



CAST

Damien Guillaume Depardieu • Enzo Max Baissette de Malglaive
Nina Judith Chemla • Nadine Aure Atika • Jean-Jacques Patrick
Descamps • Enzo adolescent Matteo Giovannetti • Madame Herchel
Brigitte Sy • P'tit Louis Franc Bruneau • Tony Philippe Dupagne

CREW

Written and directed by Pierre Schoeller • Producer Géraldine
Michelot • Director of Photography Julien Hirsch • Editor Mathilde
Muyard • Sound Yves-Marie Omnès, François Mereu, Stéphane
Thiébaud • Original Music Philippe Schoeller • Production Designer
Brigitte Brassart • Costume Designer Marie Cesari • Line Producers
Philippe Martin & Géraldine Michelot • Produced by Les films
Pelléas • With the participation of Centre National de la
Cinématographie (CNC) and the support of Région Ile-de-France
et de Centre Images - Région Centre • With the participation of
Canal + and of Cinécinema • In association with the Sofica La
Banque Postale Image and Cinéma 2 • With the support of
Procirep and of Angoa Agicoa and the programme MEDIA • Pierre
Schoeller has been laureate of Emergence 2007

PIERRE SCHOELLER

DIRECTOR AND SCREENWRITER: 2008 Versailles - Public Award -
Best Script Angers 2007 • 2002 Zéro défaut / Zero defect
(Arte France TV) FIPA 2003 - Prix Europa Berlin 2003 - Raindance
London 2003 • 1996 Deux amis (short film)

SCREENWRITER: 2003 De particulier à particulier / Hotel Harabati
by Brice Cauvin • 2001 Quand tu descendras du ciel / From Heaven
by Eric Guirado • 1999 L'Afrance by Alain Gomis

SCREENWRITER FOR TV selection: 2003 Carmen by Jean-Pierre Limosin
1999 Le plafond de verre by Denis Mallevat • 1998 A bicyclette by
Merzak Allouache • 1996 L'enfant sage by Fabrice Cazeneuve

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SYNOPSIS

Paris, today. A child and his young mother sleep on the streets. Nina is unemployed with no ties. Enzo is 5. Their drifting leads them to Versailles. In the woods near the palace, a man lives in a hut, cut off from everything. Damien. Nina spends a night with him. Early the next morning, Nina leaves the child and vanishes. When he wakes, Damien finds Enzo alone. As the days and seasons pass, the man and the child get acquainted, start to get along and grow fond of each other. Their bond will be as strong as their destitution. However, they will have to leave the hut one day...

2008 - FRANCE - 35MM - COLOR - 1.85 - SRD - 1H53



Les films Pelléas present



FESTIVAL DE CANNES

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VERSAILLES



A film by
Pierre Schoeller

With **Guillaume Depardieu**
Max Baissette de Malglaive **Judith Chemla**
Aure Atika **Patrick Descamps**



INTERVIEW with PIERRE SCHOELLER

► *Versailles* is a film marked by strong contrasts. Firstly, between the title and its subject...

The title lies at the origin of the project. In France today, 900,000 people live in makeshift shelters: huts, tents, caravans, garages, plastic greenhouses... And even in Versailles, in the grounds of the palace, a few outsiders have found refuge in the woods. I met some of them. This was a decisive encounter, even if the film does not tell their story. Our country lives in a state of latent social decomposition. I set off from a simple hypothesis: what if French society had never turned its back on the society of privileges after all? Talking about the present therefore means referring back to a society that is now a little ghostly but still present with the palace, its magnificence and emblems. Talking about what isn't right in the country, while bringing in its golden age, Versailles. At the same time, I wanted a modern melodrama, a tragedy of everyday life in which the characters do not submit to the story but create it. During writing, the whole challenge was to enter into the private lives of these three outcasts: the mother, the child and the steadfast loner.

■ **Nina and Damien don't experience their role as outcasts in the same manner. Is that a major difference between the characters?** Yes, Damien, like his neighbours in the woods, asserts his exclusion. He is one of those people who cannot live where they are born. After escaping death and prison, he has found a territory of his own. This hut is the only place where he can live. Deep down, he is a steady man, someone who never flees but who affirms his life force, strength and health. Nina's story is different. She is a girl who, since birth, has never been considered or esteemed. She was left there, like a forgotten old thing. She lives with this, with the little that she has, and hopes for a life worthy of the word. In the meantime, she raises her child in spite of everything, giving him all the love she can.

