



A WHY NOT PRODUCTION

STARRING

JOHAN LIBEREAU SALOMÉ STEVENIN PIERRE PERRIER

# cold showers

(douches froides)

A FILM BY ANTONY CORDIER

wild bunch  
CREDITS NON CONTRACTUAL

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## Synopsis

COLD SHOWERS is set today, in small-town France. Nowhere special. It tells the story of three teenagers: a beautiful girl, Vanessa, and two boys, Mickael and Clément, one rich, one poor. The story of Mickael - judo fanatic and doomed lover - and his parents, both convinced that the sky will one day come crashing down on their heads, and both more than able to cope when it does. Of how Mickael has everything he needs to make a go of his life, against all the odds. And of how he blows it.

Set against a backdrop of punishing physicality, a combat-fuelled world of obsessive training and dieting and intense, illicit sexual adventure, cold showers also casts a piercing eye over the crucial problems of adolescence: How can anyone put up with a mother who cuts off the electricity for two weeks just to save money? Which one rules - judo or karate? Can you criticise your dad for hitting the bottle too hard? How do you lose 9 kilos in 6 weeks? Are there really people who long for disaster to strike? What's the best way to organise a threesome? Can you handle it when it happens?

And how the hell do you get the last squeeze out of an empty tube of toothpaste?

COLD SHOWERS. Blackly comic, brutally funny, heartbreaking, truthful. A tragi-comedy. About happiness and hardship, sex, luck and catastrophe.

## Cast and Crew

*Mickael:* Johan LIBÉREAU  
*Vanessa:* Salomé STÉVENIN  
*Clément:* Pierre PERRIER  
*Annie:* Florence THOMASSIN  
*Gérard:* Jean-Philippe ÉCOFFEY  
*Louis Steiner:* Aurélien RECOING  
*Mathilde:* Claire NEBOUT  
*Philippe:* Denis FALGOU  
*Isabelle:* Camille JAPY  
*Natacha:* Magali WOCH

**Director:** Antony Cordier  
**1st Assistant Director:** Céline Savoldelli  
**Casting:** Marion Touitou  
**Screenplay:** Antony Cordier and Julie Peyr  
**DP:** Nicolas Gaurin  
**Music:** Nicolas Lemercier  
**Sound:** Pierre Tucac  
**Set Designer:** François Girard  
**Production Manager:** Albert Blasius  
**Editor:** Emmanuelle Castro  
**Judo Advisor:** Franck Bellard  
**Producer:** Sébastien Lemercier

**Production:** Why Not Productions

1h40 / 35mm / 1.66

## Interview with Antony Cordier

### **The film's first image is a blackboard...**

- It's what I come from, republican school. I learnt everything at school, even cinema, given that I learnt editing at the FEMIS. That's the reason, no doubt about it, that's what's at the beginning: a blackboard... My first film, "Beau Comme Un Camion", was a documentary about my family. To talk with the folk in my family, to understand why, when I was a child, they said to me: "you shouldn't become a blue-collar worker", it's inextricable from my need to make films.

### **What was your starting point?**

- Working-class society gives a lot of importance to the idea of effort, of sacrifice: you have to suffer in life, you have to have a hard time. I wanted to see how far it could take us, this logic of sacrifice, in all areas, and in particular, that of the heart. What do you have to sacrifice in love? Why? What pleasure can it bring you?

### **It's a form of masochism!**

- Almost! What I find astonishing is that there are people who find happiness in depriving themselves of the essentials. Ideological as opposed to spiritual ascetics. In the film, the family cuts off its own electricity: they force themselves to live in the dark, without the benefits of microwave, TV, or electric razor. It's a challenge linked to the necessity of economising, but it really seems almost to make them happy!

### **The family lighting the candle, is that a true story?**

- No, it's made up, but I come from a family where we were all preoccupied with the conditions of our survival. That's not how everyone is. If you wanted to survive, you had to economise a bit with everything: electricity, heating, food, holidays, clothes... no one chooses this way of life, this culture. It's forced on people because manual labour is so badly paid, just less than what it takes to survive normally: it forces people to find schemes, to stray into petty crime, and this maintains a climate of fear.

### **Why did you choose judo?**

- If I began to write about judo, it's because that's the sport I know best, having practised it a long time, but while I was writing I thought about changing the sport, to athletics for example. But the story of Mickael's self-imposed diet took on such importance that judo became vital.

A judo bout isn't always pleasant to watch, but I knew that I needed to go and what I wanted to get from it. It's interesting 'politically': it's a sport created by a short man who wanted to develop a method of combat that would allow the small to fight those bigger than them utilising the strengths of their opponents.

### **In the film, they fight in teams, against adversaries chosen by weight: a bit like the Daltons...**

- It's a funny yet clever way of organising things: a judo team is like a Utopian micro-society where handicaps of weight (much too light, a little bit

overweight) become advantages...

You never see judo in the cinema, but it's the 3rd most practised sport in France. Everyone's done a year or two of judo. There were technicians on the crew who had done judo as children and who were really moved to get back on the tatami! It's a sport that leaves its mark first of all... philosophically.

