A film by DAVID and STEPHANE FÖENKINOS

la délicatesse

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STUDIOCANAL
Nathalie has a wonderful life. She is young, beautiful and has the perfect marriage. But when her husband dies in an accident, it brings her world crashing down. For the next few years, she focuses on work, leaving her emotions on the sidelines. Then all of a sudden, without even understanding why, she kisses a most unlikely man – her coworker, Markus. This odd couple then embarks upon their own emotional journey: a journey that raises all kinds of questions and hostility at work. Can we really choose how we rediscover our taste for life? Marveling at their newfound love, Nathalie and Markus end up running away to give their relationship a fighting chance. This is a story of rebirth but it is also a tale of the singularity of love.

Adapted from David Foenkinos’ eighth novel, winner of 10 literary awards and which has sold over 700,000 copies.
Interview with
David and Stéphane Foenkinos
directors

David, La Délicatesse is your eighth novel. It has had the most readers of all your works with 700,000 copies sold and translations into 21 languages. How did the idea come about to turn it into a film?

Stéphane – We both wanted to make a film together one day. I was lucky because David gave me the book to read very early on. I immediately thought that it had to be turned into a movie. And that was long before we had any idea the book would reach so many readers.

David – Several of my books are in the process of being adapted. But in my mind, my desire to make movies wasn’t linked to my work as a writer. On the one hand, I write novels and on the other, I wanted to make a film. As I did all the interviews and debates one does when a new book is launched, I realized that this story was much more personal than I’d realized and that the subject was very close to my heart. I hadn’t finished with the story. When other books I’d written were published, I felt a kind of weariness and a desire to move onto something else. Whereas here, I couldn’t break away from it; I still wanted to talk about it and I still had the energy to spend more time with it.
What is the Foenkinos brothers’ cinematographic complicity based on?

David – We’ve been making films for ten years...

Stéphane – We had a wonderful mentor in Jacques Doillon with whom I started out as a casting director. It was his idea to put us to work together on a project. He had a script he couldn’t finish and wanted someone to take a fresh look at it. Back then, I was already writing, and David had just published his first novel. And then one day, I was making a “Making Of” for a Stéphanie Murat film in Luxemburg and I had a crew. I saw an opportunity to make the short film we’d been thinking about for a while.

How did the project for LA DÉLICATESSE develop?

David – Among the offers we received, we were pleased to meet producers Marc-Antoine Robert and Xavier Rigault because they’d acquired the rights for my previous novel, Nos Séparations, and I felt very comfortable with them. I then wrote the screenplay, trying to come up with new ideas. I wanted it to be a film adapted from a book more than a transposition.
David’s literary style is in part based on a constant desire to play with the reader. There is self-mockery and multiple digressions, information is inserted between chapters; cultural references, lists, soccer results, the recipe for asparagus risotto and so on. How did you resolve the dilemma of whether to keep these annotations and how to do that, or to get rid of them at the risk of losing the tone?

David – The adaptation is very faithful, but I think the scenes from the book weren’t necessarily cinematographic. My challenge was to preserve the tone of the text while creating new fantasies. I used transitions, ellipses and various other tricks to illustrate the passing of time. There are things that aren’t in the book but a film is something different to a novel so the things we took from the book had to be visual.

The internal voice also allows you to keep connection with the text.

David – The film begins and finishes with a voice off. Among the filmmakers who have influenced us, firstly there is Truffaut. (The so-called “crackers” scene is a direct homage to BED AND BOARD.) But we also wanted to avoid falling into the trap of a film that was too literary.

Stéphane – We also really like visual comedy and situation comedy. And those offbeat characters like Jacques Tati, Pierre Etaix and Blake Edwards.

The style of the office as well as Markus and Nathalie’s costumes are very characteristic of their psychology and they play a key role in the comic side of the film. What did you ask from the set and costume designers?

Stéphane – Given that a large part of the film takes place in the office, we didn’t want to film the modernity of glass and open-plan spaces. We had to find wooden moldings, gilt and marble that crepe soles stick to and upon which high heels tap. It’s also supposed to be a Swedish company so the watchwords were discretion and a muted atmosphere. As soon as we found the set – a real company in Saint-Denis – we had to revamp the fittings and accessories to avoid being too old-fashioned.

