning. I thought: "I'm going to get this part because I'm married to the director but how will I get it because of me?" So I worked, worked, worked. I watched all the films Michel watched with him, read all the books he left lying around: biographies of producers, directors, actresses, actors. I read Frank Capra, I read and watched Joan Crawford and Marlene Dietrich. I saw Peppy in each actress that fascinated me; I could see her in each scene. "Here, it's Marlene... When she dances at the beginning of her career, she's Joan Crawford, and here Gloria Swanson..." I even started to call them by their first names, Marlene, Joan and Gloria. I knew everything by heart so that one day Michel told me: "Now you have to have fun and discover how Bérénice becomes Peppy." That's when I called on a coach with whom I worked every day for two weeks, which was very beneficial. At the beginning of our exercises I would say: "She does this, she does that..." I always talked about her as if she was extraordinary. At the end of these two weeks of work I would say: "I meet George... I look at him for the first time..." I had become Peppy! I know that this was not just coincidence, that this character was for me - and not for the wrong reasons - and that all I had learned during a year had succeeded in creating her. But when Michel told me: "Stop working, stop looking

at the internet, don't watch any more films, you're on holiday, forget about everything!" I wondered what would be left of all that and I arrived on set petrified! I put myself under a lot of pressure. I didn't want to get her wrong, I wanted to make Michel happy. I knew what he had endured to get there, I knew so much what he wanted from Peppy that I was afraid I wouldn't be able to do it. The first day was dreadful. Then I did the scene of her first interview, the one where she is so happy that things are starting to work for her that she goes overboard. It was a difficult scene, the only one where you see this young actress who thinks she's really something, who thinks everybody is at her feet and becomes arrogant. I was thinking: "How am I going to move, how am I going to speak without using my voice?" And then everything helped me: the costumes, the make-up, the sets, the situation... I overplayed her, I had fun and at the end of the scene I thought: "That's it, I got it!" I can't explain it, it was physical.

**Did you view the fact that you had to play this character without a voice, without dialogue, as an obstacle, another challenge or on the contrary, as a springboard to more freedom?**

It's a strange feeling... the audience can't hear us but we often talk in the film, we have a few lines. That's strange already. I saw so many great silent films during pre-production - the Murnaus, the Frank Borzages and so forth - that I knew the absence of dialogue wouldn't be an obstacle. My instinct told me that the fact that we didn't talk was going to make the characters and the pictures stronger. I knew that the characters would be magnified so I wasn't concerned that they wouldn't







be heard. But now I'm afraid of microphones. We give ourselves so much pressure with words... I didn't miss words, and if a director wants me for the role of a mute girl, I'll take it right away!

**Is it easy to find the right balance, to know how far you can go and when to stop ?**

That's when the director comes into his own, when his eye is essential... Michel has his film in mind so much that he has fantastic clarity. He storyboarded the entire screenplay. His judgement is very strong and his taste is so reliable. As a result you let yourself be guided even more than usual, you ask more... but in the end the approach isn't so different from a talking film. Except perhaps that we had to work more on the physical aspect of acting, which we don't do much in France. We had already done a lot of that for "OSS". I like it very much when acting is not conveyed solely through dialogue but by the body, the walk, the attitude, the precision of each gesture... He made me work on little things like walking with your head high without lifting the chin, or swaggering in the interview scene... These kinds of pointers allowed me to find the physical side of the character, they were very valuable to me. And because we could talk during shooting, Michel didn't hesitate to give us indications without cutting to make us go from one emotion to another. It was interesting because it made you search for something else in the heat of the moment. What also helped us a huge amount is the way Michel uses music on set. He played a lot of music. It made our lives easier because it allowed us to overlap with the voice and not be embarrassed in front of the others; it carried us wonderfully. If you

listen to them just before an emotional scene, certain pieces of music will carry you away immediately. Michel always knew which music to play. For the scene where I get off the bus and arrive at the studio for an audition I think he played "Day for Night". It's so cheerful that I was immediately transported: it gave me wings! It helped Jean and me so much. From the beginning of the shoot, we were very happy to have not microphones but music! So much so that today I wonder if I'll be able to act without music on set, it's such a liberating experience!

