

EUROPACORP AND RECTANGLE PRODUCTIONS PRESENT



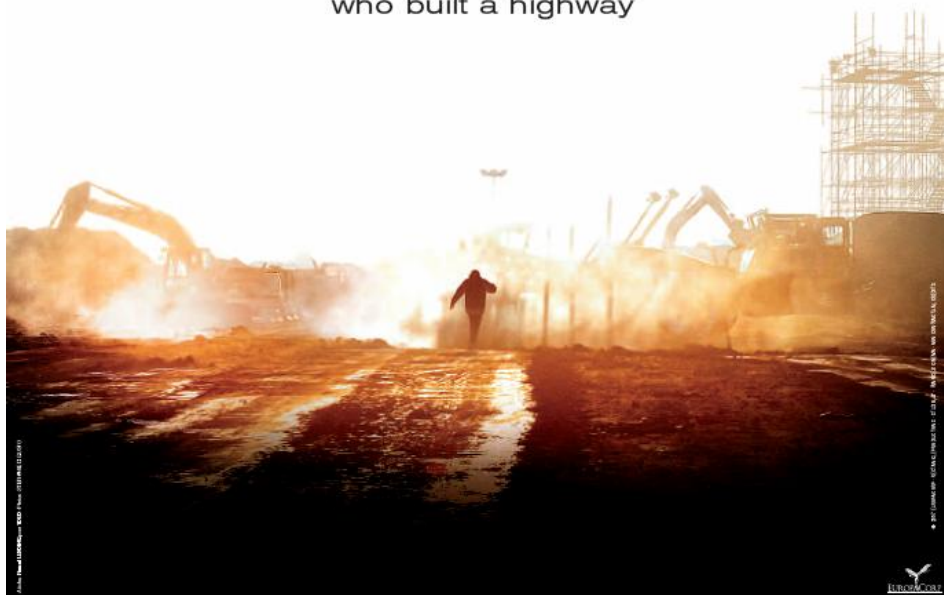
FRANÇOIS**CLUZET**

EMMANUELLE**DEVOS**

# IN THE BEGINNING

a film by  
XAVIER**GIANNOLI**

The true story  
of a smalltime conman  
who built a highway



SYNOPSIS  
IN THE  
BEGINNING

The true story of a smalltime conman  
who built a highway

## INTERVIEW XAVIER GIANNOLI

### DIRECTOR/SCREENWRITER

#### **How did you get the idea for this film?**

A few years ago, I read a strange news item in the paper. It was the story of a crook who had posed as a works manager and was reported to have built a highway in the middle of a field... He had hired dozens of workers for his project and got a whole region to take part into his adventure. This story intrigued and amused me in equal parts. I wanted to find out more. In just a few lines, the article held a powerful story.

#### **So you started your own investigation?**

First, I contacted Judge Laurent Léguevaque, the examining magistrate in charge of the case. An unusual, incredibly learned judge who wondered a lot about the mystery of this man and his motives. Today, he isn't a judge anymore and he agreed to advise me and even to play himself at the end of the film. With him, I learned that this imaginary contractor had not made any money from his fraud and that money was probably not his real or his only motive. It was not a mere case of swindling, stealing money from decent though gullible people. That would not have interested me, for I have no special attraction for conmen as such. There was more to it than that...

#### **Did you meet the man concerned?**

The judge issued a permit for me to visit him. So I went to see him several times in prison. He came across as shy and modest. At least, that's the impression he wanted to give me. It struck me how he listened with great attention... It was as if the course of events decided who he should be, who he should become, in order to obtain what he wanted. You could say he was an opportunist. He had nothing in common with the sort of verbose conman who blows hot air. When he built this road, he just did what he had to do, that's all. You could say he had done "his job" while fulfilling an obscure inner necessity. So I tried to make him speak, as much as he was willing to, about his road, his own life and the rest of the world. It enabled me to understand in detail how this whole story had practically been made possible, rather as if I was piecing together the sequence of events of some incredible hold-up. However, I soon realized these conversations had reached their limit.