The same applied to the costumes with very precise color codes ranging from navy to beige. So when Nathalie puts on a red blouse, she really is out of place. And as for Markus, I think we totally exhausted the full range of beiges. Every time François Damiens saw a new sweater, he’d quip, “Oh, beige for a change!”

David – We thought long and hard about Markus’s comic side, but we absolutely had to avoid him being ridiculous or awkward. Striking that balance was key. Sometimes that involved simple details like Markus’s complete inability to sort out his shirt collar.

Stéphane – We were influenced by the 1960s aesthetic of “Mad Men”, which fitted with the direction we were taking. We also claim a barely-concealed homage to Joan, the series’ busty secretary, through the formidable Audrey Fleurot who was delighted to oblige.
In a similar way, the film tells the story of a woman over a decade or so. From the joyful and happy period at the start to the return of love at the end, Nathalie goes through some darker periods and in particular a period of grieving. How did you work on Nathalie’s physical development?

Stéphane – In the script and the storyboarding, we defined three different phases for Nathalie. And they were the object of meetings with the hair and make-up team and the set designers to plan how we were going to make that happen. Audrey was also very involved with the choice of hairstyles among other things. David, who is obsessed with hairstyles, and I both wanted her to have long hair at the start of the film.

We opted for a high ponytail that you first see in the long opening take and which immediately works as a symbol of youth and insouciance.

David – We didn’t want to be too obvious in the way Nathalie moves through the phases of her life. We didn’t want to use the easy route of cutting her hair to symbolize the passage of time. Aside from the changes in style over the decades, we felt very strongly that her appearance had to reflect her state of mind. Markus’s arrival subtly provokes changes in Nathalie in terms of her clothes and her hairstyle.
The work done in terms of lighting is also very precise. Did you have any specific cinematographic or pictorial references?

Stéphane – We talked a lot with our DP Rémy Chevrin about Michel Gondry’s ETERNAL SUNSHINE OF THE SPOTLESS MIND. We particularly liked Gondry’s way of approaching faces and playing with natural light. In a similar way, to accompany her physical and psychological evolution, Rémy used different film stock to subtly mark Nathalie’s passage from her initial happiness to grief and then gradually to rebirth.

David – We worked very closely with Rémy. Our references weren’t always linked to a specific filmmaker but to precise scenes. For example, in terms of recent movies, we were very struck by Xavier Dolan’s slow-downs, as well as the nightclub scene from BLACK SWAN where Nathalie Portman lets go. Furthermore, we also spent a lot of time looking at paintings, books on structuralist architecture and Erwin Olaf’s photography in particular.

Both your names are on this film. Do you share the various tasks? Who does what?

David – We are extremely complementary. I wrote the story and the screenplay, and I’m fascinated by the technical aspects of framing and editing. I have spent a lot of time these last few years on shoots.

Stéphane – I was very relieved to be working in tandem. There was no question of me making a film on my own, even if I’m more involved in this business than David. He is the author of the book and thus the conscience and the reference in terms of the characters and their psychology. For any slight question in the text, David was able to arbitrate. Because I have worked in casting, I was more disposed to directing the actor.

How did the casting work out?

David – We gave the script to Audrey Tautou to read very early on. It was like a crazy kind of dream – we didn’t dare hope, although we were sure she was right for the character.

Stéphane – I have a particular link to her because I did the casting for Pascale Bailly’s GOD IS GREAT AND I’M NOT (2001). I already knew her capacity for working in very different registers and her inventiveness, as well as her skill that would mean she remained credible as the woman/child at the start right through to the woman who has been tested by life but for whom life is opening up once more. Audrey was concerned that as the story went on, her character would become dry or unlikable but that was never the case.

In what way was Audrey Tautou the character?

David – While I was writing the script, I saw her on stage in Ibsen’s A Doll’s House, and I was overwhelmed by her performance. I was amazed by the power and fragility she gave off at the same time as a comic energy.