**What is like playing opposite Jean Dujardin?**

Jean is an actor who enjoys himself, who acts with enormous pleasure. Above all he looks for pleasure in acting and when he doesn't enjoy himself he gets frustrated, he feels he didn't get it right. As a result, it's a treat to play opposite him; he is deeply generous. It's not about him but about the pleasure of the scene, so he's always striving for more. He is also very loving, very attentive. I love acting with him and I was very happy to be back on set with him again. All the more so since we've remained friends. We've seen a lot of each other and there's no false modesty between us. It is not always easy to work on a film like this one, a melodrama, a love story... But I could cry, fall into his arms, do something very melodramatic, I had no shame, no fear. I knew that I had someone who was looking at me with kindness and love, who didn't judge me.

**This is the first time that Michel, Jean and you have worked together on a romantic film...**

That's true. It was unexpected and fun to work together in this genre. It was great fun to see Jean stripped of his usual attire. He was beautiful, very

sad, there was something childlike about him, very true to himself; it was good to see him this way. He let himself go, yes... He arrived on the project later than me... well no, because Michel wrote it for him, but he arrived later on in the preparation, he didn't follow it step by step like I did. Consequently he suffered even more stage fright than I did and was in a way more needy with Michel. I immediately thought I should give them more space together. It became a joke between the two of us. Jean would say: "Leave me some, after all you have him every night". We get along very well, the three of us...

### **How do you see their relationship?**

I wouldn't say Michel and Jean are in love but... they love each other a lot! Jean says that Michel looks at him like no one has ever looked at him. There is real tenderness and complete trust between them. Both of them love to have fun. They laugh a lot, they search together, they go very far and they come back... They complete each other very well. Michel is incapable of acting in front of a camera but he's really good without one, so Jean takes all he can from him. He's like a sponge and Michel gives him all he's got which makes him very happy. It's not at all the type of relationship Michel has with an actress, even me!

### **You perform a magnificent tap dancing act with Jean Dujardin. Did learning how to tap dance play a big part in your preparation?**

Sure, it did. Taking dance lessons from the start helped me immerse myself in the character of Peppy. I told myself: "She has to dance like this, move like that..." I actually worked at a lot of details. Like when I wink at Malcolm McDowell for example. I think I

must have watched Marlene wink about 150 times on the internet! I had to work on gestures from the initial stages, bearing, expressions because I knew that we just wouldn't have much time to do that on set. I had to find the physical mannerisms, how to sit down, how to hold myself, how to move my head... The costumes and the make-up helped a lot. It was vital. I needed to wear furs, to feel these materials we no longer use, haircuts that move with you, lots of lipstick - for me who never wear any. These are girly things but it allows you to get into the spirit of the times. To go back to tap dancing, it was a real challenge for me because I have never danced - except in "OSS"! I started in November, one year before shooting, with Fabien Ruiz - a tap dancer

of no little repute - by taking one lesson a day to familiarize myself. All the more so since I know Jean is very good as soon as he starts learning something, whereas I need time to understand and digest. Starting in February, for three months

I took one tap lesson a day and two dance lessons per week on top of that. I needed that to become suppler and to feel comfortable. We rehearsed the choreography together only two or three weeks before going to L.A. On the other hand what a blast shooting that scene was! Of course the pressure was huge. The rest didn't frighten us so much: when you're an actor, dancing is a real challenge. Jean and I were quite nervous, there was such energy... We liked the idea that Michel wouldn't want to cut the scene much, we were adamant really, it showed it was us dancing... Even though in the film, we're not supposed to be dancers, just actors who have a dance scene in their film.



**Were there other scenes you were particularly dreading?**

Beside the tap dancing scene and the interview scene, no. On the other hand, the scene I found hardest is the one where they run into each other on the staircase. It was really difficult. I don't know why. George and Peppy run into each other by chance; she's going up, he's coming down. She has just signed a contract, he has just found out it's all over for him, and they are not on the same level. This was difficult to act, I can't really explain why. Light, cheerfulness, an almost happy-go-lucky attitude was needed... Michel asked me to talk all the time, to improvise in English - which is not what I prefer. I felt as if I was in a loop, as if I had lost the character, overdone it... Afterwards, I saw it worked very well. These are the miracles of - silent - movies!

**What about the scene where you wear George Valentin's suit?**

I was a bit apprehensive but it was fun to play. I love that scene: it's very poignant. To imagine yourself wearing the clothes of the one you love, there's something disquieting, arousing... It had to be done well. I rehearsed it the day before, but it was on set that I thought that Peppy could pretend George had grabbed her behind. Michel liked the idea and decided to keep it...