### **Is this a film about adolescence?**

Adolescence in itself doesn't really interest me. There was never any question of making a straightforward naturalistic account of adolescence, absolutely not! The characters don't talk that much like the 'youth of today'. No, what interests me is difference, and at the age of 17, the question of difference raises itself in very crude forms: social difference, sexual difference... At a pinch, yes, I was interested in the way that during adolescence, you can be very free sexually, free to try things out. To make love in a threesome doesn't really mean you're a swinger at heart, rather that you have a very sensual relationship to friendships, and that you're looking for the limits and direction of your own sexuality. In addition, at 17 it's still possible to think of sex as a performance. The number of partners, the length, the positions, the place where you 'do it', all that's important. I find it touching.

### **Exactly, we have the feeling that the lovemaking scene is pivotal...**

- It's a sequence we choreographed heavily with the actors, like the judo bouts. During the preparation, we had a little dojo just for us. What the three teens do has a meaning. You could say that they have a threesome, but actually, Mickael becomes aware that he's authorised his girlfriend to make love with another guy. He finds himself in the role of spectator and it's obvious that it makes him suffer. It's no longer an act of licentiousness, he's made a gesture of allegiance. He has learned to deprive himself of everything, and he's in the process, stupidly, of depriving himself of his girlfriend. Somewhat unfairly, he holds his parents responsible for it all, then Vanessa.

### **After sex, there is a lovely moment, very silent, between the three...**

- I tried to make as few ellipses as possible. Having a threesome isn't exactly ordinary, but finding yourself, all three together, after the sex, that's really awkward! The boys resort to their sports behaviour, throwing themselves into the showers... Vanessa is in a more contemplative state of mind. In the changing rooms things literally come together and then unravel, but in what sense? Vanessa has a lace around her wrist, she's really shackled, but Clement, he doesn't even undo his shoelaces...

### **The next day, Vanessa aches all over. Isn't that a bit exaggerated?**

- Sure! It's true that with Julie Peyr, who wrote the script with me, we thought a lot about the novels of John Irving, who often uses wrestling, another combat

sport. It's a simple way of approaching the question of sport: as a metaphor for sexuality. Perhaps because sport in the cinema quickly becomes boring! Besides, in the scene where they make love, all three on the tatami, sporting gestures quickly turn into gestures of tenderness. With John Irving, similarly, there is something a bit immoderate in the sexuality, an exaggerated quality I find very right, and very funny.

### **The parents are also important...**

- In the film, there are people in their late teens/early 20s and people in their 40s, and I'm in my 30s. I'm as far from one lot as from the other. It's a film about characters who aren't of my generation. For me, the same thing happens to Mickael and his parents: each have their problems (at school; at work; with sport; emotional) but the parents find their happiness within it, whereas with Mickael, it's the opposite.

### **All the same, it's a rather neurotic family.**

- Definitely. They are always looking for things to deprive themselves of: light, hot water, full-fat goods, love... always planning this voluntary divesting. They are poor: they so dread catastrophe that they are relieved when it arrives. That's very human. Mickael decides he has to lose so much weight because he's socially predetermined to sacrifice himself. At the beginning of the film, his life is pretty much on course, but little by little he lets everything of potential slip away and finishes up bereft.

### **Did you want to make a 'social realist' film?**

- I don't think the social realist film exists. The producer Sébastien Lemerrier and I never spoke about making a social realist film, and we talked a lot about the genre of the film... On the other hand, that there should be social motivations in feelings or even sexual experiences, that was something I absolutely wanted to show.

Clearly when you make a film showing the rich and the poor, you try to watch out for clichés. It's hard, because at the same time the social sphere is full of real clichés, and you have to take them into account. The barrier of money for example, it's omnipresent when you're poor. So? How do you create scenes without repeating yourself too much? In the scene at the hotel, Mickael allows his girlfriend to go up with Clément because he doesn't have a credit card. It could be aggravating always to return to the problem of money, but in the world of the working-class, every other word is about the lack of money. Sure, it's really exasperating!

So the least you can do as a director is to make sure that this obsession has something moving about it, or at least something funny...

### **Certainly, when Mickael goes to the Steiners' house for the first time, he seems bowled over, and at the same time, it's a little derisive.**

- Exactly. This lovely house echoes with Mozart: it's beautiful but a bit stupid. And they are kind to him, but

they keep him on the doorstep, they teach him a bit of a lesson. That's how the bourgeoisie are: civilised but terribly violent at heart. When you come from what's known as a deprived background, life's one constant humiliations. That's how it is.

### **It's almost a *noir* subject, but the film itself is full of light...**

- The DP Nicolas Gaurin and I knew what we didn't want: a dark, high contrast image... We wanted rather a look like Taiwanese cinema, something soft and colourful. Like the sports kits: brightly coloured cotton. We watched a lot of American and Chinese films. Before the shoot, we screened "Blue Gate Crossing", a Taiwanese blockbuster. The Chinese aren't afraid of the forms we despise: comedy, pop, romantic fictions. It's very liberating.