Stéphane – I was very relieved to be working in tandem. There was no question of me making a film on my own, even if I’m more involved in this business than David. He is the author of the book and thus the conscience and the reference in terms of the characters and their psychology. For any slight question in the text, David was able to arbitrate. Because I have worked in casting, I was more disposed to directing the actor.
Tell us about the male roles. In the novel, you talk about a combination of Pierre Richard and Marlon Brando, but that’s to describe Nathalie’s husband François, rather than Markus, the coworker who falls in love with her.

David – That’s true. For François, we needed someone so charming that he makes you want to spend the rest of your life with him and whose premature death is totally devastating. As for Markus, in the start, we didn’t really know who would be able to play this unusual Swede. We did some casting sessions with some Scandinavian actors. Then all of a sudden, François came on the scene.

Stéphane – There was this cloud of faces and every time, his reappeared.

David – Physically, he was perfect for the character, but I was worried he might be a little too extrovert because Markus is shy and discreet. But when we met him, it was a striking. He was Markus.

Stéphane – I’d just cast him in Doillon’s JUST ANYBODY in which he has two estate agent scenes that were both comic and scary.

His character has that aspect of childishness that you find in the work of Polish writer Gombrowicz.

David – There’s something of the Gogol’s characters about him. He reads Cioran. He has that grotesque gentleness of characters in novels from those Eastern Bloc countries that influence me a great deal. Indeed, Audrey Tautou is reading a Goncharov novel in the film.

Stéphane – He is timeless, like in Kaurismäki’s films, which we love!
Pio Marmaï plays François, the husband.

David – He is perfect. He has the perfect fragility, sweetness, tenderness and a kind of clumsiness. I wrote the script thinking of him, of his vital strength after having seen him in Rémi Bezançon’s THE FIRST DAY OF THE REST OF YOUR LIFE.

Stéphane – He is handsome AND funny, like both Patrick Dewaere and Pierre Richard at the same time.

And Bruno Todeschini?

Stéphane – He has such comedic power, which is really under-used in my opinion. To play this hunk of a guy who is a bit of a loser, you have to have a real power of detachment, which he understood perfectly. I think a whole lot of people are going to be overwhelmed by his performance.

David – He is a character who suffers, he’s a thankless person. To characterize, he’s the baddie in the story. But I wanted him to move us too. Bruno captured that strange balance perfectly. We should also mention Mélanie Bernier (Chloé), who I was thinking about right back when I was writing the book. She has a huge capacity for self-mockery. As for Joséphine de Meaux, we wanted to have her whatever the cost, being great fans of the films of Olivier Nakache and Eric Toledano. She plays Sophie, Nathalie’s best friend, who is the only character not to appear in the book. I wrote it for her.
The music has its own role in the tone of the film. How did you come to choose Emilie Simon for it?

David – Right from the start I was determined to have this incredibly inventive musician collaborate on the film. She is the singer I most admire and who I dreamed of meeting. As a singer, she is an absolutely perfect fit in the universe of LA DÉLICATESSE. Right from the moment she agreed to do it, she went beyond our hopes. She suggested a lot of songs. Initially, we didn’t want that much music but each time she sent us something, it was so right and fitted the images so well that it was a marriage made in heaven. It’s a film by David and Stéphane Foenkinos with music by Emilie Simon!

Stéphane – It was as if she had created a parallel world to the film that was in perfect symbiosis with it.
You dare to include some very lyrical moments especially at the start and the end of the film, as if you are trying to escape reality. Does this freedom of tone seek to blur the boundary between drama and comedy?

Stéphane – We often said we were making a “dramedy”, which expresses the idea of passing from one state to the other much better than the French term, “comédie dramatique”. It’s also bittersweet. The tone is very close to that which you find in David’s novels. The moments of lyricism – those that there are – stem from a desire driven by moviemaking.

David – It was important to make the film we had in our minds, and that brings with it its own share of risks. Like a way in with a long voiceover. Beyond a simple mixture of comedy and drama, we were also driven to tell a simple story punctuated by moments of madness and flights of fantasy.

The scene with the first kiss is very unexpected, especially as it’s the first time we see François Damiens, isn’t it?

Stéphane – Sorry to prove you wrong, but Markus appears a few scenes before during his first meeting with Nathalie and her group. We liked the idea of having a hero who appears after 30 minutes of the film have already gone by, and whose face you don’t even see in his first scene.

