

Les Films du Lendemain and Les Films du Fleuve
présent

Mathieu
Kassovitz

WILD LIFE

Céline
Sallette

a film by
Cédric Kahn



Le Dacte

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INTERNATIONAL SALES

Le Pacte

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SYNOPSIS

Philippe Fournier, aka Paco, lives with his 6 and 7 year old sons, having decided not to give them back to their mother after she won custody of the children.

As children and then adolescents, Okyesa and Tsali Fournier must live their lives in the shadows, assuming different identities, hunted by the police but always free and on the move. From attics to farmhouses, caravans to communes, they live in harmony with nature and their animals.

They live with constant danger and fear, but also with the solidarity and bonds formed with friends met on the road, and the joys of living life off the grid.

11 years spent on the run all across France: a journey that would define their identity.

CAST

Paco	Mathieu KASSOVITZ
Nora	Céline SALLETTE
Tsali 9 year-old	David GASTOU
Okyesa 8 year-old	Sofiane NEVEU
Tsali teenager	Romain DEPRET
Okyesa teenager	Jules RITMANIC
Céline	Jenna THIAM
Thomas 11 year-old	Tara-Jay BANGALTER
Clara	Amandine DUGAS
Gaspard	Michaël DICHTER
Geneviève	Brigitte SY
Nora's father	Olivier GRANIER
Nora's mother	Dominique BES
Clovis	Julien THIOU
Dom	Judith SIMON
Neighbour in Normandy	Emilia DEROU-BERNAL

INTERVIEW WITH CÉDRIC KAHN

More than ten years after ROBERTO SUCCO, you're adapting again a news item. Since when have you been eager to work on a true story?

I discovered this story in 2008 in a report I read in the press and I immediately thought it would be fantastic on screen. It was both a family drama and the opportunity for me to direct an adventure film, with escape, by osmosis with nature. Time passed, the idea evolved in my mind. One day, I decided to dive deeper in the story and I read two books of testimonies which had been published simultaneously: the mother's story was telling us about a woman deprived of her sons; the father's story, co-written with his two sons, was mixing the story of the mare and the protection of a way of life. Both stories could bring to two very different movies. The only obvious thing for me was that I couldn't be on the mother's or on the father's side. The only point of view I could rely on was the boys': they were torn between an unconditional love for their father and missing their mother and elder brother at the same time. Of course the mother's search of her children could have made a harrowing movie; but I was obviously more attracted with the run and the underground. How can one disappear during eleven years in France, with two kids? What ploy does one have to do to keep on escaping for such a long time? How is survival organized? With whose help? All those things that were not said in the articles were precisely explained in the father and his sons' speech.

Has it been easy to get their authorization?

No it hasn't. I've had to go through long talks to soften their distrust and make them understand my point. They would have liked me to be truer to their cause, or more precisely their father's. But I explained my position, and they eventually accepted. Then, I had the same explanations with their mother and elder brother, and I got their consent as well.

What are their lives like today?

Xavier Fortin had a light condemnation thanks to his sons' defense: two years' imprisonment, two months of which without parole. He went out of the court as a free man. He is still today very close to his sons. They have not changed their ways of living and still live in fringe groups. They live of seasonal employment and breeding. The situation is more complicated with their mother because it is hard to get over all the years spent

away from her... But today, they have all seen the movie (the parents and the three boys) and they have accepted to appear together in the end credits.

The film starts with the breaking scene: the audience is immediately, abruptly absorbed in the film...

I personally love when the films start without any introduction and when I have to catch up the information throughout the story. If I had wanted to show the parents' story, I would have started with their meeting, the beginnings and the contract of love that are shown in the flash-back. But as it is about the children's story, we chose to begin with the moment when the family explodes. Until that moment, the boys live in a kind of idyllic family. But then everything falls over. Their mother, who can no longer stand this life of sacrifices and destitution suddenly gives up. This is the first shock for the boys who are torn away from their lives, and it will be the factor of all the others. During all those years, violence will take its toll until the final conclusion...

You also show how attractive and fun this run can be for the children...

That's where the whole paradox of this story lies. It is a mixture of wonderful and tragic. Paco, the father in the movie, invents for his sons a splendid fiction in which they are fugitives, heroes and rebels at once. Indeed, everything can become a game for kids: you hide, you lie, and you let your hair grow to become real Indians (but also not to look too much alike the photos of the wanted notices). This wonderful fiction hides the cruel reality for a while: the moments of pain, the fear of the police, and most importantly the lack of their mother and brother. The only point the father remains inflexible about is school. He is so much a stickler for the studies that it is even an obsession.

Your look upon this alternative way of living is always kind and without irony...

