

ON CLASSICS (MEDIAMAN) AND BIDIBUL PRODUCTIONS
PRESENT

Je suis drôlement content, parce que mémé vient passer quelques jours à la maison. Mémé, c'est la maman de ma maman, je l'aime beaucoup, et elle me donne tout le temps des tas de chouettes cadeaux. Papa devait sortir plus tôt de son travail, cet après-midi, pour aller chercher mémé au train, mais mémé est arrivée toute seule en taxi.

ROYAL

Little Nicholas

Happy as can be

A FILM BY AMANDINE FREDON AND BENJAMIN MASSOUBRE

BASED ON THE BEST-SELLING BOOKS BY RENÉ GOSCINNY AND JEAN-JACQUES SEMPE

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2022 OFFICIAL SELECTION



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Synopsis

Somewhere between Montmartre and Saint-Germain-des-Prés, Jean-Jacques Sempé and René Goscinny lean over a large white sheet of paper and bring to life a mischievous and endearing boy, Little Nicholas. From schoolyard games and fights to summer camp prank and camaraderie, Nicholas lives a merry and enriching childhood. As the adventures of Nicholas and his friends unfold, the boy makes his way into his creators' workshop and light-heartedly questions them. Sempé and Goscinny will recount the story of their friendship, career, and reveal a childhood filled with hopes and dreams.

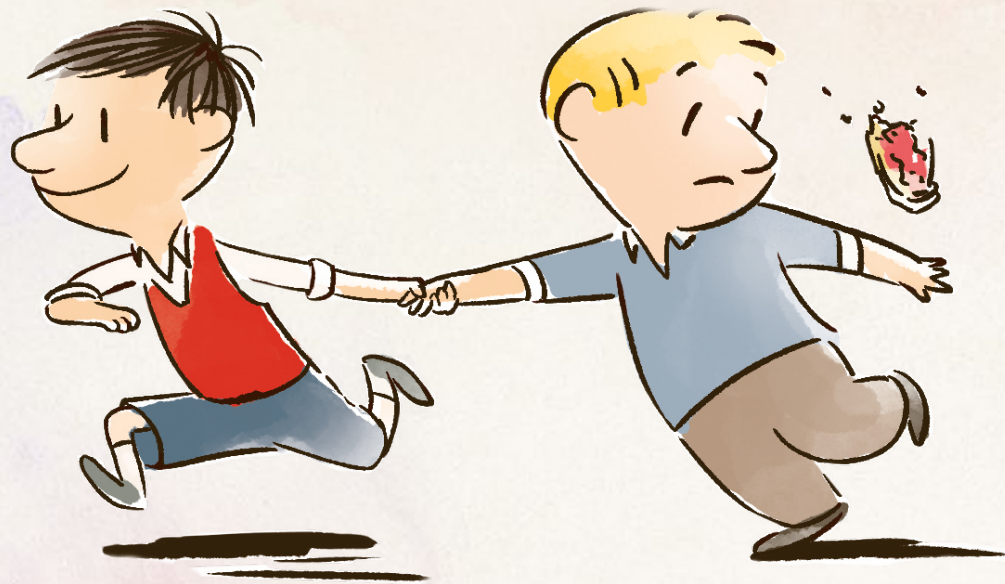


Interview with Amandine Fredon and Benjamin Massoubre

How was this project born?

Amandine Fredon: At first, the idea was to make a documentary that would combine archival footage of Jean-Jacques Sempé and René Goscinny with animated Little Nicholas stories. In the end, the project evolved, and eventually it became clear that we wanted to do the whole film in animation. It seemed coherent with respect to the authors' universes, and it also allowed us to do the first animated film adaptation of Little Nicholas.

Benjamin Massoubre: The film, which combines the lives of the authors and Little Nicholas stories, ended up taking several years to be developed and financed, and it wasn't until the spring of 2020 that I came on board. I started by doing some re-writing with Anne Goscinny, with an eye in particular to developing the scenes about Sempé's and Goscinny's lives, and to add as many biographical details as possible. At the same time, we worked on the artistic direction with Fursy Teyssier and Juliette Laurent, going back over the characters, the decors, and the choices of colors.



How did you two organize making this film together?

Benjamin Massoubre: My background is in film editing and screenwriting, so it was simpler for me to handle the writing with Anne Goscinny. And then afterwards, Amandine and I worked together on arranging the artistic direction and the animation decisions.

Amandine Fredon: It's important to know that in animation, editing is the most important step. It's done ahead of time to avoid having the teams animate scenes that don't end up being used. Editing is often where it's possible to resolve problems with the script, because it instantly reveals whether something works or not.

Benjamin Massoubre: That's why I also worked a lot with the storyboard artists to build out the frame of the film and create an animatic. The idea was to go through the entire film, matching the storyboard sketches with voices, sounds, and drafts of the music to figure out the precise duration of each scene before making the final versions.

Is it intimidating to work on such monumental subjects as Sempé and Goscinny?

Benjamin Massoubre: This book has been passed down from generation to generation in so many French families. In my family, my grandfather read it to my father, and my father read it to me, and now I'm introducing my own children to it. So when you're working on something that deals with a book like this one, you might be afraid of having your intentions judged. But the only way to overcome that pressure was to make a film that exudes our sincerity and love for Little Nicholas. Still, it was a lot of pressure, because it was important to us to celebrate these authors, and we had to rise to the level of elegance there is in Sempé's artwork and in Goscinny's wit. The goal was to stay at the level of homage and to maintain a certain respectful distance so as not to slip into caricature, pure reproduction, or hagiography. In order to do so, it was important to stick as closely as possible to who they really were. For the voice-overs, we often used their own words from interviews, and for the drawings, we observed the way they move from archival footage.