#### **Why is that?**

First because he would relate the facts from his sole viewpoint, presenting them however he wanted to. Then because, obviously, the mere telling of the facts does not lead to getting closer to the human dimension of reality in this kind of story. In this context more than ever, reality needs the help of storytelling to become decipherable, understandable. News bulletins, most documentaries on TV, in short, a certain media prattle makes reality even more confused and opaque.

#### **How far did you take your investigation?**

A collaborator of mine, who is also fascinated by the case, helped me in this inquiry by meeting almost every person who had something to do with the construction site. Some said our man was a bastard who just wanted to "play at being the boss". Others said he was a generous guy and he wanted to help them. All these often contradictory elements provided

me with a fantastic base for fiction. Above all, they enabled me to find the right distance with the facts themselves, for what I was interested in was taking this story over and offering my own viewpoint, my interpretation of it. I didn't want to limit myself to trying to recreate factual reality. I wanted to show the truth – or rather, a truth. Who could hope for anything else when making a film "based on a true story"? Naturally, the names have been changed, etc. Anyway, my approach is in no way cynical or punitive. It is much to the victims' credit to have wanted to believe in all this.

### **Did you write the script alone?**

I looked at this man from a personal point of view. I wrote his story with what I felt about it. For me, working on this story was a peculiar experience. I felt a form of dizziness. In fact, I think I made the film in order to understand why I was making it. Obviously, this is the exciting part of it, going beyond the investigation, looking for a part of your own self in a human adventure in which you feel more or less clearly that something very intimate to you is at stake. Writing a film is a bit like inventing a plausible autobiography, especially if you are trying to find an approach to someone else's mystery. First by being very practical, by staging the mechanisms of his massive lie. Then by trying to take it all in a different dimension.

### **Meaning?**

Behind this news item, one quickly understands there is a specific economic and social context. It is the story of a "savior" arriving in a region with unemployment problems. However, my intention was not at all to make a topical film, especially as I wrote the script long before the economic crisis started and as the facts had taken place over ten years before. I wanted to go beyond the anecdotal side of it. Working on the destiny of an impostor also means you wonder about the identity crisis which a person can go through in this day and age when they have no moral resources, political ideal or religious faith and they feel they're being asked to achieve social success by their own means, through their own work. To sum up, we could say that before, people used to fear death and now, on top of it, they fear not to exist. And for me, this construction site was a sign of life, a weird and therefore poetic sign of the need to feel we exist, by confronting the world, nature, the cold, women, children... So we can feel alive at last, so something happens at last and our life stops being programmed, chosen by others. To me, by turning over the landscape with his machines, this man was trying to change the world to make it bearable, turn it into an adventure again. Actually, I like the idea that the cinema speaks to the wild part of us, the part which can be unreasonable and full of anger. What this man did by building his road was an act of freedom for better or for worse. But freedom isn't just autonomy. It can lead to discovering other values. It is not merely a stretch of road, it is a link.

### **The themes of imposture and the economic crisis have already been explored by literature as well as by the cinema or by sociological, anthropological essays, etc.**

Well, for me, this road in the middle of nowhere opened up a new perspective. What touched me in this story was, first and foremost, the need this man had to go towards others, even if, in the beginning, he only wanted to con them. But as he meets these men and women who place their trust in him, he starts wondering about responsibility, selfishness and greed, in other words about life in a community, nowadays or in the past, with or without a crisis. It's suggested in the title. Whereas many such stories about

impostors finish on a murder, the culprit's flight or, simply, his arrest, this story exuded new energy.

**Your main interest seems to be with this character...**

What gave this story its impetus was how he was gradually outdone by his own fraud, outdone by himself, by his own feelings. His lie escapes him. In spite of himself, what started out as virtual becomes real, concrete, part of life. Where is he going to take it from there? What he is going to dig out of the earth with his machines is a part of himself. That's why I was so keen to include the scene with the dancer and the earthmover, the coming-together of man, machine, and earth. His encounter with the character, Emmanuelle makes him incarnate, reveals him. She returns him to life and to others. He discovers that being loved is a way of being useful. Without this encounter, nothing would have been possible. Nothing whatsoever.

