

STUDIO CANAL

SILENZIO



Marilyn Productions
presents

WHEN PIGS HAVE WINGS

a film by
Sylvain Estibal

STUDIOCANAL
INTERNATIONAL MARKETING
Caroline Safir
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France
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Runtime : 1h39



SYNOPSIS

Jafaar, a Palestinian fisherman, is astonished when he finds a Vietnamese pot-bellied pig tangled up in his net. He has to get rid of the impure animal fast, before the authorities find out, but he can't resist the opportunity to make some quick money.

When a local UN official refuses to buy the pig, Jafaar finds a way to exploit his new friend's reproductive abilities in the most unexpected of places...

Interview with SYLVAIN ESTIBAL

DIRECTOR

Where did the idea come from to make this film?

From nowhere! It was really born from the blurring of different anecdotes and memories. I live in Montevideo in Uruguay and at certain times of the year, you can go to the port and see these gigantic ships leaving to cross the Atlantic, filled with thousands of sheep for Eid. When they are loading, it's spectacular. They fill the city with a very powerful odor and they inspire the imagination. One day, I even surprised myself imagining pigs instead of sheep. I thought that seemed like a fun image and the idea just stayed there in my mind.

In parallel, I had a conversation with an Israeli friend of mine who is a photographer. He told me that he knew some Jews who were raising pigs on platforms because these animals are forbidden from touching Israeli soil. I thought that was as ingenious as it is absurd and that was another idea I stored away.

Then in 2004, I did some photographic work in Hebron in the West Bank, which also made a profound impression

on me. I gave cameras to two families, one Palestinian and the other Israeli, who were living either side of a fence just a few meters apart, and I asked them to photograph their daily lives. Neither knew that on the other side of the fence the same thing was happening. After a year, I showed each family's photos to the other and asked what they thought. They discovered the personal lives of their neighbors, realized just how similar they were and in doing so, I think that the impression they had of their enemies changed somehow. Despite themselves, the "others" became humanized. I showed this work in Tel Aviv and brought the two families there. They met and it made a very big impact on all of us. This project was also presented at the Visa Pour l'Image festival of photojournalism, and the Bayeux Festival for war correspondents.

I think that all these experiences and no doubt others too came together subconsciously to give rise to the screenplay of WHEN PIGS HAVE WINGS.





What are you trying to say with this story?

Above all, it's a humorous cry of rage.

It's a desire to change things, to breathe new life into the situation, to make both sides laugh – Israeli as well as Palestinian – by showing the absurdity of the situation by tackling it from a humorous and human angle, without being aggressive, but without sparing anything. What I am expressing in my film is a rebellion against fixed representations, it's a desire to shake up a fixed political discourse to return to the fate of a single person. In this film, the two sides are united by their shared rejection of the pig. So the pig bonds them, it becomes the link between two communities and from this little common denominator, the beginnings of an entente are born.

The Vietnamese pot-bellied pig is like my dove of peace!

What inspired you for the film?

During the writing phase, I naturally thought about Chaplin a great deal.

Why are you in a position to deal with the subject of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

I don't think you need to be part of a community to talk about it. The best example of this comes from Chaplin who was neither German nor Jewish and yet produced a masterpiece in the form of THE DICTATOR. I'm not comparing myself to Chaplin but raising the financing for the film was tricky because of this question of legitimacy or a lack thereof. It would have no doubt been easier if I'd been Israeli or Palestinian, which is

ridiculous. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict affects all of us. Unfortunately, it's part of our lives and we all suffer the consequences in some way or another. One tries to create art to recreate a reality that isn't necessarily one's own but which touches one. You cannot reduce it to the expression of one community's agenda. Making art is about appropriating things to give them a personal vision.

What clichés did you want to avoid?