Thanks to Anne Goscinny, we also had the opportunity to look at the original typescripts and drawings of Little Nicholas. And having the opportunity, in what has become a very virtual world, to have a tactile relationship with her father's documents and pens, or to sit down at



his desk, conveyed an extra level of emotion that we tried to bring across in the film. That relationship to physical touch, to drawing by hand, typing on a typewriter, the sound of the pages flying through the air... that tactile relationship to creation needed to be an integral part of the film.

What do Sempé and Goscinny represent to professional animators?

Amandine Fredon: All it takes is one look at the artists' shining eyes, and the pleasure and motivation they all have to be working on this project, to understand that Sempé and Goscinny are role models when it comes to drawing and style. So for us, that was even more encouraging.

Benjamin Massoubre: That's right. It wasn't hard to motivate the teams, because a lot of the artists are fans of Sempé's work. And as a matter of fact, the impact of Goscinny's work on the collective unconscious and on French humor is undeniable. And it was that much more compelling to be able to show where that sense of humor comes from, through the biography of this globe trotter who spent his childhood in Argentina and also lived in New York.

Their personal trajectories haven't actually been the object of much discussion. Were you familiar with their histories going in?

Benjamin Massoubre: I had thought that I knew this stuff better than anyone, but working on this film made me realize that there was a lot I didn't know. For example, we learned that Goscinny had spent so many years away from his country that Paris represented a very exotic city to him, a city that was a fantasy for him.

Sempé's life story was just as fascinating. He's this miracle survivor from an extremely disadvantaged background, who climbs to the top of the illustration world thanks to getting published in the New Yorker. That's what I found really moving about his life story. In the end, although certain things are romanticized, everything that makes this film, we took from their personal lives. Within this fairly complex structure, one that combines the real world of the authors, the world of creation, and the world of Nicholas, we were able to build a cohesive emotional narrative. The heart of the film lies in the destiny of these two men who imagined for Little Nicholas this dreamt-up childhood, and who developed a bright, humorous, radiant character in order to deal with the tragedies they both lived through as children. For Goscinny, that was the Shoah, and for Sempé, it was the violence of his



father-in-law. This film tells a story of resilience and of the birth of a friendship. That's where the subtitle came from, in fact: "What are we waiting for to be happy?"

Amandine Fredon: It's important to know, too, that we were working right in the middle of the Covid pandemic, and that context probably played a role, because we really wanted to make a feel-good movie. For us, it was important to show that before these artists become world famous, they really struggled to sell their art, to make themselves known, and that they didn't throw in the towel. Their success is the fruit of a lifetime of work. They made the conscious choice to stay positive in the face of challenges and to look on the bright side of life. The fantasy of Little Nicholas and the humor they developed represent a positive reaction to these traumas. The film puts that positive message across.

Did the visual style come naturally, or did it take some time to work out?

Benjamin Massoubre: There are two very distinct worlds in the film: there's the world of the authors, and then there's Little Nicholas's world. For the latter, we wanted to stick as closely as possible to illustrations from the original books, both in the tracing of the line and in the way the backgrounds aren't completely fleshed out. As a result, there were two artistic directions: one based on the illustrations from Little Nicholas, and another based on Sempé's illustration work in other books or in the New Yorker, which are more colorful and more fleshed out.

But it's nearly impossible to imitate his style, because he never draws exactly the same Little Nicholas — whereas in animation, you need to keep a single, identical character that's immediately recognizable. Also, all the poetry of his drawings lies in their vertical format, and a film requires a horizontal one.

Amandine Fredon: It was thus important for us to show Jean-Jacques Sempé our drawings for him to sign off on. He's an elderly man now, but he was still able to participate in the first animation tests, and we submitted our work to him regularly while making the film. That led to some moments that were both funny and moving, where he would affix his signature to and give his comments on our own reproductions of his creations, or on our depictions of him. He always thought he was either too handsome or too ugly, but he was proud that a whole team was adapting his work to the big screen.

How do you bring your own animation style through amid Sempé's drawings?

Benjamin Massoubre: I think you can bring it across all over the place. All while staying respectful to the work, there's a big margin for creative maneuver. For example, we decided, like Sempé, to use lots of bubbles to show Nicholas's thoughts. That allowed us to set the pace of the scenes, and it brought some poetry to Nicholas's fantasies. For the world of the authors, we had a lot of fun coming up with different forms, like the flashback in Paris, where Sempé goes from one set to another, like in a musical.

Amandine Fredon: Adapting a work requires creating a lot and bringing in processes from animation while still respecting the original work. In this case, we had to invent the colors, create figures for the authors, and retrace the places and time periods they lived in, from Argentine in the '20s to the occupied Paris of the '40s. The film is also the story of our collective history. We didn't want to restrict ourselves to Goscinny's office and Sempé's workshop, because we needed to show that they had drawn their inspiration and creativity from their travels. So in order to do that, we had to create very different atmospheres and allow the audience to experience a variety of emotions. The animation teams, under Juliette Laurent's direction, were able to find the right balance and sensitivity we needed to give the characters life.

