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The joker with a serious side

The Marching Band’s Pierre Cottin on outsider traits, box office hits and gainful employment

by Richard Mowe



With his propensity for fooling around, taking the Mickey and deflating actorly pretensions, Pierre Lottin, 36, represents an unusual addition to the collection of French cinema’s rising stars.

He’s equally at home in a social comedy-drama such as [The Marching Band](#), which has stormed the French box office and comes to UK cinemas on May 16, as he is in the latest instalment of Les Tuche (first episode released in 2011, in which he plays Wilfried, the rapper) about a working class family catapulted into the stratosphere after winning a fortune in a lottery and playing around with absurd situations and a dialogue all of their own. Now in its fifth incarnation the latest instalment involves an unlikely trip to the UK, meeting the royal family and a grandson playing for Arsenal.

Lottin claims to be drawn to playing outsiders because “I am a bit of an outsider myself and these were the kind of roles I started off by being offered”. At school he never really applied himself and instead started an acting course at the age of 16. He embarked on roles in a series of short films as well as the TV series Boulevard du Palais before the first edition of Les Tuche and then the others in the series.

“I’m fairly instinctive as an actor but I also like to be fully prepared and investigate all aspects of a character,” he said. “I feel I owe them that. We made The Marching Band without any pretensions but we were all pleasantly surprised by its success with the public.”

Although he was unaware when approached for the part of the trombonist in the band from a small mining village in the north of France it was written with him in mind by the writer/director Emmanuel Courcol. He had worked with him previously on [The Big Hit](#) playing one of the prison inmates. Lottin had a vaguely musical background and learned to play the piano as youngster. It was only later that he was joined in the film by his fraternal opposite number Benjamin Lavernhe, who comes from a background in classical theatre and the Comédie Française. Their cultural differences chimed perfectly with the pairing of the characters in the film. “We had a complicity together and also with the non-professionals in the cast. It all worked very naturally,” Lottin added.

Lottin prefers the term in French “comédien” to “acteur” which, he suggested, has connotations of airs and graces. He admits, however, that he may be on the way to becoming an “acteur” despite his best intentions. “Then you’ll think I’m really shitty,” he said with a laugh.

Even in his childhood and adolescence he had an aptitude for jokes, which was one way of being “accepted” by his peers. He learned quickly that an actor observes and then reproduces. He dislikes the Actors’ Studio mantra of “living the part” and comes at characters internally. “That’s my job. I don’t know anything else. And having the chance it would be a shame to mess it up. If you don’t do it for real you will be found out,” he said with conviction.

Citing his acting influences isn’t really his bag but when pressed comes up with Gary Oldman, Jim Carrey, Dustin Hoffman, Peter Sellers and on the French side Jean Gabin, Lino Ventura and Albert Dupontel.



Pierre Lottin on acting with Benjamin Lavernhe in The Marching Band: 'We had a complicity together and also with the non-professionals in the cast. It all worked very naturally' *Photo: UniFrance*

He doesn’t really want to reflect on his craft too much in case he breaks the spell. So far he hasn’t done too badly and has had a remarkable run of gainful employment. He was the dangerous boyfriend in Dominik Moll’s [The Night Of The 12th](#); a fireman in Notre-Dame Is Burning and joined François Ozon for [When Autumn Falls](#). He has a project with his partner Melissa Izquierdo, a stand-up comedian, for a comedy The Story of Jojo “about a guy who wants to be a samurai”. They are writing together and he admits that Melissa is far more productive than he is. When it will see the light of day is anyone’s guess.

In the meantime he has just joined the cast (among them Reda Kateb, Sara Giraudeau, and Bastien Bouillon) for Jean-Paul Salomé’s new thriller The Money Maker, based on the true story of the man dubbed “the Cezanne of fake money”. And he rejoins Ozon for his adaptation of one of the most read French language novels The Stranger (first published in 1942 and already made into a film by Luchino Visconti in 1967 with Marcello Mastroianni). It’s due for release next year. If that wasn’t quite enough to be going on with, waiting in the wings is the new film by Eric Toledano and Olivier Nakache, Just a Illusion, a multi-layered family drama, in which he is partnered by Camille Cottin and Louis Garrel.

Lottin with a staccato delivery and a lot of hand-waving makes an energetic interviewee. When you remark on the umpteen facets of his chameleon personality on display he excuses himself playfully with: “Who says you can’t be many different

things at the same time?” Enough said!

The Marching Band is on release in the UK and Ireland from May 16. Richard Mowe interviewed Pierre Lottin at the UniFrance Rendez-vous with French Cinema in Paris at the start of the year.

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