Myriam Tekaïa acts in the film and was also my artistic collaborator. Together, we set out to avoid clichés in the casting and to avoid the image of the bearded Muslim. We also wanted Jafaar's wife to be beautiful and dignified rather than a caricatured image of a woman tied to the kitchen stove. In general terms, we needed to have a kind of beauty to show through the viewfinder, while always keeping it realistic. We wanted human beauty to provide a certain aspirational quality and dignity but without necessarily hiding the poverty that exists there. We wanted audiences to lose some of their reference points and be transported into the story whilst maintaining the feeling of witnessing a reality. This job was done during the casting but also in the choice of sets and costumes, to which we were very attentive. By giving the role of Jafaar, the Palestinian fisherman, to an Israeli actor with Iraqi roots (Sasson Gabay), and that of the young Israeli woman to Myriam Takaïa, a Tunisian, was also a way of confusing the issues and the identities.

How and why did you choose Sasson Gabay to play Jafaar?

I wrote the part without anyone in mind. And then when it came to casting the lead actor I thought about that wonderful actor in THE BAND'S VISIT, Sasson Gabay. I was looking for someone appealing with whom one could immediately empathize. I wanted a deeply human face.

You are a writer and a journalist. To what extent did journalism shape your work as a moviemaker for this subject?

My experience did have an influence on the writing of the screenplay. I was careful to be accurate in how I handled real events, in the same way as how I write as a journalist. Of course, there are little anachronisms such as the appearance of Obama, but the events are, in general, credible. Moreover, because I wanted this film to be like a story or a fable, I didn't want reality to be too important. To put it simply, I didn't want to make any mistakes in terms of the reality of the movie but at the same time, I did everything I could to distance myself from it.

Man and animal form a very cinematographic duo. Why did you choose this model?

My thoughts naturally turned to THE COW AND I, which I wanted to integrate into a scene where Jafaar is watching TV. I like the simplicity of that film and the idea of an impoverished man who draws upon an animal to help him out of a difficult situation. In WHEN PIGS HAVE WINGS, the pig has a symbolic value. It is dark and worrying, it represents preconceived ideas, the unknown and the fear that we have to tame.

There is a poetic dimension to this film. Why is that?

I wanted the film to be dream-like, I wanted it to present an achievable fantasy, hence the sequence where the four main characters run away to sea. But I didn't want the film to finish on this scene because the political solution isn't exile but rather cohabitation in the same place. So, for the end of the film, I chose the hip-hop dancing scene with young handicapped dancers. I think these two peoples, from Israel and Palestine, are a little like them – two wounded peoples who confront one another. To my eyes, they symbolize the suffering of Israel and Palestine, from which peace can still emerge. I wanted to finish on a beautiful, symbolic image – on a vision of hope.

Is comedy your natural means of expression?

Those close to me describe me as an “awake dreamer” and I think that fits pretty well. My film is like that too, I think.

Is WHEN PIGS HAVE WINGS a political film?

It's a point of view on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict so of course there's a political aspect. It's a film about an individual caught up in a conflict. It's like a shout in the face of wastefulness and hatred, in the face of a religion that is too frequently taken to the letter, ignoring its fraternal message. I have participated in the writing of a certain number of books with Théodore Monod. I admired the detachment and intelligent approach he had to religious texts. Despite being deeply religious and coming from a family of pastors, he kept a certain distance from his own religion and only wanted to keep what inspired him from religious texts, preferring to forget the rest. In terms of other religious, he also said, "There is one single mountain we are each climbing via a different path." It's a simple image but an inspirational one.

Is the film biased in favor of one camp in particular?

It is neither for nor against any particular camp. It is against the absurdity of the situation and for human dignity. Before agreeing to join the project, the actors wanted to know what the objective was. Making this film was also a kind of political statement for the actors, both Palestinian and Israeli. I am an outsider. The situation in Gaza is totally absurd and I'm happy to push the surrealism up a notch to better denounce it. During the shoot, some actors thought that sometimes the film was moving more towards one camp than the other. But this applied to actors from both sides, so that was reassuring. Deep down, I think we all thought that we were giving a message of peace. The crew, which was made up of some 20 different nationalities was totally dedicated to getting this message across. This is moviemaking that seeks to be useful, although you still have to keep it in perspective. You can't take yourself too seriously when you're making a comedy and the lead actor is a pig!





Interview with SASSON GABAY

What were your first impressions when you read the screenplay for WHEN PIGS HAVE WINGS?