**One might say a question your film asks is simply: Where is the limit with other people?**

Yes, in a way. Will we ever manage to free ourselves from the destructive and guilt-free individualism which latterly has led the whole world to the brink of the abyss? I do not believe we can invent a radiant and happy society if we carry on being greedy, materialistic and cynical. I'm fed up with moral vandalism, whether from financiers, politicians or commentators. In fact, I had great fun filming my lead character redistributing the money he'd stolen from everybody, which didn't stop people calling him a bastard at the end of the film. For I find it difficult to believe in mere redemption stories. It always seems insufficient. I think what I feel is more confused. I don't know if this is a good thing or a bad thing.

**It's the story of a man who opens up to life...**

Yes, and as he can't find the words, he goes into action... by building a highway in the middle of a field. For me, this is where cinema begins. On the shoot, I often said to my crew: "They're not trucks, they're feelings." In fact, I try to make action films, but human action. Deep down, I'd like to live the same sort of adventure as my character; I mean feeling that something has been untangled inside me. Not necessarily resolved, but untangled.

**Work is at the heart of the film.**

I'm telling the story of a crook, therefore an insubordinate man, a rebel. Still his strange destiny leads him to building the walls which "regular" rebels want to destroy: work, to start with, but also responsibility towards one's family, then towards the community, guilt, morality. I found that contradictory and therefore human. He builds a road because he wants to feel free, but the first to drive on this road are the cops who come to arrest him.

**What has become of this man today?**

Nobody really knows. What it says in the titles at the end of the film is the truth. After his last spell in prison, he disappeared... Some say he went abroad, others say he changed his name and died, so we'll never know. Escaping death thanks to his imposture puts all this in an interesting perspective.

**How was the film produced?**

Since my first short film, I've worked with Edouard Weil, at Rectangle. As with my previous film, Pierre-Ange Le Pogam, at Europa Corp, has proved to be a thoughtful and supportive co-producer, whatever hardships we went through.

### **Tell us about the shoot itself.**

I was supposed to shoot it on a real highway construction site by a major building company. And at the last moment, the vice-president (who had been part of the true story and remembered the beetles' incident) canceled everything just before the shoot was due to start, completely oblivious to the consequences. It was panic all round for, obviously, we didn't have the budget to build over a mile of highway. At that point, we'd lost everything. Absolutely everything. Now, Rectangle is an independent production company which, just like EuropaCorp, is involved in all the financial aspects of the film. In short, we were faced with ruin. At that point, I carefully observed who remained supportive and who suddenly stopped returning calls. In the meantime, Depardieu, with incredible generosity, spared no effort to get us out of that deadlock. He was prepared to drive a truck himself... He knew full well we were taking a wild chance and it is the sort of stuff which causes his beautiful eyes to light up.

### **What happened?**

We carried on telling everyone, "We'll manage somehow..." but the start of the shoot was fast approaching and we didn't know how we were going to build our highway which was to be the main set. And then, one day, in Northern France, I happened to meet an incredible man in a cowboy hat, Raymond Legrand. He used to be a farmer, but he now runs his own plant hire company. I told him about the story and the character. I was supposed to shoot in December and, because of the rain, nobody builds highways in the winter. So, his yellow trucks were lying dormant in the garage. All this amused and touched him and one day, he said to me, "Right, I'll build your highway for you!" A genuine, passionate man. There are still some around. So, I shot with his machinery and also his workers. He was my technical advisor, both for the construction work and for capturing this world as accurately as possible. To build my highway, he mobilized means I could never have afforded.

### **It has been said that the shoot was an epic adventure...**

The project was rather crazy, to start with: a lot of outside shooting, a great number of characters, unexpected events, tensions... And on top of that, the winter was dreadful that year. The thing is, as I always do my best to keep some secrecy about the film while it's being made, some people tell tales. It doesn't matter though.

### **So, the conditions of the shoot were difficult?**

All the difficulties with the weather, financing, the human and technical problems we had made us feel a little closer every day to our main character. Basically, I was lucky with my film to have to face the same ordeals as he had, building his highway. In fact, at night, a highway construction site looks strangely like a film shoot.