**How did you feel to find yourself in Hollywood - a young French actress, acting in a film about Hollywood's history?**

For a start, it is rare that French cinema talks about American cinema... And of course, there was something magical about playing a young American, finding yourself in the Warner studios,

wandering around the streets of the studio, living in Hollywood - well, in the film in Mary's Pickford's house... These are anecdotes and memories that you enjoy telling afterwards but at the time you're so involved in the film and work that it's difficult to really make the most of it. What was strange and very exciting was the enthusiasm of the Americans who worked on the film. They said: "We could never do this in the US!" We told them that in France it hadn't been easy either but they insisted: "We could never do this!". They were absolutely fascinated by the project. Maybe because this film brings us all back to the sources of our profession, because it's very poignant to make a film about the beginnings of cinema, precisely where it happened. Even if we know the silent cinema well, we've all seen the Charlie Chaplins, the Buster Keatons... We love this profession for these kinds of films as well...

**Among all the films you watched during preparation, which ones touched you most?**

The first one that I saw at the Cinémathèque: Murnau's CITY GIRL. Incredible! How modern this film is! SUNRISE too, and SEVENTH HEAVEN by Frank Borzage... All these films with no dialogue but where the picture suffices... And in fact they're not old at all. The stories are wonderful, the actors beautiful, the emotions are very strong. I loved that time where I went from one discovery to the next. It went way beyond preparation for the film. I love Gloria Swanson and Joan Crawford's biographies: they're really the mirror image of each other. I even fell in love with Joan Crawford. With her beauty, her class, her journey, the way she smoked, the way

she looked at you... When she started she was a dancer as well, she would move in every direction and I thought: "That's it, when Peppy dances, it has to go in all directions!" It seems like a blessed era. It was the beginnings of cinema, there was something innocent, free, joyous. People looked happy; it was new so the stars would become stars overnight and throughout the world. I also loved Eleanor Powell. She was the greatest tap dancer of her time. She didn't appear in many films because she got married and stopped but when she danced, what ease, what elegance, what naturalness! And her smile! Watching her I thought our scenes should look as simple as that. And I re-discovered Marlene. What an amazing woman! What beauty, sensuality and confidence she had. She could be a housewife, a mother and be at the pinnacle of glamour! Today, stars have become more ordinary.

**You talked about going back to beginnings; this film could also be called "Most Promising Actress".**

That's true! I don't think I was aware of the gift Michel gave us while we were shooting, I don't think he was either. I couldn't believe it when I saw the film. Of course I was proud of my work - because I worked very hard - but I was mostly honoured to be a part of this, to be there, to see what Michel had done with me, what we did together. It's a beautiful proof of love. This profession is so beautiful when it's done like this!

**In your opinion, what is Michel's greatest asset as a director?**

His humour and his intelligence. He is a brilliant man, he loves his crew, he loves other people's work, he listens, he knows exactly what he wants and how to

get it. He knows how to value people so they love to work with him. He knows how to take what is offered him... But I'm in love with him, so...

**If you were going to keep only one moment from the whole adventure, what would it be?**

I think it would be the very first day of shooting. I wasn't in the scene but I still went on the set. It was a small scene, just Jean getting into the Bugatti. I filmed the whole thing with my camera. I filmed the entire first day, the first "Action!", the first look, people applauding after the first shot. I'll keep this moment because it was truly unbelievable to be there, and that the film was being made. I'll keep that because it means that if there is this, there is also all the rest...







*Interview*

# GUILLAUME SCHIFFMAN

*Director of photography*



**Do you remember the very first time Michel Hazanavicius talked to you about his desire to make a film in black and white?**

He talked to me first about making a silent film. I think we were preparing the second "OSS"; we might even have been in the middle of shooting it. We work together a lot, we see each other often, so he mentioned it again to me shortly after. Little by little it became less of a fantasy and more of a reality. He talked to me about the different ideas he had, about the different stories he was working on. At first, he thought about making a spy movie so we started to watch black and white spy movies. Then he talked about a melodrama. Until one day he told me: "I've decided to pursue my idea all the way : a silent movie, set in Hollywood in the '20s and '30s, black and white, in 1.33, like in the old days, and it will be a melodrama..."