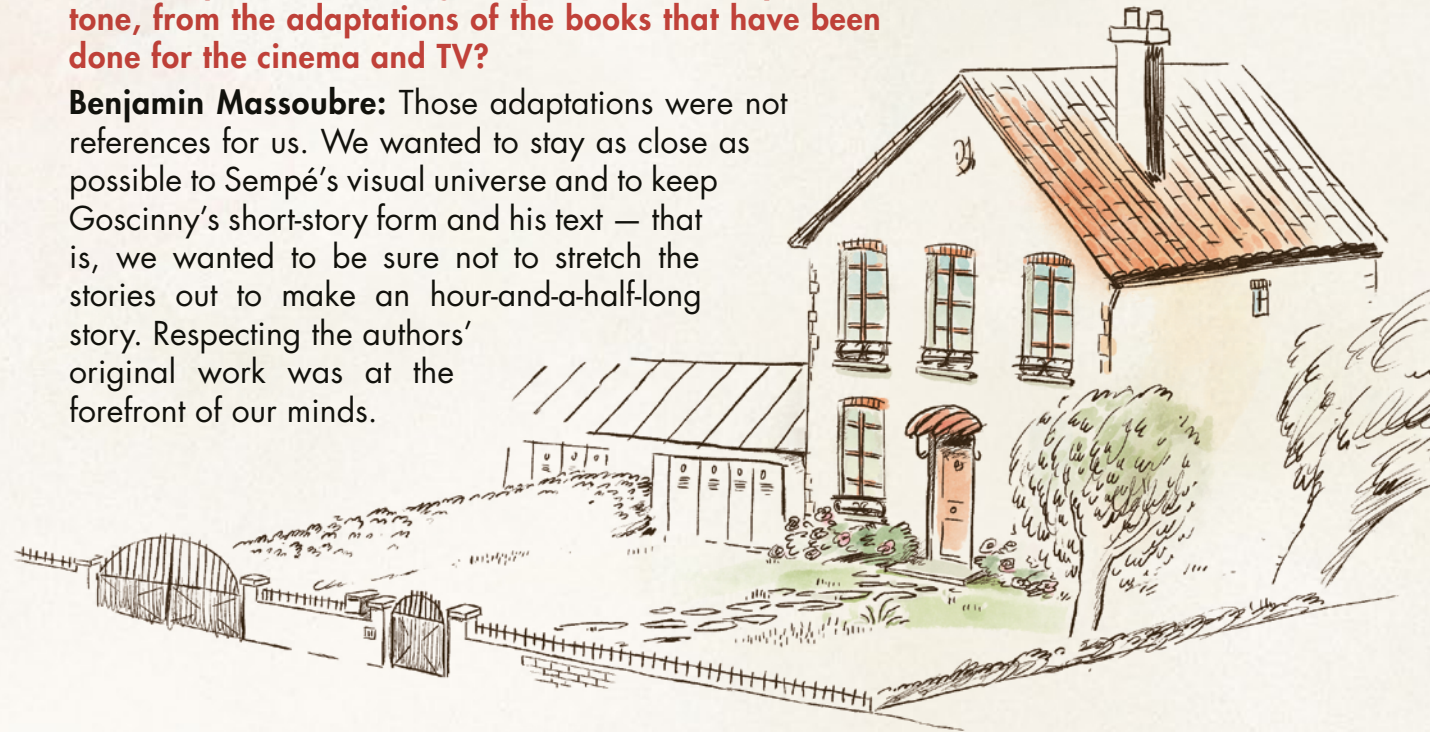
Benjamin Massoubre: And the same was true for their personal interests and passions. For example, we wanted the audience to see Sempé dance and sing, or go to a concert, because music is an integral part of his life. He talks about music in nearly all the interviews

he's given, so it was indispensable. The same goes for Goscinny's globetrotting side: he was far more cosmopolitan than you might imagine, and the vision he has of France is not a conservative one, because he had a great deal of respect for difference. And in fact, although everyone is looking to catch someone out for a faux pas these days, there are very few to be found in Goscinny's work. Far fewer than in Hergé's or others, anyway. And when he started to be a little mocked after the May '68 period by the new wave of French comics, René stood up for himself as the typical Frenchman in slippers that they imagined him to be. But I think that Anne Goscinny wanted to free him from that cliché.

Amandine Fredon: From our conversations with Anne, we realized how much of an innovator her father was, since he made his way to the US to work with writers who become world famous, right when American comics were starting to emerge. He invented the career of being a comic-book writer, which didn't exist at the time, and have the artists write their own stories. He became the director of Pilote magazine, and he was one of the first to create an animation studio in France — Idéfix — to produce and adapt the comic books as animated movies.

Was it important to distinguish your film, visually or in terms of tone, from the adaptations of the books that have been done for the cinema and TV?

Benjamin Massoubre: Those adaptations were not references for us. We wanted to stay as close as possible to Sempé's visual universe and to keep Goscinny's short-story form and his text — that is, we wanted to be sure not to stretch the stories out to make an hour-and-a-half-long story. Respecting the authors' original work was at the forefront of our minds.

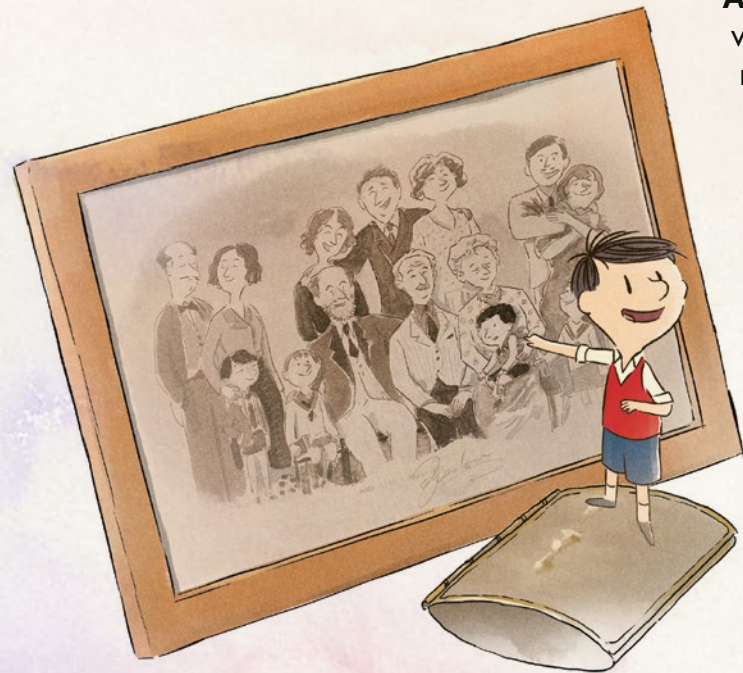




You thus decided to “turn” the images like the pages of a book...