I laughed a lot when I read it. I found it funny, intelligent, ingenious, but mainly full of humanity. I was sensitive to that desire to survive, which is shared by all the characters. I like weak characters who can be strong despite themselves.

What drew you to the character of Jafaar?

I found him deeply moving. Jafaar makes me think of Chaplin, that little man who humbly tried to survive disasters and who, even in the worst circumstances, never gave up. You feel like Jafaar is battling the whole world. The soldiers are against him, the fishermen, the police, the jihadists, the local authority, even the sea is against him! And yet he refuses to give up. He's one of those very simple men that we can all believe in.

What was your approach to the character?

My imagination is the most important tool of my trade. I have often had the chance to observe people living in a context similar to that described in the film. I know how they think, I understand their mentality. Once this material is put together, all I have to do is to call upon my imagination. And let's not forget that the script and the work sessions carried out with the director provide the solid foundations for this construction.

What was it like, acting with a pig?

It was my first time. Before the film, I wasn't very familiar with that species of animal. The first time I found myself actually in contact with the pig, I wasn't very confident and I had cold feet. Then gradually, I got to know it, I got over my fears and learned how to be patient with it. In fact, the interesting thing is that animals have their own feelings depending on a situation and they aren't always the same as ours. You have to learn to respect that.

You are an Israeli with Iraqi origins. Was it strange for you to play a Palestinian?

No. In my career, I have played a multitude of characters with different nationalities. I've played Afghans, Egyptians and Palestinians, among others. I think I'm very lucky because I love speaking new languages – I find it extremely stimulating. For example, in *THE BAND'S VISIT*, I loved working with an Egyptian accent and it was never a constraint. Moreover, it's part of my job to get under the skin of people who are different to me, whatever those differences are. I had the impression I was entering the rich world of a fable rather than another nationality.

Were you worried during filming that the film might be more pro one camp than another?

No, never. For the simple reason that the script was very clear in its orientation. Since the start of the project, Sylvain maintained that in this Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the people in each camp were in a ridiculous situation and that they were each suffering as much as the other. I liked the fact that he didn't point the finger, he never said one character was good and another bad. He showed, especially at the end of the film, that each of the main protagonists was trying to move towards a situation of peace and I liked that idea.

Would you say that playing a role like this is a kind of political commitment?

I have played various roles including politicians, members of government, soldiers, Iraqi ministers and Afghan leaders. I've never had the feeling of being political myself. I'm just an actor and I'm an actor wherever I come from.

I chose to be in this film because Jafaar is an appealing character. He's a man of strong values and yet he's an outsider. He's an unpopular man who makes mistakes and keeps pretending everything is fine. I don't think choosing to play a role like this is a kind of political commitment. If I commit to something with this film, it's to defending this type of character. I believe in individuals, in simple men and their way of dealing with life. Sylvain does too, I think. That's what united us in this film.

Do you think a film has the power to change people's minds?

I have never thought art could change people or politics or anything. Art must remain modest in this respect. On the other hand, I think it can open people's minds and inspire reflection. It's a mirror that reflects a society at a given moment. *WHEN PIGS HAVE WINGS* fulfills that role, and to my mind, that's already quite a considerable achievement.



Interview with MYRIAM TEKAÏA

Tell us about your career.

I am Tunisian but I was born in Italy. I grew up in Canada and in India. I went to university in Paris. One day, through professional necessity, I went to do a 10-day speech course and that's when I truly fell in love with the theater. I then got into the Cours Florent acting school and that's when I changed career.

Who is Yelena?

Yelena is on the margins of her community. She is in the settlement more through loyalty to her heritage than through an ideology. She's a woman of character who is independent and honest. She wants to be useful and to give meaning to her life. She stays there, ignoring the criticism of what she does, and she's not too concerned with what is going on outside the settlement, naively thinking that on the other side of the fence, people also manage to live in dignity.

What were the difficulties of this role?

It was a little strange defending a character that lives within a group with whose ideology and activities I disagree. But it was my job to get into that universe, to invent and try and understand the individualities, imagine their experiences and explain them to myself in order to be able to identify and empathize with them.