**As a cinematographer, what was your reaction?**

Black and white, 1.33 format, '30s style - it's a dream come true for a cinematographer. On three films now Michel has made me work in a specific style: first '50s, then '60s and now '30s - no doubt it's brought a lot to me, who would love some much to be a great "futurist" director of photography. It's a great pleasure to revisit, through three films, a chunk of the history of cinema - particularly today, when we're at the end of the celluloid era, when we are moving towards digital supremacy. So when Michel said we were going to shoot in Los Angeles, in Hollywood, it was a kid's dream....

**What are the first questions that come to mind when someone offers you such project?**

What Michel tries to achieve - and if I can say so myself, what we've succeeded in doing quite well

with the two "OSS" films - is to find the image of an era and free ourselves from it, so we can play with it, and be able to tell the story better. The difference with the "OSS" films is that this was not tongue-in-cheek, it had to be taken in the first degree, with real emotions. What made things even more complicated was that we had to find not only the correct image of the era, but also our memories of it, which is not quite the same thing. So we worked in these directions.

**How did Michel Hazanavicius talk to you about the image he wanted for THE ARTIST?**

Michel has an unusual method of working : a bit concentric, beginning with a large circle and getting closer to the centre little by little. He starts by giving you all sorts of general information and grows more and more precise... Michel lets you in on all the preparation work from the initial stages. For THE ARTIST he watched many, many films, between 300 and 350, I believe, whereas I only saw about forty, which is already quite a number! We watched a few together at the Cinémathèque but also in Los Angeles where we saw one of the first John Ford films that had been rediscovered. We also watched Murnau's SUNRISE on the big screen, which is a rare pleasure. It was in a magnificent movie theatre, the New Art, specializing in old films. We also watched a lot of DVDs. We made a selection and reduced it little by little until there were five or six films we could refer to. We navigated between Murnau's SUNRISE and CITY GIRL, King Vidor's THE CROWD, a few Chaplins and some Sternbergs... Michel told me how he envisaged the story, how he was going to play with the blacks and whites, shadow and light, and a lot of greys. What's



fascinating with Michel is that he never loses sight of the story he wants to tell. You have to satisfy yourself but you can't produce only beautiful images and lose the audience in the process. The goal isn't to make the audience go "Wow!" at each shot but to fascinate them, and in this case to move them. The danger of a gorgeous black and white image of Hollywood in the '30s with beautiful sets, beautiful costumes, and Jean and Bérénice, who make a classy couple, was that it would become an art object where no one followed the story or was touched by its music. We had to be humble in front of our subject; it was necessary almost to forget about the picture. That's fine by me: I was brought up with the notion that the director of photography is only there to tell stories, to strive to bring his technical knowledge, some originality and his talent to help tell the stories well. Telling stories, that's the only thing that interests me.

**How would you define the light you created?  
How different is lighting a silent film?**

During pre-production, this crucial moment when you ask all the questions, we knew that the beginning of the film would be flashy, even showy, because the story required it. Because the film is the story of a fall, a decline, it was necessary to go gradually into greys before we could bring back the sheen, when fate smiles once more on George Valentin. The big difference with a silent film is that the essence is told by the acting but also by the pictures. Because there's no dialogue, light has to tell you something, the shadows have to tell you something... all the more so in a film where the hero spends his time moving from light to shadow and the heroine from shadow to light...

**Did you shoot in black and white?**

No, in colour. You can still find black and white film stock and we did go to the best black and white lab in Los Angeles but it didn't work for us. Today's black and white is too precise, too sharp. So we shot the whole film in 500 ASA colour so it would be grainier. I lit it with filters I don't normally use, so the whites would be diffused and that the blacks slightly underplayed. Then afterwards, I worked the shadows and the faces with lights...

**Was your collaboration with the set designer and the costume designer different than usual?**

The main task was to find how we were going to obtain the black and white that we wanted. I was lucky that Thomas (Langmann) understood quickly that I needed a lot of preparation, and because Michel was preparing his film in L.A. he didn't hesitate to send me there early on. I was able to do some research and make progress at Michel's side... On top of being a talented screenwriter and director, Michel is a true art director. He knows very well where he wants to go and asks you to help him get there. It's stimulating and exciting. All the more so because there always comes a point when he lets me get on with it, there are so many other things he needs to do.

I was able to do tests with Mark Bridges (costume designer) and Laurence Bennett (production designer), in order to find a colour chart that would be adequate for black and white. I was also lucky enough to meet the specialist who makes optics for Panavision in L.A. and who is passionate about the cinema of the '30s. He recreated some very special optical lenses stripped of their anti-reflecting coating.