### **How did you find Johan Libéreau?**

- He's someone from the street, not a professional actor: he's been a boilermaker, a pastry cook... But I wasn't looking specially for a token prole: I saw plenty of young actors, and also judokas with no acting experience. It went on for a year and a half, we had to see 250 lads...

I met Johan very late. Strangely, he turned up at the casting at the same time as Pierre Perrier, who plays Clément. It's always a stupid thing to say, but from the first reading, something happened. I don't know if they were accurate, but you felt that they weren't forcing it, which is to say that between their two characters there was an opposition that wasn't aggressive. It was an intelligent opposition, full of mutual fascination. You felt that Johan envied Pierre's assured bearing, while Pierre envied in turn Johan's street smarts. It wasn't a case of class war, or good against bad, it was two forms of masculinity opposed in seduction, and so it was perfect.

### **Was he very close to the character he played?**

- If Johan is truly great in the part, it's also in my opinion because he understood perfectly everything in the script. At no point did he have any problems with any of it: the inferiority complex, the brawls, the conquests, the defeats which are down to no one but himself... he understood all that.

Finally, I think what was hardest for him was the physical work, before and during the shoot. He had to do judo for six months, a little white belt amidst the black belts of the Racing Club du France, and to follow an extremely restricting daily bodybuilding course. Of course, he was more than happy to get his new abs too! And then he had to gain 6 kilos before shooting, in order to be able to lose them as the shoot went along.

### **And Salomé Stévenin?**

- With Salomé, it was something different. I was half way through writing the script when I saw her in "Mischka" and I felt delighted to know she existed. I had an intuition about her... in sporting terms, for me

she was the French champion in her league, but she had to prove it, for herself as well as for me. So I saw other young women, I had a bunch of trial runs. As well as confirming Salomé's excellence, it allowed us to hone her character. What's great about Salomé is that she doesn't embody sulky, gloomy adolescence, but Life. She makes you want to take her into thrilling adventures...

### **They're different sorts of actors.**

- Johan and Salomé are fundamentally different, whether socially, mentally, or in their way of dealing with day-to-day life, and during the shoot we were able to play on that difference. To Salomé, who needs a lot of guidance, I'd say: "Johan's character wants to be the champion of his neighbourhood. Whereas your character's ambition is to be a citizen of the world". When we were editing, I read a phrase of Jacques Piasenta's which made me think of my two young actors: he was comparing two young athletes he'd trained. And truly, with Johan and Salomé, it's like Marie-Jo Pérec and Christine Aaron: one always says yes, one always says no, but they're both competitive animals, born to compete.

### **How did you choose the actors who play the parents?**

- It's rather they who chose me! When I met them it was as if I was auditioning... and I'm very grateful to them for having helped me out at that point!

Florence Thomassin I had above all appreciated in the films of Gérard Mordillat, where she had a lot of class, so I first thought of proposing the role of Mathilde Steiner to her. But it became clear to me in the first two minutes, fundamentally, she makes a magnificent proletariat.

With Jean-Philippe Écoffey, for me it's a bit as if twenty years later he took up the character of the sailor he played in "L'Effrontée", as if he'd just come round from the blow Charlotte Gainsbourg dealt him. But I've never said that to him...

### **And the wealthy parents...?**

- Aurélien Recoing and Claire Nebout make a feline couple, very seductive. Claire, with her modernity and her assertiveness, we don't think of her just as 'the little wife', as if Steiner had married a former Miss France; you'd rather say he'd married a national champion. She lends a bit of subtlety to cliché.

### **Louis Steiner is confined to a wheelchair...**

- We see that he's suffered a real accident, a real drama, so when faced with him, Mickael can't overplay his own misery. Steiner has a handicap that makes him untouchable. I very much like characters to reveal themselves physically first of all...

### **Like Vanessa, who undresses in class when she's giving her talk...**

- I believe that in the film it's the body that allows me to go beyond the constraints of social determinism. It's

an alternative: instead of filming the 'colourful worker', poverty and affluence, one can simply film who the characters are in their own bodies. The athletes work on their bodies, they're more muscular than the others. Vanessa, it's true, is sexier than the others, and freer, which is why she performs the striptease/talk. Like Mickael and his judo in the following scene, she throws all her adversaries over her shoulder! For me, the heroes of the story have different bodies which allow them to live different adventures.

### **In the presentation at the beginning, you have the poem "Meet The Monster": we suspect there will be monsters in the plot...**

- Yes, but we'll never know who they really are. It's a 'true/false' declaration: the film will not point out the guilty. For me, I was thinking more of monsters like those you find in the films of Miyazaki, those 'demons' we first think of as evil, and who suddenly metamorphose and help the little hero. I said to myself: OK, if this was a Japanese anime, what would this person change into in order to become better? And then Mickael's parents are for him somewhat transformed into pigs, like in "Spirited Away"...

### **It's a film about metamorphosis?**

- For me, it's more about happiness. All forms of happiness: the intoxication of victory, money, the most intense orgasm. But for you, it's about whatever you want it to be...

*Interview conducted by Mardou Fox, in Paris, March 2005*