Amandine Fredon: It was important for us to give the audience the impression of being thrown into a book, to give them a chance to rediscover the magic of the Little Nicholas stories. But because the original drawings were done in black and white, we did have to invent a broad palette of watercolors in order to really bring out that poetic, nostalgic side, all while staying faithful to the author’s work. Fursy Teyssier, our artistic director, came up with some wonderful solutions to preserve that paper-like effect, to create very subtle appearances of zones of color, and to have the characters disappearing at the edge of the frame in a really natural way.

Benjamin Massoubre: Indeed, beyond those two artistic directions, we wanted to distinguish the different spaces of the narrative using two distinct film grammars. In the end, the authors portion corresponds to a classic cinema style, with a fully fleshed-out frame that’s completely colored, with traveling shots, closeups, etc. And in contrast, for the Little Nicholas section, we constrained ourselves to very wide shots that correspond to the book, to “unfinished” watercolor drawings, and to a paper-like texture that recalls Jean-Jacques illustration work on the book. By doing so, we’re able to shift from the film’s “reality” (the authors’ lives) to its imaginary (Little Nicholas’s life).



Amandine Fredon: This required two very different techniques and two styles of mise en scène. We couldn’t do closeups of Little Nicholas, for example. In the book, he’s often quite small, lost amid a vast scenery, and moving away from the style would have stripped it of all its poetry. It’s not for nothing that his name is LITTLE Nicholas, it’s because that’s his primary characteristic. The same is true of his friends. When we see them all together, it’s this swarm of little characters in these big spaces, where the empty spaces are just as important as anything else.

Why was it important to keep Little Nicholas as the narrator?

Benjamin Massoubre: To stay faithful to the original texts, and to retrace the story through the eyes of a child. But most of all, to stay as close as possible to the soul of René Goscinny. Because what ties these two universes together are his words.

Amandine Fredon: And when Little Nicholas appears in certain scenes as a mental image on the authors’ desk, to question them or debate with them, that’s because we felt it was important that he never be passive. It was important for him to evolve throughout the film.

Benjamin Massoubre: In rereading the short stories, we realized that Nicholas was very present, because although he does narrate the story, in the end he’s more often a spectator of the events that unfold. To make him proactive, he had to be given a personality and a little more soul: that of a joyful, curious little boy.

What was most difficult for you about this project?

Benjamin Massoubre: The biggest challenge was to find the right pace to engage the audience in the story even though it doesn’t have a typical narrative structure. The film moves scene-by-scene; it’s constructed a bit like a musical, with songs and dance numbers. One of our references, in fact, was *An American in Paris*. We had to link the two narratives and make the scenes cohere in order to generate emotion. And the second challenge, for me, was to put color into Little Nicholas’s world beyond the touch of red that Sempé put on his sweater. We started out with sepia tones, in a ‘50s style, but that didn’t bring the radiant touch we wanted, so we ended up settling on more vibrant, childlike colors.

Amandine Fredon: It wasn’t easy to intersperse scenes about the authors’ lives between the eight Little Nicholas stories and still maintain a logical structure. In order to do that, we had to come up with a lot of little tricks to make the transitions as fluid and logical as possible. And the other big challenge for was to find a visual style for the Goscinny and Sempé characters that matches Sempé’s drawing style. His drawings give the impression of simplicity, but when you try to imitate them, you realize how difficult they are to produce. His lines are extremely pure and stylized, and he draws only what’s essential. To get that result, we had to put in all the background and then erase it. So it took quite some time to find the right balance between Sempé’s drawings, our interpretation, and what we ended up creating.

Was it easy for Laurent Laffitte and Alain Chabat to do their voice acting?

Benjamin Massoubre: Early on, Amandine and I had put their names on the table, because they're actors we really adore, and fortunately they accepted. Alain had already formed a bond with Anne Goscinnny, since he'd made *Asterix & Obelix: Mission Cleopatra* in 2002, and we found out that he's a huge Goscinnny fan! He's like those *Star Wars* fans: he collects the figurines, and he's really into anything related to Goscinnny's world. As an actor, Alain has this wonderful ability to bring a lot of empathy to his characters. Whatever the quality of the film he's in, you want to follow him, because the characters he plays are sympathetic, and you feel like you can spend an hour-and-a-half with them.

Amandine Fredon: He brings his characters' emotions across in a very natural and sincere way. He's a great actor who manages to enter into emotional scenes without overdoing it. In this case, he does a great job of bringing across Goscinnny's deadpan humor.