We made three series of tests in the studio with an increasing number of sets and costumes, correcting as we went along - all this under Michel's direction. We progressively got closer to what we wanted - so much so that some of these tests are now part of the finished film. All this preparatory work is crucial. You simply can't afford to get it wrong because the picture itself is crucial in telling the story. You have to be precise. If one element in the set is wrong, if the light is wrong, if Michel thinks we are misrepresenting the story, we have to change everything. We couldn't overlook anything at all, not like we could in a talking film when you can tell yourself the actors have done a perfect job...

**Did the 1/33 format demand particular constraints?**

No, no constraints at all, it was pure joy! To go back to 1/33 is to go back to the source. It's not by chance that cinema was invented with this format. It's the format for cinema. It allows beautiful close-ups, close-ups of bodies; it allows you to compose the picture differently, to have diagonals, to create perspectives. Because I was doing the framing and the photography, it was heaven! It is a bit more complicated to light because you have to place the projectors a lot higher. I understood why the studios of the time were 8 meters high! So I had to learn how to light with very tall sets, and more powerful sources. I used a lot of old projectors, not from the '30s, but the '50s and '60s.

**Did you use special cameras?**

They were modern cameras but Michel wanted them to be noisy so the actors would always remember that we were shooting a silent film! Such

cameras still exist, they're used for filming ads, high-speed cameras that are certainly noisy - you can't record sound with them. That's what we used. He was adamant that the actors should always hear the noise from the camera. He was right because it changed the mood on set radically. To such degree that when I came back to France and made a film, a short in 35, with a Panavision, it was so quiet that I couldn't understand what was going on! We didn't go as far as using the old hand-cranked camera - that would have been too much! Michel knows where to stop. He never forgets that we're in 2011! Audiences will have the feeling they're seeing an old but modern film...

**There are a number of films-within-the-film. Did that require any special work?**

First of all, we used some vintage films on which we superimposed Jean. We had to be very precise when finding the same light. I had to reproduce Errol Flynn movies, Douglas Fairbanks movies... it was great fun, even though only a little remains in the finished product. And then, for the films-within-the-film that we shot ourselves, we strived to produce a different light. I had to fiddle with some old projectors, firstly to get them to work again, and so that they could light the film-within-the-film and at the same time, work in the film once we were through with the film-within-the-film! I usually work instinctively but for once I needed cards to help me keep track. What's great about Michel is that he is both rich in references and happy to get rid of them as soon as he feels the story requires it. He had visual references from the '50s rather than the '30s: CITIZEN KANE for example, for





the scene where George Valentin discovers sound. We had to re-interpret them. Complicated but great fun.

**What do you think is his greatest asset?**

His talent, for sure! Michel is very 'directing', but that's what's so exhilarating. He asks you to accompany him in his search, in his ambitions, in his demands. He knows exactly what he wants in the frame, in the image, and he knows when he doesn't like it. There's never any problem between us, probably due to the fact that we outline everything we can before we start. We talk all the time, about everything. It is a tremendous help that he draws his storyboards himself. He always gives a lot of freedom to his collaborators, his actors too; he's open to what others suggest. It is a paradox that such a precise and centred director allows others such creativity and freedom. Creativity often comes from constraints.

**This is your third film with Michel Hazanavicius and Jean Dujardin, and the third time you've worked with Bérénice Béjo. But it's the first time you all worked together on such a directly emotional project...**

I've always thought Bérénice possesses the charm and energy of the '30s. And Jean is one of the rare contemporary French actors with the real class and the natural charm that seem sometimes to have come from another era. They're the ideal couple for this film. One of Michel's strong points is that he surrounds himself with good people. For the four of us, who have become friends, it was a real thrill to meet again for this project. And to witness Michel and Jean taking a new step in a more emotional domain was both astonishing and moving. They're

both quite modest and used to restraining their emotions... Here they let go, each at his own level. And Bérénice's presence made it even easier. Filming emotion is always moving: it was even more so in this case, with them...

