Happy Birthday

A FILM BY
CÉDRIC KAHN

LES FILMS DU WORSO
PRESENT

CATHERINE DENEUVE  EMMANUELLE BERÇOT  VINCENT MACAIGNE  CÉDRIC KAHN

WITH LUANA BAJRAMI  LAETITIA COLOMBANI  ISABEL AIMÉ GONZALEZ SOLA  ALAIN ARTUR  JOSHUA ROSINET  MILAN HATALA  SOLAL FERREIRA
Happy Birthday

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SYNOPSIS

« Today is my birthday and I would only like to talk about happy things. »

Andrea doesn’t know it yet but the «surprise» arrival of her eldest daughter, Claire, who has disappeared for the past 3 years and is determined to take back what is due to her, will upset the program and trigger a family storm.
Your eleventh feature film is part of what is almost a genre in itself: the family film. What was the origin of this project?

The origin, I don’t know exactly, but what I can say is that I had this story inside me for a long time, maybe even forever, and it took me all this time and all these films to allow me to tell it. But from the moment it became obvious, everything went very fast. In the fall of 2017, when I had just finished The Prayer, I wrote a first treatment of about twenty pages which I had Sylvie Pialat, the producer, read. She immediately had the intuition that this project should come into being quickly, as if she had felt both an urgency and a risk of setback. And from then on, everything went very quickly: writing the script, looking for actors and funding, until the shooting which started shortly afterwards. For me, who am of a slow nature, it was a little vertiginous but I took it as a challenge.

Like most of the heroes of your previous films, Claire is a character «at the limit». But for the first time, this character is female.

Yes, that’s true and, more generally, I would say it’s a film in which women are at the centre. Powerful, comic, tragic women. And as far as I’m concerned, I’d say: finally! It was about time.... And I loved this work with all these actresses.

Did the film’s directorial approach, which borrows from the theatre, quickly appear in the writing process?

There was no intention to do «theatre», but let’s say that it was naturally imposed by the subject, since there is a unity of place (the house), time (the film takes place in less than 24 hours) and action (everything is organized around the mother’s birthday). The film is built in three acts and the dialogues are abundant. The theatricality also comes from the characters themselves since we have the feeling that they stage themselves, that they sometimes play a role that is imposed on them, with an almost vaudeville side at times. And as for the two productions that take place during the story (Romain’s film and Emma’s play), they function like Russian dolls, which give perspective to the story. They also offer a form of outlet, a little as if fiction became the last line of defence against madness.

These shows also bring good humour and lightness. More generally, tragedy and comedy coexist throughout the film.

I wanted to tell about a family that was a little crazy but also very happy, where everyone could express their fantasy and creativity. They have very hard relationships between them, very cash, sometimes throw terrible things at each other, but it’s their way of loving each other. I wanted it to be very lively, very «gutsy», with children who don’t stand up, drink wine, climb on the tables, adults who behave like children, a real freedom of tone. Everything about them is instinctive, spontaneous, the opposite of an educated or «psychoanalyzed» family.

The film has a «Familial Cluedo» dimension. Claire’s arrival seems to energize the group, but as the story unfolds, revelations, manipulations and reversals of alliances constantly shake up the viewer’s certainties.
The arrival of Claire, the older sister, immediately raises many questions. She has been missing for several years, arrives with all her things, was not invited to her mother’s birthday, her daughter lives here with her grandparents... Nothing is really normal and yet everyone acts as if everything was normal, and that is perhaps the strangest thing. The questions pile up and the film becomes a kind of investigation into this character. And as the answers come, the mystery thickens, we no longer really know who is telling the truth and who is lying, who is the executioner, who is the victim. There is a constant play of mirrors, so in the end everyone seems contaminated by Claire’s sickness.

With its old wallpapers and its quirky feel, the house is also a real character.

We were looking for a large house, a relic of a bygone era, surrounded by a beautiful garden, but above all a house that was a little «crazy». With the head decorator, Guillaume Deviercy, we even accentuated this feeling of «fading». We had to be able to tell ourselves that this family was living beyond its means, in the fantasy of a glorious past, the idea of a world adrift. I also cared a lot about the «cloister» side, an impregnable citadel, as if this family lived in the anguish of the outside world, of the invasion. In the end, it has an almost unreal side, as if these characters were evolving in an illusion.

With its colourful characters and chiselled dialogues, Fête de famille is a great film of actors. How did you compose this family?