What do you think about what Jafaar and Yelena do in this story?

Circumstances drive them to the edges of their society. And that's where the connection between these two opposing worlds exists. Their relationship firstly comes about through pragmatism, causing this connection, but as their relationship develops, they learn to understand one another despite themselves, until they reach a point where they are able to envisage a shared future and the beginnings of an understanding.





How did the shoot go?

It was a strange experience because I have several hats, only one of which is that of an actor. I have to say that I was very impressed by the work of the crew. I wanted to give the best of myself for them, so as not to let them down. Right until the end I was also obsessed by the idea of avoiding clichés and preconceived ideas. We wanted to stick to our line, so that people on each side would be able to identify with the story and laugh at the situation.

Were there any tensions or difficulties linked to the different nationalities on the shoot?

It was more a predominant feeling of understanding and good humor. Of course, certain scenes were harder than others to shoot and there was quite a lot of discussion before and during the shoot. Without getting into the details, I think that there were simply moments that revealed to what extent these people have been wounded and traumatized by their history.

The film is coming out after revolutions have taken place in certain Arab countries including Tunisia where you are from. How did that make you feel?

It may seem a little incongruous, I think there is a resonance between the Arab Spring, Stéphane Hessel's "Time For Outrage" and our film. They share the same starting point; the sentiment of having had enough

of a desperate situation that seems set in stone; a desire to say, "That's enough!", which is the first line of our film; and a desire to shake things up and breathe new life into a situation. It's a film that stands up against clichés, against separationist standpoints and extremism. We really felt the stress that exists around the Israeli-Palestine situation here in Europe while the financing was being raised for the film. The film will no doubt upset certain individuals because it doesn't fit the usual mold. It's not a film made by an Israeli or a Palestinian. It doesn't really fit into an established, comforting pigeonhole. And a certain school of thought will no doubt consider that we can't laugh as much at this drama being European, especially bringing a pig to the film. Many good souls who live far from the conflict think they know what's good or otherwise for the people living this situation every day. Moreover, that's one of the characteristics of this conflict and in my opinion one of the reasons that makes ending it so complicated.

But we know, having heard it from the mouths of those involved, both Israeli and Palestinian, that laughter is a commodity that they are cruelly lacking. It's also the best way to denounce the absurdity of the situation. Sharing that laughter is, for us, a way of helping bring these people together.

PIG ON BOARD

THE STAR...

Name: Charlotte

Sex: Female

Race: Vietnamese pot-bellied pig

Age: Two and a half

Address: In the foothills of the Pyrenees with Guy Demasure, a wrangler for the cinema who didn't want to let her go after the filming was finished.

Early years: Wasn't bottle-fed but is nonetheless very close to humans and very sociable.

Hobby: Often runs away, along with her wrangler's mares. Has a lot of fun with Guy's dogs and his son who climbs on her back like a wooden horse.

Little indulgence: Sardines – they're savory and she loves them.



Interview with GUY DEMASURE

WRANGLER

How did you meet Charlotte?

I did a casting session for Vietnamese pot-bellied pigs and chose five. After reading the script, I spent two months preparing, during which I prepared the animals to do those things I thought would be complicated. Then, we had to transpose that work into the shoot in Malta. During the preparation process I realized that among the five pigs, there was one real standout. It was Charlotte, a female, even though the role was for a male. During the project, she demonstrated such talent that she did almost the whole film.

What difficulties did you encounter during the shoot?

I arrived in Malta two weeks before the main part of the crew to acclimatize the pigs to the heat and to check out the sets because there's always a difference between what you imagine when you read the script and the reality of the place in question. It's a lot hotter in Malta than it is in France. We knew that pigs don't like heat and that it can cause hormone imbalances that can even lead to them stopping eating. Because we wranglers work with rewards, that can cause problems. Fortunately, they stood up to the heat because the nights are cooler. This mean their body temperatures came back down to normal and the pigs eventually got used to it..

What was the most surprising thing Charlotte did during filming?