David – The scene with the kiss is surely the pivotal scene of the film. I remember the huge relief during the shoot when I saw that fabulous eye rolling from François Damiens. It must be said that Audrey helped us a lot. We established a special strategy for that day. We did a number of additional shots to push back the kiss. François dropped his guard. And then during one scene, when he wasn’t expecting it anymore, Audrey kissed him really passionately. You really feel the sense of surprise in that shot.

The final scene is particularly moving. How did you envisage it?

Stéphane – David had written this quite audacious long take in the screenplay and there were some in the crew who weren’t 100% for it. We did a lot of tests and rehearsals. Then, thanks to the set which magnified the garden, shooting with the Steadicam, the skill of the actors and Emilie Simon’s music, the choreography made sense and we were able to recreate what we had in mind.
Emilie Simon
songwriter, composer

"David Foenkinos contacted me last winter. He wanted me to write the music for his film. He wrote me a really lovely letter, which I’ve kept. In parallel, he sent a very touching appeal, a kind of cheeky reference, through an article published in the French daily newspaper Libération. I received two copies of La Délicatesse, one a novel and the other a screenplay. I read them conscientiously, one after the other. I was both moved and a little upset by the common ground between this story and my own life. What David wrote rang very true with what I’d just been through, having lost someone very dear to me. I didn’t say yes right away. I went to the shoot in Paris to meet the actors, the crew and the two filmmakers. I wanted to soak up the mood of the film. After that, I decided to join in the adventure.

I found myself in a quite unique situation, at a crossroads between two universes that were colliding. I had already written certain themes in memory of the person I’d lost, like a kind of secret diary. Of course I composed others, to reflect the images of the Foenkinos brothers, I finalized melodies and arrangements. It was a strange experience – both autobiographical and for a film. Both made to measure to suit the film and also in homage to the man I loved. La Délicatesse or “delicacy” is the most suitable term to describe my original ideas. I’ve used that term so many times that now I talk about finesse and subtlety. With a kind of depth but without string instruments. I worked on arrangements for piano, voice, drum and bass; something organic and warm. Also using brass, percussion, keyboard and a few electronic interventions. For the scene in the nightclub for example, the sound had to remain warm.

I wanted to explore the extent of what I had to say on the subject. So much so that certain themes aren’t used in the film but they are there on the album, “Franky Knight”, released on 21 November. I thought long and hard about the way I’d talk about this creation. I think the most appropriate way to describe it is as music where life meets art!"
David Foenkinos

biography

Born on 28 October 1974. After studying arts at the Sorbonne and jazz at the CIM school of jazz, he attempted to form various music groups but could never find a bass player. He then had his first novel published by Éditions Gallimard: Inversion de l’Idiotie, de l’Influence de Deux Polonais, which won the François-Mauriac, prize from the Académie Française. His second novel was Entre les Oreilles, and his third, Le Potentiel Érotique de ma Femme, won the Roger Nimier prize. In 2003, he was made a beneficiary of the Fondation Hachette. He then went on to publish two other novels, En Cas de Bonheur and Les Cœurs Autonomes. His sixth novel, Qui se Souvient de David Foenkinos?, was shortlisted for the Femina and won the Jean Giono jury prize. Nos Séparations, which was published in October 2008, is currently being adapted for the screen by Yann Samuell, director of LOVE ME IF YOU DARE. In January 2010 he published Bernard, a novella the film rights to which were bought by Mars Films. Then in October 2010, he published Lennon, the fictional confessions of John Lennon. His novels have been translated in some 20 countries. In August 2011, he published his tenth tome, Les Souvenirs, in the top 5 of the L’Express magazine bestseller list and shortlisted for the Prix Goncourt. La Délicatesse is the only book published in the 2009 season that was selected for all major French literary prizes (Goncourt, Femina, Renaudot, Médicis and Interallié). It has won ten literary awards in total, and counting editions by Grand Livre du Mois, France Loisirs, and Folio, has enjoyed a print run of 700,000.

In addition to his novels, David Foenkinos has also written stories for graphic novels and co-directed with his brother Stéphane a short film, UNE HISTOIRE DE PIEDS, which has won many audience awards and can be viewed on his Facebook page. He has also worked with directors including Jacques Doillon and Cédric Klapisch on a range of screenplay projects.