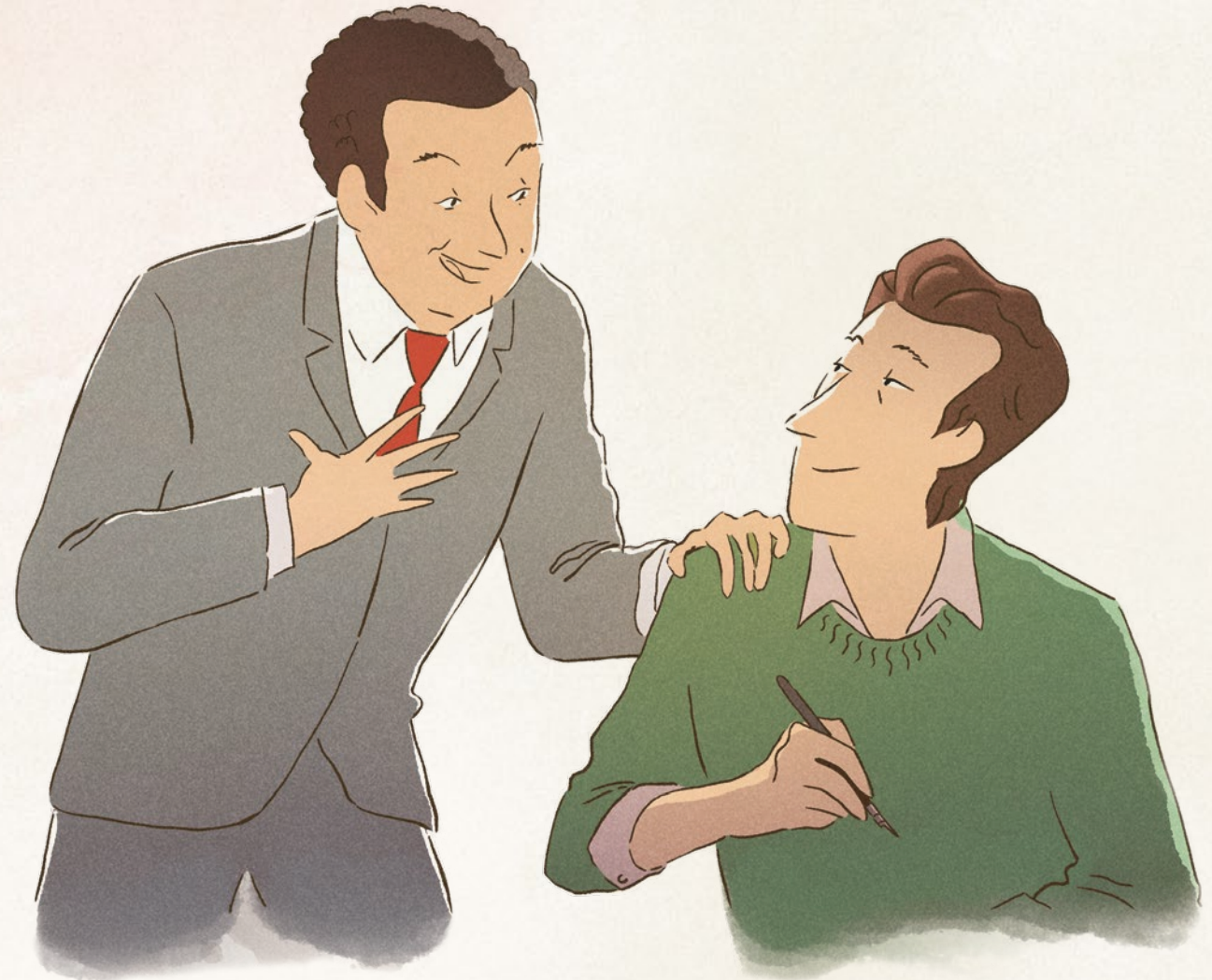
Benjamin Massoubre: As for Laurent, he's a big Sempé fan, and he was thrilled to play the impassible, slightly bohemian Jean-Jacques. Plus, shockingly, these two actors had never acted together, and they were both excited about the idea of getting together for three days in a music studio in Provence to record the voices. And it was actually a rare thing to be able to record the voices together in conditions like those. It was like a mini-shoot: we'd work during the day, and in the evenings we'd all get together for a simple, no-fuss dinner. And the camaraderie that came out of that comes across on screen.

Amandine Fredon: And we shouldn't forget to mention the young Simon Faliu, who put in a lot of work on Little Nicholas's voice. It's really quite stunning, because beyond incarnating a character and bringing across their emotions, he also had to read these very long voice-over texts that are written in somewhat old-fashioned language. We insisted on using a real child's voice, and not woman's voice, something that's often done in animation. And we have no regrets, because that particular timbre, the bit of laughter in his voice, and the way he sings all bring a lot of poetry to the film.

Music was very important to Sempé's life. How did you decide to integrate it into your film?

Benjamin Massoubre: It happened in several stages. During editing, I did a bunch of mock-ups, and we decided that we should draw from Jean-Jacques's personal tastes, particularly Michel Legrand, Paul Misraki (who wrote "*Qu'est-ce qu'on attend pour être heureux ?*"), Duke Ellington, and Claude Debussy for more diffuse atmospheres. The jazz vibe matches

the story, like those melodies that were popular at the time, strong melodies reminiscent of Ray Ventura, Trenet, Montant, and others. At that point, we also realized that lots of Ludovic Bource themes, like the music he composed for *The Artist*, would work very well for this film, and so we wanted to work with him. We were lucky to be able to work with lots of top-tier artists like him.



Amandine Fredon: His music made it possible to bring across the nostalgia for the Saint-Germain of the '50s and '60s, and to dive right into this time period. But it also brought the modern, lively dimension we were looking for. We needed there to be joy and energy, and it was great to be able to move back and forth between these two vibes. Benjamin and Ludovic spent a lot of time perfecting the music for the film, and the result is incredible.

What does being selected for the Cannes Festival mean for a film like this one?

Benjamin Massoubre: Even though we're living through the golden age of French animation, it's not very well represented at the Cannes Festival, so being able to present the film there is a real opportunity. Beyond the pleasure of going to Cannes, it's also a really positive

validation of the two years of tireless work we put in. And there's no better launch pad for the film, because our goal was always to make a popular movie that's both smart and accessible to the greatest number of people.

Amandine Fredon: And beyond making us happy, it's also gratifying for all our teams, because it rewards the quality of their work and all the passion they put into the film. And when you make a film, you want it to be seen by the greatest number of people. Well, the Cannes Festival allows that to happen.





Interview with Anne Goscinny - Screenplay, dialogues and adaptation

When did this project start?