The day when she jumped in the water! That day, we were shooting the scene when the four actors are in a little boat with the pig. Boats are really quite something for pigs – they move differently and the deck is slippery. She wasn't afraid but it was unusual for her. To give her confidence, I stayed on the boat with her. In the beginning, everything was fine. Shooting began and after 45 minutes of acting, she got fed up with it and she just jumped in! She'd never been in water before and we didn't know if she could swim so I immediately jumped in. She disappeared under the water for a few long moments and then I saw her come up. It gave us a terrible fright but that was the price we paid for discovering that Charlotte knew how to swim perfectly. After that first time, she did it several more times. She's funny when she swims because all you can see above water is her tail, her snout and her ears.

Despite her willingness, were there any things she refused to do?

The scene where the four actors cross the desert to escape the soldiers was hell to shoot. In the script, this scene is set in a desert but in reality, we shot it

in a field of green which to Charlotte was like a giant salad! It was difficult because all she could think about was eating and she wouldn't walk. Making her walk in socks on a tiled floor wasn't easy for her either. But she nonetheless managed it. She's very talented!

How did she get on with the other actors?

Sasson always had a little treat to reward her and it went very well. Pigs used to be wild animals so for the first few days, I asked for a lot of silence on set, helped by the first assistant director. People think pigs are like dogs but in actual fact, they are nothing like them. So we took it easy at first, and then she gradually got used to it and did a good job. She didn't cause us to waste any time.

What happened to the five pigs?

I gave the four other pigs away. They are in good places in nice regions and will enjoy their retirements. I kept Charlotte and she lives happily with my other animals and my family.



CAST

Jaffar Sasson Gabay
Fatima Baya Belal
Yelena Myriam Tekaïa
Hairdresser Gassan Abbas
Hussein Khalifa Natour
Young police officer Lotfi Abdelli
UN official Ulrich Tukur
Storekeeper Khaled Riani
Netsah Uri Gabai
Soldier on terrace 1 Ido Shaked
Soldier on terrace 2 Thierry Lopez
Settlement soldier Zohar Wexler
Jihadist cameraman Maurad Saad
Jihadist 3 Kheredine Ennasri
Jihadist 2 David Leguesse
Boy with the ball Nicholas Galea
Walid Bashir Wakil
Rabbi Michael Sciortino
Preacher Manuel Cauchi
Jihadist hold Mohammed Mutaz
Young Palestinian. Mark Mifsud
Young Palestinian 2 Salama Jarboua
Jihadist Mahmoud Moghrabi
Israeli officer Edward Mercieca
Israeli soldier 2 Chris Micallef
Checkpoint soldier Andrew Galea

Fisherman 1 Harry Borg
Fisherman 2 Anthony Ellul
Fisherman 3 Philip Mizzi
Police officer Mikhail Basmadjian
Checkpoint officer Nizer Al Gadi
Woman with child. Tiziana Azzopardi
Settler Miki Shoval
Druggist Rania Zouari
Boy in drugstore. Mikhail Léon Farrugia
The boss Daniel Slim
Boss's son Mark Ciantar
Customer Frank Tanti
Neighbor Marcelle Teuma
Young girl in the settlement Sanâa Estibal
Ice-cream man Jimmy Grima
Children in the settlement Adam Gabai
Imran Estibal
Boy who gets slapped Luay Merai
Hip-hop dancers. Jean Hourth Sok
Luca Lazylegz Patuelli
Automated dialogue
replacement actors Ameer Marzouq Khalil
Wassim Zomlot
Nadim Deaibes

And the pigs Charlotte & Babe

CREW

Directed by Sylvain Estibal
Screenplay, adaptation and dialogues Sylvain Estibal
Music Aqualactica
Boogie Balagan
Lighting Romain Winding AFC
Set design Albrecht Konrad
Sound Dirk Bombey
Gert Janssen
Mathieu Cox
Editing Damien Keyeux
First assistant director Alain Olivieri AFAR
Production manager Marc Olla
Executive producer Jean-Philippe Blime
Produced by Franck Chorot

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With the participation of Canal+ and Orange Cinéma Séries and the Ministry of Culture and Communication