His first play, Célibataires, was met with success in Fall 2008 at the Studio des Champs-Élysées, starring Catherine Jacob and Christian Charmetant. It was directed by Anouche Setbon.

He also writes a monthly column for Psychologies magazine as well as Gael magazine in Belgium.
Stéphane Foenkinos

A former English teacher, Stéphane Foenkinos’ career changed course when he met Jacques Doillon who employed him as casting director. Since 1997, he has worked with a raft of names from the world of French-language filmmaking including Jean-Luc Godard, François Ozon, André Téchiné, Claude Chabrol, Coline Serreau, Jeanne Labrune, Valérie Lemercier, Anne Fontaine, Ian Duran-Cohen, Danièle Thompson, Jean-Paul Salomé, Catherine Corsini, Jacques Fieschi, Laurent Tirard and Florent Siri. He has also worked on a range of international projects with directors including Peter Greenaway, Mike Newell, Martin Campbell, Florian Van Donnersmarck, Terrence Malick, Woody Allen for MIDNIGHT IN PARIS and most recently with Robert Zemeckis. In parallel, he writes sketches for the humorist Sylvie Joly, about whom he wrote a biography published by Flammarion in 2010. For the stage, he co-wrote and directed a musical show inspired by the life of Judy Garland and has, since 2010, been an associate writer at the CDN in Orléans directed by Arthur Nauzyciel. With his older brother David, he embarked upon a screenwriting partnership under the guidance of Jacques Doillon. In 2005, they made their first short film, UNE HISTOIRE DE PIEDS, a love story from the point of view of feet that was selected for many festivals and won many prizes including the audience award at the Nice Festival and the Youth Prize at the Meudon Festival of Humor. He also co-wrote an international project with writer Peter Greenaway, Mike Newell, Martin Campbell, Florian Van Donnersmarck, Terrence Malick, Woody Allen for MIDNIGHT IN PARIS and most recently with Robert Zemeckis.

FEATURE LENGTH MOVIE DIRECTION
LA DÉLICATESSE
Co-directed with David Foenkinos, based on the eponymous novel by David Foenkinos 2011, produced by 2.4.7. Films

SCREENPLAY FOR TELEVISION
HARD
Season two (Cathy Vernay/Benoiît Pétrè) 2011, produced by La Pataphysique d’Images / Canal+

FEATURE-LENGTH SCREENPLAY
GPD (Benoiît Pétrè)
In preparation - 2011, prod. Les Films du Cap

DOCUMENTARY DIRECTION
AUTOUR DE VICTOIRE
Making of the film VICTOIRE by Stéphanie Murat, 52mn 2005, produced by ADR

SHORT FILM DIRECTION
UNE HISTOIRE DE PIEDS
35mm, color, 13 mins 2005, co-written and co-directed with David Foenkinos
Produced by Dhrarama Films
Selected for the festivals of Nice (audience award); Meudon (Youth Prize); Paris Tout Court, etc.

THEATER
IMPROBABLES
CDN Orléans, 2011

CEDIE EN LOVE
Reading at the Théâtre des 13 Vents, Montpellier, 2010

MAMIE
French adaptation in collaboration with David Foenkinos
Based on the work by Martin Sherman, 2009

FÉLICHES
French adaptation with Charlotte Des Georges
Based on the work by John Patrick Shanley

REBEKABARET, ME AND MY CELLO
Co-written and directed with Rebecca Carrington
Edinburgh Festival 2004, 2005 and 2006