Very methodically. Starting with the mother, the cornerstone of the family building, Catherine Deneuve was an obvious choice. Her status, her aura, her fantasy, her humanity: everything resonated with the character. And since she quickly gave us her consent, we built the family around her. In a kind of semi-pleasure, I told Sylvie Pialat that the role of the older brother as a pain in the ass, a righter of wrongs, would suit me like a glove and she was immediately convinced by the idea. I decided to trust her, even if my reluctance to act and direct at the same time was very great. Then we started with Antoine Carrard (my long time casting partner) long script reading sessions with different actors. I needed to see this family, to «smell» it, I couldn’t be satisfied with a theoretical construction. It was an assembly exercise until the painting was as perfect as possible, with a set of similarities and dissimilarities by duos [Andréa and Claire, Vincent and Romain, Claire and her daughter, the wife of the older brother and the fiancée of the younger brother, and so on...]. The day we gathered all the actors around a table to read the script, I had the feeling that each instrument was in its place and this feeling never left me during the shooting.

It was your first time directing Catherine Deneuve.

Yes, before I started, I was quite impressed, but from the moment I started working, everything seemed very simple, simpler than with a lot of actors. She has an ability to live the present moment, the shooting, her character and the situations of the film that makes things a lot lighter. She also has a great interet in the direction, so I could open myself up to everything with her.

And it was also the first time you acted in one of your films.

It’s a little bit the same. I was making a big deal out of it and in the heat of
the moment, everything seemed easier. I felt like I could bring the tone and energy from the inside. I was also served by high-level actors, very virtuosic, very autonomous. With the chief operator, assistant and production manager, we had rehearsed the whole scenario in the set before the shooting, since we knew each camera position before we started. With Yves Cape, we had decided on very clear staging options and we have hardly deviated from them. The film is composed mainly of sequence shots, with few axes. The camera doesn’t move, the movement comes from the characters. And when the film is set up, for meal scenes for example, it’s the opposite: the cutting up takes over, creates the movement. There are also two or three shots that I would call «mental», especially during dinner, when everything gets blurry: it’s as if we were inside Claire’s brain, which at the time seems totally isolated from the rest of the family.

**Emmanuelle Bercot and Vincent Macaigne have in common a sense of excess. And like you, they are two directors...**

I didn’t deliberately choose two actors who are also directors, but maybe that’s what makes our siblings credible... More seriously, it’s true that I also called on them for their baroque side, I wanted powerful, comic, free actors, at the service of unreasonable characters. Their duo is the framework of the film, they are the animators of the story, bringing in turn fantasy, manipulation and tragedy.

**How did you work with Emmanuelle Bercot on the character of Claire who, because of her extreme character, can be difficult to grasp?**

When you see Emmanuelle on the screen, you get an impression of spontaneity, of ease, whereas she prepares a lot, she is very hard working. What I was telling her was that she should not act madness, but on the contrary defend the convictions and logic of her character. I didn’t talk to her about references to films with borderline characters, but during the preparation, with the team, we saw a lot of them again: Melancholia, A woman under the influence, A streetcar named desire....

**When you say «Happy Birthday», you mean group scenes, it’s quite new in your cinema. How did you approach this aspect of filming?**

I had already experienced them on Trop de bonheur and La Prière. I love it, the energy is multiplies itself! I like to create in disorder and, conversely, order makes me anxious. When there are people in the shot, something unexpected happens all the time, the writing is affected, the lines are bursting, we cut each other off... In the meal scenes, it is as if the camera became one of the guests. But in the end, the film is quite faithful to the script.

The film marks your reunion with editor Yann Dedet, ten years after Les Regrets.

I have an almost filial link with Yann Dedet. I’ve known him all my life, I was his intern, he trained me in editing, edited several of my films. I felt protected, especially about this story, in which I delivered many personal things. I needed that confidence, especially since I was also an actor. But beyond this relationship, Yann has an editing style that is totally adapted to this kind of film. He has a particular talent for integrating the shooting material into the script and making things terribly lively. The lunch scene has hardly been altered, it corresponds, with a few details, to its very first edit. I could say, about Sylvie Pialat and Yann Dedet, that I made a film about family, «with family».

**The story is punctuated by two songs, Mon amie la rose by Françoise Hardy and L’Amour, l’amour, l’amour, l’amour by Mouloudji, and also a rap piece**
Each generation has its own song. We can imagine that Mouloudji’s has the status of a family mascot, it is a song that parents listened to and that now connects brothers and sisters. «Mon amie la rose» is Claire’s song. I chose it mainly for the lyrics that resonate with the character, a kind of sweet melancholy. For rap, I wanted something sentimental, the song was found by Joshua, the young actor. The link between all these songs is that they all talk about love. I really like French songs in movies, they allow us to be sentimental, nostalgic. I dream of a movie where everything would be said in songs.
CÉDRIC KAHN