It must have been in 2015. The producer Aton Soumache, whom I had already worked with on *the Little Nicholas* series that was shown on M6, told me that he wanted to make a very different kind of film, one that would combine archival footage and animation to retrace the history of Little Nicholas. At the time, I didn't have a very clear idea of what that might mean or who the audience for that kind of a film would be, because animation and documentary have very different target audiences. Then he suggested I get involved and write a synopsis. But although I'd written a few novels, I didn't have much experience with screenwriting beyond having read many screenplays and edited my fair share. Indeed, whenever a film is being made that brings my father's characters to the screen, I read and amend the screenplay in order to make it as faithful as possible to my father's work. Now, although it might be a small step from re-writing to writing, they're not the same exercise. That's when Aton Soumache introduced me to a screenwriter who is both a consummate professional and a man of rare kindness: Michel Fessler.

We became close friends and both agreed the entire film should be animated. Through obsessive reflection, I hit upon the rationale needed to balance the narrative. Sempé would have to ask himself whether or not to tell Nicholas that my father was dead. We therefore decided to write the film as a flashback, with the issue being: "How do you tell a character that their co-creator won't be bringing him to life anymore?"

And, following the process used by the brilliant Alexis Michalik in *Edmond*, we decided to justify the *raison d'être* of the film by telling the authors' life stories.

How did you decide which Little Nicholas stories to put in the film?

Michel Fessler loved certain stories, like *Le Tas de Sable* ("The Sand Pile") and *L'École Buissonnière* ("Playing Hooky.") I loved them all, but we had to make choices. And we also had to deal with the fact that Little Nicholas's universe isn't co-ed... So we included two stories with strong female characters, one with Marie-Edwige and another with Louissette. We weren't going to exclude the female audience!

Was this very personal project motivated by a desire to carry on your father's legacy?

In agreeing to make my father into an animated character, I knew that I'd have to professionalize my emotions. So to put enough distance between myself and the work, Michel Fessler and I made my father and Sempé into fictional characters. It was an experience unlike any other. I thought it would be proper to remind the audience that the man who, along with Sempé, invented this French childhood, didn't have a drop of French blood in his veins! And that same man, my father, also created (with Albert Uderzo, whose parents were both Italian) one of the 20th century's French myths: the adventures of Asterix the Gaul. My father was Russian on his mother's side, and Polish on his father's side.

I count myself among those who believe strongly that we must never stop teaching History, as teaching it is the only way we have a chance of not repeating it.

I also wanted to remind the audience that my father's family wore the yellow star, were deported, and were murdered in Auschwitz.

Lastly, this whimsical childhood that Nicholas lives is probably partly the kind that my father's cousins, who stayed in Europe, didn't get the chance to have, whereas my father was lucky enough to immigrate to Argentina in 1928.





Among all the documents you took out for this project, which brought up the most emotion for you?

What's always very moving is to share photographs with the artists and animators. When you keep those images to yourself, they generate intense emotions, but when you share them, when you discuss them and bring them to life, you approach something like immortality. As long as you remember, as long as memory is kept alive, death has no hold. I found some photos of my father's Uncle Léon, who was deported with two of his brothers. I also found this photo where you can see the sign "Beresniak Printing," the family business, which briefly appears in the film. Seeing those very personal images come to life, and having my father come back to life in the artform that was most dear to him — animated movies — was probably my most wonderful professional and personal experience.

How did you go about researching Sempé's life?

I'm very familiar with his life. Michel Fessler and I reread the interview that Jean-Jacques Sempé gave to Marc Lecarpentier in the book *Enfances*. It's a very personal, sensitive book that's all true. I've also known Jean-Jacques my whole life. I knew that his childhood wasn't a particularly happy one. We decided to focus on the grandfather he loved so much, who would take him to soccer games.

There's a word that, alas, has been cheapened over time, but which suits my father and Sempé perfectly. It's a word that could be their common denominator: resilience. One saw his family shipped off to hell; the other was denied the love that allows a child to blossom. So they created this Little Nicholas, who has a whimsical childhood, where his parents love for their son reigns supreme, where his friends and the schoolteacher are the heroes of this fairytale childhood.

On the other hand, animating Sempé's drawing style was a real challenge for the animators, because his drawing style is built on omissions and empty spaces that leave room for the reader to dream, to identify with the story, and to engage in interpretation. Visually, *Little Nicholas* is different from *Asterix* in that, for example, Albert Uderzo's style doesn't leave room for interpretation. His drawings are wonderfully sure of themselves, whereas Sempé gives people who want to dream the opportunity to slip in among the characters and even become part of the drawing themselves.

What bond did you form with Amandine Fredon and Benjamin Massoubre?

Both of them came from the field of animation, and they were immediately passionate about the project. I had more of a connection to Benjamin, since we reworked the screenplay together to make it compatible with animation, and I felt like he was putting his whole life into every scene, every word. It was the first film he'd directed, and the sense of urgency he displayed, his commitment and enthusiasm, reminded me of myself when I wrote my first book.

Was Alain Chabat an obvious choice for you to do your father's voice?

Of course! Yes, they have very different voices, but that doesn't matter one bit. Alain was the most justifiable choice of person to incarnate my father vocally. He's a sort of spiritual heir to my father. The most successful film adaptation in France remains his film *Asterix and Obelix: Mission Cleopatra*. It was essential that the actor who

would lend his voice to my father have as much admiration for him as tenderness or friendship. These are two men who succeeded in forming a connection without ever having met. We're talking about an affinity between them that goes beyond death. When he said yes, I knew the film was going to be a success. Hearing Alain double my father's voice, reading lines that I had co-written, was deeply moving. I wasn't far from tears, but do we ever know whether it's laughter or emotion that brings on the tears? Laurent Lafitte had Jean-Jacques Sempé's elegant voice. He incarnated this handsome, spiritual dandy so well.