UNE ÉTOILE ET MOI
Edinburgh Festival 2005 and world tour

LA CIGALE ET LA JOLY
Texts for Sylvie Joly - La Cigale, 1999-2000
2011 LA DÉLICATESSE by David and Stéphane Foenkinos
2009 BEAUTIFUL LIES by Pierre Salvadori
2008 COCO BEFORE CHANEL by Anne Fontaine
2007 HUNTING AND GATHERING by Claude Berri
2006 PRICELESS by Pierre Salvadori
THE DA VINCI CODE by Ron Howard
2005 RUSSIAN DOLLS by Cédric Klapisch
2004 A VERY LONG ENGAGEMENT by Jean-Pierre Jeunet
2003 NOT ON THE LIPS by Alain Resnais
2002 DIRTY PRETTY THINGS by Stephen Frears
LAUBERGÉ ESPAGNOLE by Cédric Klapisch
HE LOVES ME... HE LOVES ME NOT by Laetitia Colombani
LOST SEAMEN by Claire Devers
2001 GOD IS GREAT AND I’M NOT by Pascale Bailly
AMÉLIE by Jean-Pierre Jeunet
2000 THE LIBERTINE by Gabriel Aghion
MARRY ME by Harriet Marin
1999 VENUS BEAUTY INSTITUTE by Tonie Marshall
PRETTY DEVILS by Serge Meynard

Audrey Tautou
filmography

Audrey Tautou
2011
LA DÉLICATESSE by David and Stéphane Foenkinos
TORPEDO by Matthieu Donck
HOLIDAYS BY THE SEA by Pascal Rabaté
BORDERLINE by Alexandre Coffre

2010
NOTHING TO DECLARE by Dany Boon
HEARTBREAKER by Pascal Chaumeil

2009
THE WOLBERG FAMILY by Axelle Ropert
LITTLE NICOLAS by Laurent Tirard

2008
ME TWO by Nicolas Charlet and Bruno Lavaine
JCVD by Mabrouk El Mechri
SEULS TWO by Eric Judor and Ramzy Bedia
DADDY COOL by Thomas Sorlioux and François Desagnat
BEHIND THE WALLS by Christian Faure
JUST ANYBODY by Jacques Doillon

2007
COWBOY by Benoît Mariage
TAXI 4 by Gérard Krawczyk

2006
OSS 117, CAIRO, NEST OF SPIES by Michel Hazanavicius
2.4.7. Films

MAINS ARMÉES by Pierre Jolivet
From a screenplay by Pierre Jolivet and Simon Michéli
With Roschdy Zem, Leïla Bekhti and Marc Lavoine
In post-production

LA DÉLICATESSE by David and Stéphane Foenkinos
Written by David Foenkinos
Based on the eponymous novel by David Foenkinos
With Audrey Tautou, François Damiens, Bruno Todeschini, Joséphine de Meaux and Mélanie Bernier
French release: 21 December 2011

SIMON WERNER A DISPARU... by Fabrice Gobert
Written by Fabrice Gobert
With Jules Pélissier, Ana Girardot, Arthur Mazet and Serge Riabouikine
French release: 22 September 2010
Festival de Cannes 2010 – Un Certain Regard
Césars 2011 – nomination for Best First Film

PIÈCE MONTÉE by Denys Granier-Deferre
Based on the novel by Blandine Le Callet
With Danielle Darrieux, Jean-Pierre Marielle, Jérémie Renier, Clémence Poésy, Julie Depardieu, Léa Drucker, Julie Gayet and Dominique Lavanant
French release: 10 March 2010
Alpe d’Huez Festival of Comedy Films 2010

PERSEPOLIS by Marjane Satrapi and Vincent Paronnaud
Written by Marjane Satrapi and Vincent Paronnaud
With the voices of Chiara Mastroianni and Catherine Deneuve
French release: 27 June 2007
Festival de Cannes 2007 Jury Prize
Césars 2008 – Best First Film and Best Adaptation
Oscars 2008 – nomination for Best Animation
European Film Awards – nomination for Best Film
Cast

Audrey Tautou  Nathalie
François Damiens  Markus
Bruno Todeschini  Charles
Mélanie Bernier  Chloé
Joséphine de Meaux  Sophie
Pio Marmai  François
Monique Chaumette  Madeleine
Marc Citti  Pierre
Alexandre Pavloff, of the Comédie Française  Benoît
Vittoria Scognamiglio  François' mother
Olivier Cruvellier  François' father
Audrey Fleurot  Ingrid, Charles' secretary

With the kind participation of Ariane Ascaride in the role of Nathalie’s mother
and Christophe Malavoy in the role of Nathalie’s father

Original music and songs  Emilie Simon

“Franky Knight” (Emilie Simon), album released by Barclay, a Universal label