### **Had you worked with François Cluzet before?**

I had, on a short film, about ten years ago. We'd never met since. I thought of him for this part because he had never played a character like this. So there was some unknown territory to be conquered. And this imposture story was about the risk one takes by playing at being

someone else. So, there was clearly common ground between an actor's work and this character's lies: social comedy and human truth. That's how we worked, precariously balanced on this high-risk border, faced with a disturbing identity flaw. It is a difficult, tumultuous part, full of contradictory emotions.

### **What about Emmanuelle Devos?**

I wrote the part for her. In a film, she is always a sign of life, a surprise every time. For my impostor, I felt she was "untouchable" and this is what brings energy into their encounter. You never know what risk she'll take next. Her scintillating quality breathes life into her character, far removed from clichés and standardized emotions. She is a great, elegant and generous artist, accurate and free at the same time. She keeps bringing new ideas all the time, making her character more lively and unexpected than what was in the script.

### **And Depardieu?**

I am lucky to have a relationship with him which is both very friendly and demanding. When we shoot a film together, we're there to work, find new ideas and never compromise. I've already talked a lot about it when we did *Quand J'étais Chanteur*, even if here, he plays a totally different and rather dark part, a real bastard. He's always been supportive of the film, in his own way, concentrating on his character, oblivious to everything around whereas, in such a situation, others use or invent any pretext to justify their own outbursts, fears or limitations. He is famous for knowing no limits, for better or... for better! I very much enjoyed seeing him act alongside a young actor like Rottiers. It's this kind of encounter which will refresh his relationship with the cinema.

### **There are many supporting actors...**

The beautiful Soko, to start with. A friend who is a music producer told me about a young artist, a musician and poet who could be right for the part. I listened to her music and watched her videos on the Internet. I could see she was exceptional. I think she is a really interesting actress who, so far, has only shown a small part of her talent. With Vincent Rottiers, they formed a modern movie couple. Vincent reminds me of actors like Edward Norton or Joaquin Phoenix. He possesses an introspective power which brings tension to the merest gaze or the simplest situation. Other supporting actors are a mix of professional actors and real workers who were helping each other. I'm thinking of Gaby, the bulldozer driver who helped the excellent Brice Fournier (the foreman) take charge of his construction site. The main thing was that everybody, famous or unknown, had a genuine hope that the film would finally exist. I want to thank them for that.

## **FILMOGRAPHY**

2009 IN THE BEGINNING

2006 THE SINGER

2005 ONLY THE NIGHT

2003 EAGER BODIES

1998 THE INTERVIEW (Short Film - Palme d'Or)

## **INTERVIEW LAURENT LEGUEVAQUE**

### **FORMER EXAMINING MAGISTRATE IN CHARGE OF THE CASE**

#### **When did you first hear about this case?**

In the beginning, a beetle was a way for ecologists to halt the construction of highways all over France. This beetle (the hermit beetle) is a protected species in Europe. This protects its predator (the birds which feed on it), and so on. And in 1995, I heard that a conman was taking advantage of this stalemate. He turned up in a small town which was suffering from the halt in construction, passed himself off as the site manager from X, claiming that work was starting up again, and was able to live on credit in the best hotel and pocket bribes (as everyone wanted to work on such a major civil engineering project)... Then, probably disappear.

#### **How did you get involved?**

I was an examining magistrate in the town of Mâcon. The DA referred to me the case of a convict who, after serving a number of sentences for fraud, had organized a fake training course for the jobless (in the public works sector) before making off with the takings. I thought it was particularly nasty to steal money off the unemployed. So, I sent letters rogatory to a policeman I knew who was particularly persistent and told him to find this conman. And that's when the beetle entered the picture, because after a few weeks, this policeman informed me he'd found our man... building a highway somewhere in France. Building a highway without permission – he was just an ex-con on the run...