Were you already thinking about the music during the screenwriting phase?

I'm a huge fan of *chanson française*. I wanted people to feel happy on their way out of the theater, and I wanted them to want to hum that happiness. Ray Ventura's "*Qu'est-ce qu'on attend pour être heureux*" was the clear choice for the theme. And since Sempé would have loved to be a pianist, although he was undeniably more gifted for drawing than for piano, we came up with the scene where he's part of the Ray Ventura Schoolchildren group. And then there's the "playing hooky" scene where the children are make-believing that they're galley slaves. I couldn't help but thinking of the legendary song "*Le galérien*" ["The Galley Slave"] written by Maurice Druon and arranged by Leo Poll, Michel Polnareff's father, adapted from a Russian melody. In film, the music isn't part of the background, it's not a detail — it's a whole character unto itself. It's often what you remember the most when you leave the theater. So when I learned that Ludovic Bource, who won an Oscar for his work on *The Artist*, would be doing the music, I was impressed, happy, and intrigued. Everyone has their own private music running through their mind when they read a story. What would his be?

How do you explain why *Little Nicholas* continues to represent the storybook image of school in France, and why these stories remain so contemporary?

The Little Nicholas of the books and movies have absolutely nothing to do with today's schoolchildren. The technology has all changed. Where there used to be a pencil case and a blackboard, now everything is digital. Even the textbooks are being digitized. But those differences are really just details. The essence lies elsewhere. Technology can become obsolete. But friendship, on the other hand, and the camaraderie that so often develops in the classroom — that's age-old, it's eternal. People often have strong connections to their teachers, who are often the first ones to introduce children to the



joys of reading and the pleasure of learning. School is the one place throughout time where people come out richer. School is also the perfect place to break the rules and find ways to misbehave. In any class, whether in 1960 or in 2022, there's always a teacher's pet, a first-in-the-class, a dunce, a kid who's always snacking, or getting into fights... Those stereotypes are long-lived, and they're what make the *Little Nicholas* stories so current.

Would your father have felt flattered that the film was selected for the Cannes Festival?

My father was a huge cinephile, and he was crazy about the Cannes Film Festival and the city of Cannes. We even had an apartment there that he was very attached to. I was born on May 19th, which is approximately the date the Cannes Festival starts. I remember spending all my birthdays there, and seeing my parents go to the screenings every night in tuxedos and evening gowns. That said, he had enough imagination to picture himself projected onto the big screen as an animated character, doubled by a genius he never got the chance to meet.

I'm sure that wherever my parents are now, a big screen has been set up and the movie will be shown. Maybe they'll see me walk up the steps; maybe they'll be touched by how emotional I am...

And knowing that the *Little Nicholas* stories have been translated into more than forty languages, that he's a star in Poland and Germany, and that people love him in Korea, I'm sure the Cannes Festival will make the film an international blockbuster.



From Sempé

« Excellent! What a great job! »

Sempé.



Sempé.



Sempé.



Sempé.

Interview with Alain Chabat - The voice of Rene Goscinny

What attracted you to this project?

Anne Goscinny called me about the project, and she told me that she wanted me to be the voice of her father. I was really touched and honored, but I was also terribly intimidated: I'm a huge admirer of René Goscinny. Very quickly though, Anne took the pressure off of me. Then the directors Benjamin and Amandine shared some of the visuals with me and I thought they were just wonderful. It was as though Sempé himself had drawn them. And the idea of working with Laurent Lafitte was also great news.

What's your personal relationship to Little Nicholas?

I first discovered *Little Nicholas* when I was around 13 years old, I think. I immediately fell in love with the writing. It cracked me up. I read every *Little Nicolas* story over a pretty short period of time, one after the other, compulsively. I was immediately familiar with the characters, basically having an Agnan, an Eudes, and an Alceste in my own group of friends. I spent hours looking at Sempé's drawings, poring over the details, imagining which nib he must have used. Later on, I continued to follow his work, particularly the stuff published by Jean-Jacques Pauvert. I'm sure I read *Sempé*, *en avant* a thousand times!.

What does Goscinny represent to you?

René Goscinny has always been a major influence. Dozens of books could be written about his influence on comics, on cinema (live action and animated), on entrepreneurship, humor, and culture in general. He's a brilliant author in the strictest sense of the word: consider the iconic characters and worlds he created, and at an impressive pace, without ever sacrificing quality. He also discovered and helped bring up new talents. The 30-40 years of comics that followed the Pilote years, when Goscinny was editor-in-chief, owe so much to him. Whether it's *Charlie*, *Hara Kiri*, *L'Écho des Savanes*, *Fluide Glacial*, or *Métal Hurlant*, to name just a few, all these magazines were created by talents discovered by Goscinny.



Interview with Laurent Lafitte - The voice of Jean-Jacques Sempe

What attracted you to this project?

First of all, I love animated films. Like many other children, they were my introduction to cinema. *Bambi* will forever be a memory at once brutal and filled with wonder for me. The dark poetry of the *King and the Mockingbird* also left a profound mark on me. I've already lent my voice to several animated films; I thoroughly enjoy this kind of work. This project seemed so faithful to what I remember feeling when reading *Little Nicholas* as a kid, and the story of the encounter of these two geniuses – Sempé and Goscinny – is so incredibly moving both from a standpoint of friendship and creativity that I welcomed this offer as an honor and a delicious nudge from fate.

What is your connection with *Little Nicholas*, personally?