**How would you define the pleasure you experienced filming THE ARTIST?**

It was quite strange for me, with my double nationality: American on my father's side and French on my mother's. Unlike my mother, my father didn't work at all in cinema but he grew up with these kinds of movies. It was quite strange, suddenly reuniting this double legacy, paternal and maternal. I think this was the first time I experienced so much emotion making pictures. This was also the first time I've made a film in the U.S.A., and a French film at that, with a French friend - friends, in fact, because we were a little gang, Michel, Jean, Bérénice and I. It was all the more moving because I remembered Michel telling me a few years ago, laughing: "One day we'll go to Hollywood!" And the icing on the cake: we were there to make a film about the memory of cinema. While digital is here tomorrow, if not today, I was offered a silent film, celluloid, in black and white, set in the Hollywood of the '30s. An absolute gift - something that happens only once in a lifetime! Even if it was complicated, even if we worked twelve and fifteen hours every day... it gives you lots of energy, it gives you the will to use all necessary means to succeed...

**How did you experience the reaction of people in Hollywood?**

It was a fantastic feeling. Because we arrived ahead for the prep, people had heard about it. A

silent film in black and white about Hollywood: for the people who live in Hollywood and work in the movies, this was made of their memories, their history. Many wanted to be part of the project. As a result we had some exceptional collaborators who freed themselves to come and make this silent film with this crazy French guy, in a format that no longer exists. People were very excited. Everybody was curious and very enthusiastic - almost grateful!

And if you had to keep only one moment of this adventure?

When I arrived in the studio with Michel for the first time. When we walked through the Paramount doors together and found ourselves in the street with our camera, our crew.... We said to ourselves:

“That’s it! We’re there!”



*Interview with*  
**LUDOVIC BOURCE**  
*Original Music*



**How and when did you meet Michel Hazanavicius?**

I met him in 1996 through a friend, my first publisher, Fabrice Benoît, who was with EMI at the time. Michel was then assistant director on the television show LES NULS for CANAL+. Our first meeting didn't go very well by the way, perhaps because I went to our appointment having decided to test him a bit. But a few weeks later, not wanting to keep that initial impression, we saw each other again and got on better! At the time I was in a metal fusion band, I was starting to earn a living with a few different music projects. I also worked with Kamel Ech-Cheik, one of Michel's childhood friends. As a result, we worked on adverts and when he directed his first feature, MES AMIS (1998), produced by Dominique Farrugia, he naturally called on us. It was the first time I'd written for film.

**You have accompanied him on each of his films; how would you say he has changed most since MES AMIS?**

He hasn't really changed. He just has a lot more experience. He has developed his range. He knows exactly what he wants, he knows how to recognize the people who will be able to work in his direction. He's aware of your possibilities and of how to enable you to push them to the limit. This is his fourth film, and now there's, if not a style - it's difficult to say because his films are all sort of tributes - at least a pretty wide spectrum.

**How do you complement each other? What's the secret of your collaboration?**

I don't know that we do complement each other... and I don't think there is a secret to our collaboration. Let's just say that we don't say much

and things go well! We talk a little during the writing of the screenplay, and once the shooting has begun, I ask to see the rushes to understand the feelings, the light... I'm very focused on these details, they're important to me. Looking at the rushes, re-reading passages of the screenplay, melodies start to come to me, themes connected to certain characters or to the film as a whole. That's kind of how it works. At least for THE ARTIST it did.

**Do you remember when he talked to you about this unusual project - a silent film in black and white? How did he tell you what he had in mind?**

Just recently he reminded me that he talked to me about this project eight or nine years ago. I didn't expect him to bring such a strong story to fruition: it's so romantic, so moving, so different to his first films. It's a film that he holds dear to his heart, a tribute to the great silent movie directors, to yesteryear's ways of filming and of acting. Of course, we started with references to many great Hollywood movies. The film is set at the beginning of the '30s but we spread our net over a much longer period. We listened to many things - from Chaplin, Max Steiner and Franz Waxman to Bernard Herrmann, to mention only a few... We listened and analysed all these treasures, and we went back to the source as well, to the romantic composers of the 19th century. So mainly symphonic music. Extremely powerful orchestral music, performed by 80 musicians.

Being self-taught, and not a symphonic music specialist, I needed a lot of time to digest all this before I could compose the first theme. Michel grew attached to certain powerful themes by great



composers for great films, in order to get round them better and forget them later. We started from a fantasy then brought everything back to the images of his film. At the same time it's still a tribute, a declaration of love to the great composers of great Hollywood films.