#### **How did you meet the man?**

Instead of fleeing with the bribes, the conman had stayed there, as if rooted to the spot. A bit like a rabbit caught in a car's headlights... This failure to act (which is unusual in crooks who are generally quick to take off) enabled us to localize him. Then, to arrest him. And do you know what he'd invariably answer me over the course of questioning when I asked him why he'd stayed there instead of taking the money and running? This compulsive crook and ex-con, with a record as long as his arm, would say to me: "Because, Your Honor, for the first time in my life, I was somebody..." I heard that loud and clear... For the first time in his life, he wasn't just an exconvict – a whole town had put their hopes in him.

#### **What did it change for you to meet the man in person?**

I realized that a conman doesn't just want money. Above all, he wants a precise role, a social function in a group of people. A function which allows him to "be", or rather, to "become somebody". "Being" and "appearing", that old refrain... A usurper's intentions are not just villainous – they are also existential. Just like ours.

#### **What happened to you personally and with the case after that?**

The conman was indicted and put in custody... He admitted the crime he was accused of, as they say. In the end, he was sentenced to several years in prison. I continued my career in other cities, still as an examining magistrate. Then, years later, I resigned. I'd had enough of the job, the "social role" of executioner, so to speak...

#### **Did you empathize with the man? What creates empathy for the character?**

I think you can and you must empathize with an unpleasant person when, through his behavior, or even through his faults, he teaches us about an essential part of how we function as a society.

**How did you come to meet Xavier Giannoli and his project? What did he tell you?**

He was fascinated by this trivial event. He wanted to meet the conman, and the people involved... So, he contacted me, the examining magistrate. Xavier was still a young director at the time. He'd just won an award at Cannes for a short film I'd happened to see. So, I trusted him as an artist – in his artistic undertaking which I rightly assumed to be an honest one. And I officially allowed him to contact the conman who was in custody at the time.

**Did it initially seem obvious to you to make it into a film?**

It didn't even seem obvious to Xavier who approached me, saying: "I don't know yet what I'll do with this story – a film or a book"... But he already had a vision of the case which was perfectly in tune with mine: to put it plainly, what immediately fascinated the filmmaker was the question of usurpation of identity, of assuming someone's position... Encountering an intense desire by society, in these times of economic crisis: working and, beyond that, building, achieving a common goal... As well as the idea of a road going nowhere, a strong metaphor of everyone's destiny and path in life... It seemed to me that the filmmaker could already "visualize" what I could only "conceptualize"... One day, for instance, during one of our discussions, I said to Xavier: "Do you realize that in South America or on other continents, thanks to his exploits, this conman would perhaps have been made minister of major projects?" This question niggled him, just as much as me... What is one's destiny? And what is the relationship of destiny to our laws, customs, and conventions?

**How did the real story end?**

The conman continued his life, wandering around and going to prison. No-one knows where he is now. One amusing detail: the Highways Department declared that the work had been carried out "professionally". But a legal hurdle remained: it is against the law to "profit in any way from the fruit of an offence" (or one runs the risk of being charged with being "an accessory to a fraud"). A middle way was then found by the company whose identity had been usurped by the conman: they kept the people who'd been hired, but not the section of highway which had to be demolished, then rebuilt, despite it being in conformity...

**Did the film, with its narrative choices and the introduction of fictional elements, throw fresh light on the story as far as you're concerned?**

Yes, of course. The word "light" is the right word. When I saw this film, I thought: "I'm in contact with the poetry of work". Xavier captured something of the poetry of work, the beauty of teamwork, and managed to bring an extraordinary character to life.

## SELECTIVE FILMOGRAPHIES

### FRANÇOIS CLUZET

|      |                   |                      |
|------|-------------------|----------------------|
| 2009 | IN THE BEGINNING  | by Xavier Giannoli   |
| 2008 | PARIS             | by Cédric Klapisch   |
|      | RIVALS            | by Jacques Maillot   |
| 2007 | DÉTROMPEZ-VOUS    | by Bruno Dega        |
| 2006 | TELL NO ONE       | by Guillaume Canet   |
| 2005 | QUATRE ÉTOILES    | by Christian Vincent |
|      | LA CLOCHE A SONNÉ | by Bruno Herbulot    |
| 2004 | THE HOOK          | by Thomas Vincent    |