Little Nicholas is a character who accompanied me my entire childhood. Although I was born in the early 1970s, the 1950s aesthetics of this little boy's world strangely corresponded with my own reality, down to the short pants and the constant wish to have fun. The thing is, my father had introduced me to *Winnie Winkle*, the character he was a fan of during his own childhood, and that took us back all the way to the 1930s! With *Little Nicholas*, I felt I was in a familiar environment, aesthetically speaking! And his adventures were quite similar to those my little group of friends and myself busied ourselves trying to have.

What does Sempé represent for you?

Beyond the character of Little Nicholas, I discovered Sempé's world when I was a teenager – the lines in his drawings so fine that they lead you to believe that everything is simple; the melancholy yet never passéist atmosphere; and his unique poetry that is filled with humor, delicate subtlety, and levity. The sharp relevance of his drawings, his keen observation, and his eye for the one salient detail have remained pertinent for nearly a century. I am fascinated by his exceptional acuity. I am particularly touched by his way of depicting crowds and rendering vast spaces by playing with contrast, often through one tiny character isolated in a corner, who somehow always seems to be addressing us.

What did you endeavor to convey through your voice?

I tried to be as faithful as possible to the film's atmosphere and the directors' vision, not enter into a different acting code for the sole reason that this is an animation film. I was deeply moved to be able to bring my modest contribution to this body of work that has contributed so much to my childhood daydreams. Moreover, it was an opportunity to meet Alain Chabat and draw inspiration from the unpretentiousness and authenticity of his acting to create a consistency between our two interpretations. Above all, I hope Master Sempé will recognize himself in it.



Interview with Simon Faliu - The voice of Little Nicholas



What did you enjoy about this adventure?

Everything. The little trip to Luxembourg to do the recording felt like we were going on tour. Meeting Benjamin was so cool (or super swell, as Nicholas would say). Lending my voice to the leader of the Invincibles. Getting to see the storyboards. The singing session in the studio (I love to sing!)... Like I said, I really enjoyed it all!

What did Little Nicholas mean to you?

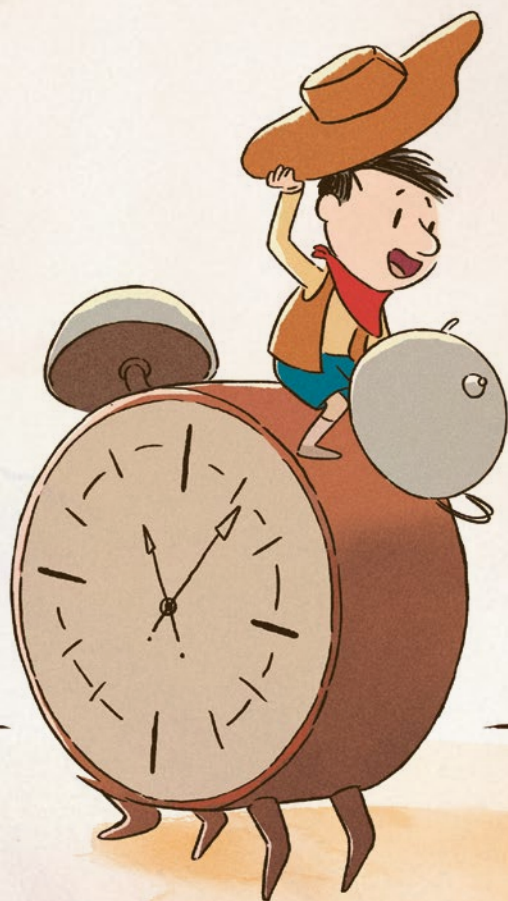
For me, he's come to symbolize friendship and adventure. I had the chance to really discover the role while making the film *Little Nicholas' Treasure*, where I played Geoffroy. I discovered his universe through the books, even though I was already familiar with the animated series. It's crazy how many memories I have thanks to him!

How did you work on the voice acting?

To get the character's energy, I looked at the storyboards even as certain scenes were still being worked out. I had the script, and above all, I had Céline Ronté directing me. She's such a great artistic director. And of course Benjamin Massoubre, one of the directors, knew the project forwards and backwards. It was like a game, trying to find different ways of doing the intonations, so that in the end they'd have different options for the animation.

What felt most difficult for you?

It might sound strange, but nothing felt difficult to me. I was so happy to be a part of the film. It was a fun adventure.



Crew

Directed by Amandine FREDON,
Benjamin MASSOUBRE

Written by Anne GOSCINNY,
Michel FESSLER

Adapted by Anne GOSCINNY,
Benjamin MASSOUBRE

Graphic Creator Jean-Jacques SEMPÉ

Art Director Fursy TEYSSIER

Animation Supervisor Juliette LAURENT

Original Music by Ludovic BOURCE

Edited by Benjamin MASSOUBRE

WITH THE VOICES OF

René Goscinny Alain CHABAT

Jean-Jacques Sempé Laurent LAFITTE, de la Comédie-Française

Little Nicholas Simon FALIU



Executive Producer Lucie BOLZE

Art Supervisor Antoine DELESVAUX

1st Assistant Director Sébastien HIVERT-MALLET

Production Manager Hélène CICA

Sound Effects Engineer Greg VINCENT

Sound Editors Nicolas LEROY, Kevin FEILDEL

Sound Mix Michel SCHILLINGS

Produced by Aton SOUMACHE, Lilian ECHE, Cédric PILOT et Christel HENON

A production ON CLASSICS (MEDIWAN) et BIDIBUL PRODUCTIONS

In co-production with ALIGN

With the participation of CANAL+, CINÉ+, FILM FUND LUXEMBOURG, CENTRE NATIONAL DU CINÉMA ET DE L'IMAGE ANIMÉE

With the support of RÉGION LA RÉUNION, RÉGION NOUVELLE-AQUITAINE, MAGELIS DÉPARTEMENT DE LA CHARENTE, PICTANOVO RÉGION HAUTS-DE-FRANCE