My parents left the city in the 70s to live in a community. I grew up in the countryside, amongst people that were exactly like the ones I show in the film: eccentrics, some who had made studies and came from rather intellectual or wealthy environments, like Fortin. This universe has nothing exotic to me. Even though my life is completely opposed to this, I admire those people who chose to live close to nature, following the seasons, in destitution, away from materialist considerations. I don't support what the father makes his sons experience; but I am convinced he is completely honest and motivated by his

cause. He is not perverted or cynical. But he obviously wants to impose his convictions on the others around. It is hard for him to compromise.

It is when the conflict of territories with the punks breaks that we understand how the ideal of absolute freedom can also have limits...

This is the turning point of the film, when the ideology collapses. All the things which could be seen as paradisiac during childhood become unbearable during teenage years. The sons don't want this kind of life any more. They feel mostly trapped in this life as runaways. The film also questions the choices. What do we really choose? When can we consider a child is able to decide for himself? These are fundamental questions of education.

Did you immediately think of Matthieu Kassowitz to play the father?

I have always thought he was one of the best French actors. I thought of him very early but I didn't dare to ask him because I was sure he wouldn't accept. We examined other ideas, and then we came back to him, around two months before the shooting would begin. He immediately accepted. After I met him I was sure he could identify himself to Fortin. I could feel he was attached to the character's convictions, his radicalism, and his rebel side. This is indeed unsettling when you watch the film: you almost have the feeling he's not playing.

We can guess that the casting of the children has been a highly important step for such a movie.

It was essential. With the production director (Aude Cathelin) and the casting director (Antoine Carrard), we set up a research plan in the provinces. We wanted children who could be close to that way of living. We sent people to the communities; and we were receiving lots of videos on the Internet as well. We made a first selection, and we invited in Paris the kids we were most interested in. It took 6 months of casting to find the four children of the film. It was very complicated because we had to take into account the constraints of playing and of resemblance. But when I see the result, I am very proud of them. I think they are all brilliant. The most moving is to see how the youngest and the oldest look like each other! Not only on a physical point of view, but also regarding their temperament. We feel like we are not really leaving them, and it is very troubling.

Céline Sallette's performance is even more remarkable that the mother appears in very few scenes, and that these scenes happen eleven years apart!

Her part is obviously the most difficult: she has few scenes, which are only climax scenes. She makes the best of it, she embodies her character, her pain, her fears, just with some looks and sentences. When she comes back after ten years away, she is really striking, unvarnished, powerless, almost crucified because of those years of search. Everything that is unsaid in the story can be seen on her face.

Are there any specific constraints when making a film in the wild?

No. On the contrary, it gives a huge feeling of freedom because there are no heavy settings, and you can constantly film at 360°. We went without projector and we eventually got rid of all the machinery after one week. Only the cameras remained. There were always two cameras. This way, the children could play all the time, no matter if they were acting or reacting. With the camera operator of the film Yves Cape, we adapted to natural light. We waited for the sun, placed ourselves according to it, even while shooting inside. It is the first time I have been operating like that and I enjoyed this simplicity, this flexibility. In my opinion, the subject of the film led us to behave this way. It felt impossible to tell such a story with the usual tricks of cinema.

CREW LIST

Directed by **Cédric KAHN**
Screenplay **Nathalie NAJEM**
Cédric KAHN
Free adaptation of ***Hors système Onze ans sous l'étoile de la liberté* by Okwari, Shahi'Yena and Xavier Fortin, written with Laurence Vidal (JC Lattès)**

Image **Yves CAPE**
Sound **Pascal JASMES**
Jean-Pierre DURET
Sylvain MALBRANT
Thomas GAUDER

Editing **Simon JACQUET**
First assistants director **Mathieu VAILLANT**
Brieuc VANDERSWALM

Production director **Aude CATHELIN**
Set **Guillaume DEVIERYC**
Costumes **Nathalie RAOUL**
Location management **Amélie SUPAU**

Producer **Kristina LARSEN**
Coproducers **Jean-Pierre et Luc DARDENNE**
Delphine TOMSON

Produced by **Les films du lendemain**
Coproduction **Les films du fleuve**
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French distribution **Le Pacte**
International sales **Le Pacte**

CÉDRIC KAHN

Filmography

- 2014 WILD LIFE (Vie Sauvage)
- 2011 A BETTER LIFE (Une vie meilleure)
- 2009 REGRETS (Les Regrets)
- 2005 L'AVION
- 2004 RED LIGHTS (Feux Rouges)
- 2001 ROBERTO SUCCO
- 1998 L'ENNUI
- 1996 CULPABILITÉ ZÉRO
- 1994 TROP DE BONHEUR
- 1994 BONHEUR
- 1992 BAR DES RAILS

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