### **In practical terms, how did you work on THE ARTIST?**

In a silent movie, music is essential for telling the story and accompanying the emotions. And it's present pretty much all the time. In THE ARTIST, for example, there's almost twice as much music as in the "OSS" films. But I proceeded more or less as normal. First I took in as much of Michel's work as I could: I returned to the screenplay regularly, I immersed myself in the storyboard - Michel's an outstanding draughtsman. In order to be able to define the main lines of the work and to feel the mood, I needed to explore all the nooks and crannies he himself had explored, to stick to the influences he himself had stockpiled and to what he had imagined. I wrote motifs, then either put them aside or recorded them. Then I immersed myself in the rushes as they came in, and in the performances of Bérénice and Jean. Watching these magnificent images as they arrived was very inspiring. The hardest thing wasn't accompanying the emotions - music is the ideal vehicle for that. No, the hardest thing, particularly with Jean's character George, was to respect the combination of comedy and emotion. With the extravagant George at the beginning of the film, we couldn't have music that killed his decline by the chaos it contained... As a result, rather than pastiche or spoof, we worked - a bit like Chaplin - along the

lines of a light sophistication... What was great was being able to work in sequence blocks of 7, 8 or 9 minutes; to be able to reflect on the mood that could be connected to the plot or to a resonance which would be like the character's interior echo, even if there were different sequences within these blocks. The bulk of the work happened during editing, almost as if everything I had composed during the initial stages had only been research, a kind of rehearsal. Music playing a bigger part than normal in the story, it required numerous adjustments. That was the main difference on this film, and certainly what was most complicated. We really couldn't afford any misinterpretation, any contradictory directions. Therefore we had to reduce certain pieces according to the editing, throw lots of them away, and write new ones, adapt them, following each step of the film that was being made. Michel and I didn't stop fine-tuning, refining.

### **Was composing the music for the tap dancing scene a pleasure?**

Yes, it was less complicated than the rest. It's big band music, jazz dance music. It was almost an exercise in style. Technically, it was risky. They had recorded the tap dancing parts to a Cole Porter piece and we had to find exactly the same rhythm, fitting George and Peppy's choreography to the very fortieth of second. We did the whole thing backwards but it's when you're faced with a real obstacle that you show your true colours!

### **Do you have a favourite theme in the film?**

That's difficult. In any case, the one that stood out when Michel started to shoot is a piece I composed





on the piano that I called “Like a Dew of Tears” and which is inspired by Brahms’ “Sapphic Ode”. It’s a piece that radiates a kind of shyness, innocence and emotion that fits well with the film’s subject: the decline, the fall, the loneliness of George Valentin. I know that Michel played it regularly on set when he wanted to get the emotional charge of certain scenes, and that Jean was very receptive to it. These are things that often escape the composer; it’s very gratifying when it happens. It’s a recurring theme in the film but there are many others I love. I like Peppy’s theme a lot.

**If there was just one moment you’d want to keep from this adventure, what would it be?**

Recording the music with the Flanders Philharmonic Orchestra in Brussels for a week. 80 musicians: 50 string players, 4 French horns, 4 trombones, 5 percussionists who ran around all over the place, a harpist, 10 technicians, 5 orchestrators, 3 mixers... It was sublime! I was lucky enough to get marvellous people. And they told me it had been a long time since they had felt this way while recording the music for a film. We all fell in love with each other. It was a very strong moment for me - a kind of accomplishment. I had the feeling - I say this in all modesty - of getting recognition from my fellow musicians. It was moving and gratifying.



## Cast

George Valentin.....Jean Dujardin  
Peppy Miller.....Bérénice Bejo  
Al Zimmer.....John Goodman  
Clifton.....James Cromwell  
Doris.....Penelope Ann Miller  
Constance.....Missi Pyle



Produced by **Thomas Langmann**

A **La Petite Reine – Studio 37 – La Classe Américaine – JD Prod – France 3 Cinéma – Jouror Productions - uFilm** Coproduction

Written and Directed by **Michel Hazanavicius**

Director of Photography **Guillaume Schiffman, AFC**

Original Music **Ludovic Bource**

Casting **Heidi Levitt, C.S.A**

Production Designer **Laurence Bennett**

Costume Designer **Mark Bridges**

Editors **Anne-Sophie Bion / Michel Hazanavicius**

Associate Producer **Emmanuel Montamat**

Executive Producers **Daniel Delume, Antoine De Cazotte, Richard Middleton**

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REINE

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wild bunch

Warner Bros. present

THE ARTIST

A Michel Hazanavicius film