DIRECTOR

2019 ............... HAPPY BIRTHDAY
2018 ............... THE PRAYER
2014 ............... WILD LIFE
2011 ............... A BETTER LIFE
2009 ............... REGRETS
2005 ............... L’AVION
2004 ............... RED LIGHTS
2001 ............... ROBERTO SUCCO
1998 ............... L’ENNUI
1996 ............... ZERO GUILT (TV)
1994 ............... TOO MUCH HAPPINESS
 ..................... HAPPINESS (TV)
1992 ............... BAR DES RAILS

ACTOR

2019 ............... HAPPY BIRTHDAY
2018 ............... COLD WAR - Pawel PAWLIKOWSKI
 ..................... HEAD ABOVE WATER - Margaux BONHOMME
2016 ............... AFTER LOVE- Joachim LAFOSSE
 ..................... UP FOR LOVE - Laurent TIRARD
2015 ............... LES ANARCHISTES - Élie WAJEMAN
2013 ............... MISS AND THE DOCTORS- Axelle ROPERT
2012 ............... ALYAH - Élie WAJEMAN
CATHERINE DENEUVE

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

2019 ............... HAPPY BIRTHDAY - Cédric KAHN
 ..................... THE TRUTH - Hirokazu KORE-EDA
 ..................... FAREWELL TO THE NIGHT - André TÉCHINÉ
 ..................... CLAIRE DARLING – Julie BERTUCCELLI
2017 ................ THE MIDWIFE - Martin PROVOST
2016 ................ ALL THAT DIVIDES US - Thierry KLIFA
2015 ................ STANDING TALL - Emmanuelle BERCOT
 ..................... THE BRAND NEW TESTAMENT – Jaco VAN DORMAEL
2014 ................ FRENCH RIVIERA - André TÉCHINÉ
 ..................... IN THE COURTYARD – Pierre SALVADORI
2013 ................ ON MY WAY - Emmanuelle BERCOT
2010 ................ BELOVED – Christophe HONORÉ
 ..................... HIS MOTHER’S EYES - Thierry KLIFA
2009 ................ POTICHE – François OZON
2007 ................ A CHRISTMAS TALE – Arnaud DESPLECHIN
2005 ................ THE STONE COUNCIL - Guillaume NICLOUX
 ..................... PALAIS ROYAL – Valérie LEMERCIER
2004 ................ CHANGING TIMES - André TÉCHINÉ
 ..................... NEAREST TO HEAVEN - Tonie MARSHALL
2001 ................ 8 WOMEN - François OZON
 ..................... I’M GOING HOME – Manoel de OLIVEIRA
2000 ................ DANCER IN THE DARK – Lars VON TRIER
1999 ................ GENEALOGIES OF A CRIME – Raoul RUIZ
1998 ................ PLACE VENDÔME - Nicole GARCIA
1996 ................ THIEVES- André TÉCHINÉ
1995 ................ THE CONVENT - Manoel de OLIVEIRA
1994 ................... MY FAVORITE SEASON- André TÉCHINÉ
1992 ................... INDOCHINE – Régis WARGNIER
1991 ................... STRANGE PLACE FOR AN ENCOUNTER - François DUPEYRON
1988 ................... SCENE OF THE CRIME - André TÉCHINÉ
1986 ................... LE BON PLAISIR - Francis GIROD
1983 ................... HOTEL AMERICA - André TÉCHINÉ
1981 ................... JE VOUS AIME - Claude BERRI
1980 ................... LAST METRO - François TRUFFAUT
1977 ................... OTHER PEOPLE’S MONEY - Christian de CHALONGE
1976 ................... SECOND CHANCE - Claude LELOUCH
1975 ................... ANIMA PERSA - Dino RISI
1974 ................... LE SAUVAGE - Jean-Paul RAPPENEAU
1973 ................... LA FEMME AUX BOTTES ROUGES - Luis BUÑUEL
1972 ................... IT ONLY HAPPENS TO OTHERS - Nadine TRINTIGNANT
1971 ................... DONKEY SKIN - Jacques DEMY
1970 ................... MISSISSIPI MERMAID - François TRUFFAUT
1969 ................... TRISTANA – Luis BUÑUEL
1968 ................... HEARTBEAT - Alain CAVALIER
1967 ................... BELLE DE JOUR - Louis BUÑUEL
1967 ................... THE YOUNG GIRLS OF ROCHEFORT - Jacques DEMY
1966 ................... THE CREATURES - Agnès VARDA
1965 ................... A MATTER OF RESISTANCE - Jean-Paul RAPPENEAU
1963 ................... REPULSION - Roman POLANSKI
1963 ................... THE UMBRELLAS OF CHERBOURG - Jacques DEMY
EMMANUELLE BERCOT