■ **And yet she abandons him?**

I wouldn't say abandon; it's more complex than that. Nina leaves Enzo with Damien because she doesn't have the strength to rebuild her life while taking care of her child. And so she leaves one morning and it is heartbreaking. Nina can only return once she has her life back on track. She thinks it will take a few weeks, a few months. And, of course, she's wrong. This young mother's act has something shocking about it. There too, she lives with her decision and pursues her goal at all costs. The shockwaves of her act run through the whole film.

■ **Why does Nina choose Damien whom she barely knows?**

That's one of the mysteries of the story. Nina trusts this man completely. She senses a moral strength within him that leads her to believe that Enzo will never be in danger at his side. Damien also resembles her. He belongs to this world of outcasts that Nina has frequented since running away from home ten years ago.

■ **How does Damien receive Enzo, this child who appears out of the night?**

It's like a clap of thunder in a clear sky. After endless ordeals, Damien has attained a certain balance. The hut is where he is at peace with himself. But, all of a sudden, here's Enzo, a child, with silent questions, a mouth to feed, in short a huge disturbance. Yet Damien awakens to feelings of love.

■ **Later on, Enzo saves Damien. This is a very powerful scene at the heart of the film that changes the course of the story again...**

That's a classical twist: at one point, the child saves the person who saved him. Damien and Enzo are bound for their rest of their lives.

■ **Does the child play a revelatory function in the film?**

The child has a future. It's in his nature to grow. And if there is no growth, his nature as a child is hampered. Damien says this to Nina: *"You won't be able to last long on the streets, this kid needs to grow."* Enzo inspires countless questions: what will tomorrow's society be like? And Nina's? And Damien's? And Jean-Jacques and Nadine's? I didn't want to decide for the character. By the end, Enzo has known both worlds, he has slept on boxes and played games in the schoolyard. He has all the elements in his possession, all his contradictions. He has his life ahead of him to answer them.

■ **The contrasts at work within the film are also found in the direction. What was your basic approach?**

The problem was tackling the theme of poverty while avoiding gloom and powering the film with a fine energy. I wanted to move towards sensitivity and emotion, to be a listener, to display empathy. There is very little dialogue, very little music. As in a silent film, the story is above all related by the images. These principles became increasingly apparent until editing. The film opens with a social situation before tackling broader questions, the power of bonds, the social order, the law.



■ **How did you work with your director of photography, Julien Hirsch, who also did the photography on "Lady Chatterley"?**

We knew each other since we had worked together on my TV-movie, *Zéro defect*. The options were fairly simple. We worked a great deal on the notion of a borderline, which is indicated in the lighting by the notion of half-light, of chiaroscuro. The heart of the film was shot without additional lighting, by daylight or by the light of the campfire... We asked ourselves a great number of questions about the distance that the camera should have in relation to the characters. How could the context be brought to life in relation to the faces? How could this permanent reality of the outside be brought to life? This explains the long shots, indeed extreme long shots, and the often frontal point of view. We thus retain the notion of scale between the adult and the child, between the woods and the hut, between Nina and the city. The editing and mix extended the concerns we had during shooting. I also wanted this edginess in the rhythm, for the film to be tense. The main thing to give the gaze time to settle.

■ **How did you go about choosing your actors?**

The hardest part was finding the trio. **Guillaume Depardieu** is the only actor of his generation who could play Damien. The part was a fairly tough one. Guillaume took hold of it magnificently. From the first day to the last, he was tuned in to the film. Filming Guillaume is pretty incredible because he has a thousand faces. He is exceptionally generous in his acting. Moreover, he helped Max a great deal. The child is so present in the film partly because of Guillaume.

Judith Chemla was also a decisive encounter. I was looking for a young actress, yet with a great deal of experience. That was her case. I love the way Judith plays Nina's self-defeatist side. Judith genuinely recreated Nina. With passion...

For the child, we happened upon **Max** who is pretty exceptional. There was a huge risk in working with such a young actor for more than two months. Max didn't like fire, brambles or icy water. It became a game. Above all, he had to play the part without losing himself. When Max did his post-synchronization work, he didn't see Max, he saw Enzo. It was important that this confusion didn't arise. Max has a very strong gaze and presence. He was heroic, well done, Max!

■ ***Versailles*, in spite of the harshness of its subject, is a film full of life.**

The film is rooted in a world of poverty, cold and hunger. But *Versailles* is above all the story of a bond that is forged between this man and this child. What interested me the most was showing how Damien, a voluntary outcast, could display social strengths. As in a tale, the beast was a prince. Whatever we do, whatever we say, misfits and outcasts are an integral part of society. The social body has no borders. Damien is the washed-up individual who returns one of its members to society. And what if the degree of humanity of a society were measured according to its capacity to make room for its opposites? ■