### EMMANUELLE DEVOS

|      |                                |                      |
|------|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| 2009 | IN THE BEGINNING               | by Xavier Giannoli   |
|      | COCO BEFORE CHANEL             | by Anne Fontaine     |
| 2008 | A CHRISTMAS TALE               | by Arnaud Desplechin |
| 2007 | TWO LIVES PLUS ONE             | by Idit Cebula       |
|      | CEUX QUI RESTENT               | by Anne Le Ny        |
| 2005 | THE BEAT THAT MY HEART SKIPPED | by Jacques Audiard   |
| 2004 | ROI & REINE                    | by Arnaud Desplechin |

### GÉRARD DEPARDIEU

|      |                              |                         |
|------|------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 2009 | IN THE BEGINNING             | by Xavier Giannoli      |
|      | BELLAMY                      | by Claude Chabrol       |
| 2008 | DEATH INSTINCT               | by Jean-François Richet |
|      | ASTERIX AT THE OLYMPIC GAMES | by Thomas Langmann      |
| 2007 | MICHOUE D'AUBER              | by Thomas Gilou         |
|      | LA VIE EN ROSE               | by Olivier Dahan        |
| 2006 | THE SINGER                   | by Xavier Giannoli      |
| 2005 | LAST HOLIDAY                 | by Wayne Wang           |
|      | HOW MUCH DO YOU LOVE ME?     | by Bertrand Blier       |
| 2004 | CHANGING TIMES               | by André Téchiné        |

### SOKO

|      |   |                           |
|------|---|---------------------------|
| 2009 | IN THE BEGINNING                        | by Xavier Giannoli        |
| 2007 | MA VIE N'EST PAS UNE COMÉDIE ROMANTIQUE | by Marc Gibaja            |
| 2007 | MA PLACE AU SOLEIL                      | by Eric De Montalier      |
| 2006 | DANS LES CORDES                         | by Magaly Richard-Serrano |

### VINCENT ROTTIERS

|      |                   |                        |
|------|-------------------|------------------------|
| 2009 | IN THE BEGINNING  | by Xavier Giannoli     |
| 2008 | FEMALE AGENTS     | by Jean-Paul Salomé    |
| 2007 | INTIMATE ENEMIES  | by Florent Emilio Siri |
|      | TREASURED ISLAND  | by Alain Berbérian     |
|      | 664 KM            | by Arnaud Bigeard      |
| 2006 | THE PASSENGER     | by Eric Caravaca       |
| 2005 | LA MAISON DE NINA | by Richard Dembo       |
|      | MON ANGE          | by Serge Frydman       |

## CAST

PHILIPPE MILLER

**FRANÇOIS CLUZET**

STÉPHANE

**EMMANUELLE DEVOS**

ABEL

**GÉRARD DEPARDIEU**

MONIKA

**SOKO**

NICOLAS

**VINCENT ROTTIERS**

LOUIS

**BRICE FOURNIER**

## **CREW**

|                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| SCREENPLAY AND DIALOGUES | <b>XAVIER GIANNOLI</b>                                  |
| DIRECTOR                 | <b>XAVIER GIANNOLI</b>                                  |
| PRODUCERS                | <b>EDOUARD WEIL<br/>PIERRE-ANGE LE POGAM</b>            |
| IMAGE                    | <b>GLYNN SPEECKAERT</b>                                 |
| SOUND                    | <b>FRANÇOIS MUSY<br/>GABRIEL HAFNER<br/>RENAUD MUSY</b> |
| ORIGINAL SCORE           | <b>CLIFF MARTINEZ</b>                                   |
| EDITING                  | <b>CELIA LAFITEDUPONT</b>                               |
| DECORATION               | <b>FRANÇOIS-RENAUD LABARTHE</b>                         |
| COSTUMES                 | <b>NATHALIE BENROS</b>                                  |
| FIRST ASSISTANT DIRECTOR | <b>ARNAUD ESTEREZ</b>                                   |
| PRODUCTION MANAGER       | <b>MEDERIC BOURLAT</b>                                  |
| POSTPRODUCTION MANAGER   | <b>MELANIE KARLIN</b>                                   |
| UNIT MANAGER             | <b>GREGORY VALAI</b>                                    |