ACTRESS

2019  HAPPY BIRTHDAY - Cédric KAHN
       JUMBO - Zoé WITTOCK
       SCHOOL’S OUT - Sébastien MARNIER
2018  GIRLS OF THE SUN - Eva HUSSON
2014  MY KING- MAÏWENN
2012  TURNING TIDE - Christophe OFFENSTEIN
       RUE MANDAR - Idit CEBULA
2010  POLISSE - MAÏWENN
2009  LITTLE WHITE LIES- Guillaume CANET
2004  WILD CAMP – Christophe ALI & Nicolas BONILAURI
2003  À TOUT DE SUITE - Benoît JACQUOT
2001  CLÉMENT – Emmanuelle BERCOT
1999  UNE POUR TOUTES...TOUTES POUR UNE - Claude LELOUCH
1998  IT ALL STARTS TODAY - Bertrand TAVERNIER
1997  CLASS TRIP- Claude MILLER
1996  LA DIVINE POURSUITE – Michel DEVILLE
1993  INNER CITY – Jean-François RICHE
1990  RAGAZZI - Mama KEÏTA

DIRECTOR

2016  150 MILLIGRAMS
2014  STANDING TALL
2012  ON MY WAY
2011  THE PLAYERS
2009  STUDENT SERVICES (TV)
2008  TIREZ SUR LE CAVISTE (TV)
2005  BACKSTAGE
2001  CLÉMENT
1998  LA PUCE (medium length)
       LE CHOIX D’ÉLODIE (TV)
1997  LES VACANCES (short)
VINCENT MACAIGNE

ACTOR

2019  HAPPY BIRTHDAY - Cédric KAHN
      WHITE AS SNOW – Anne FONTAINE
      NON FICTION– Olivier ASSAYAS
2018  DOG– Samuel BENCHETRIT
2017  REINVENTING MARVIN– Anne FONTAINE
2016  C’EST LA VIE!– Éric TOLEDANO et Olivier NAKACHE
      DES PLANS SUR LA COMÈTE – Guilhem AMESLAND
2015  STRUGGLE FOR LIFE – Antonin PERETJATKO
      TWO FRIENDS– Louis GARREL
      NEWS FROM PLANET MARS – Dominik MOLL
      THE INNOCENTS – Anne FONTAINE
      STUBBORN– Armel HOSTIOU
2014  EDEN – Mia HANSEN-LØVE
2013  FOOL CIRCLE – Vincent MARIETTE
      TONNERRE – Guillaume BRAC
      2 AUTUMNS, 3 WINTERS – Sébastien BETBEDER
      AGE OF PANIC – Justine TRIET
      LA FILLE DU 14 JUILLET – Antonin PERETJATKO
2012  LE MONDE À L’ENVERS – Sylvain DESCLOUS
2011  MOONLIGHT LOVER – Guilhem AMESLAND
      A WORLD WITHOUT WOMEN – Guillaume BRAC
      A BURNING HOT SUMMER – Philippe GARREL
      STRANDED– Guillaume BRAC
2009  ON WAR– Bertrand BONELLO
2008  24 BARS – Jalil LESPERT
2007  QUAND JE SERAI STAR – Patrick MIMOUNI
2005  MAN’S GENTLE LOVE – Jean-Paul CIVEYRAC
2001  LA RÉPÉTITION – Catherine CORSINI

DIRECTOR

2017  COMFORT AND CONSOLOATION IN FRANCE
2015  DON JUAN & SGANARELLE (TV)
2012  WHAT WE’LL LEAVE BEHIND (short)
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TECHNICAL SHEET

Director .................. Cédric Kahn
Screenplay ................. Cédric Kahn
with the participation of  Fanny Burdino et Samuel Doux
Cinematography .......... Yves CAPE
Film Editing ............... Yann DEDET
Sound ..................... Jean-Pierre DURET
.......................... Sylvain MALBRANT
.......................... Thomas GAUDER
Set decoration ............. Guillaume DEVIERCY
Costume Design .......... Alice CAMBOURNAC
Casting ................... Antoine CARRARD
Produced by ............... Sylvie Pialat
.......................... Benoît Quainon
.......................... Aude Cathelin
Production company ...... Les films du Worso
In co-production with .... France 2 Cinéma
.......................... Tropdebonheur Productions
.......................... Scope Pictures
With the participation of  France Télévisions
.......................... Canal +
.......................... Ciné +
.......................... Le Pacte
In association with ......... Cofinova 15
.......................... Cinéventure 4
.......................... Cofimage 30
.......................... Cinémage 13
.......................... Cinécap 2
With the support of ....... La région Nouvelle-Aquitaine
In partnership with ....... Conseil département Lot-et-Garonne
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International Sales ...... Elle Driver