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film festival

FILM EN STOCK presents

JE SUIS CHARLIE

L'HUMOUR À MORT

a FILM by
DANIEL & EMMANUEL LECONTE

with **ELISABETH BADINTER, GERARD BIARD, MARIKA BRET, CABU, CHARB, COCO, ANTONIO FISCHETTI, FRANÇOIS HOLLANDE, RICHARD MALKA, ERIC PORTHEULT, RISS, TIGNOUS, PHILIPPE VAL, SOUFIANE ZITOUN**

SYNOPSIS On the 7th of January 2015, French satirical weekly Charlie Hebdo was the victim of a terrorist attack that killed 12 people, including the greatest French cartoonists Cabu, Wolinski, Charb, Tignous and Honoré.

The following day a policewoman was shot dead in the street. The 9th of January, another attack targeted French Jews. Four hostages were murdered. This film pays tribute to all these victims.

Interview with DANIEL and EMMANUEL LECONTE

“It was necessary to focus on them and honor what they have given us.”

Emotion and a feeling of revolt are still palpable today as it was even more so when you shot the film. How did the project come about in such an emotionally charged moment?

Daniel Leconte : It was set up in two phases. It first came from Emmanuel, who, shocked by what happened in January, came to me and said, “We have to do a film on Charlie”. When I told him that a film already existed with “It’s Hard Being Loved by Jerks” he told me that using the rushes from that 2008 film, we could make those who had been assassinated speak and give voice to their convictions. Even if I was in a state of total shock myself, this project seemed to be sufficiently respectable and realistic that it launched us into an undertaking different from the first film.

Emmanuel Leconte : If we go back in real time to what happened on the 7th of January, we all experienced an earth-shaking moment, like on the 11th of September 2001. On the morning of the 7th of January I remember I was in my office and that I was overwhelmed by the world press coverage. A state of shock was the first emotion that came over me, as if fiction hit reality, or vice-versa. Then with each newscast or tweet announcing the deaths, I took a new slug in the stomach. I had the unbearable sensation of losing close friends as the day went on. I had that feeling of someone ripping something away from what I held dear. I then remembered that in the first film on Charlie, Daniel had filmed a lot of interviews of all the cartoonists and the witnesses of the Charlie trial in 2006-2007. I went through them right away and I had the strange impression of being with those who had been killed and that they were talking directly to me. At the time of the filming they talked about what they believed their role was in society, a role that no one else wanted to take on debating hot issues. Thanks to these images, I could again witness their humor, their intelligence, their unique sensitivity. Being able to view those interviews, was not only a way of finding an ideal refuge during the raging news storm, I also had the sensation of hearing the words of those who resist. Because they were those who resisted, who fought against racism, social confusions and violence. They had a whole arsenal of arguments to defend their point of view but very few people made the effort to listen to them. It was essential for me that people should understand the salutary power of their arguments.

DL : They found themselves at the avant-garde in defending our secular society that no one else wanted to defend and they assumed that role without preaching lessons to anyone! They were heroes in spite of themselves, bringing back heroism to its just status.

In shooting this film so close to the events, did you seek to fight against the ups and downs of information in the press and public opinion?

EL : Totally. And we especially wanted to catch up on lost time. In France, we were lucky to have had the chance to engage in debate during the Charlie Hebdo cartoonist trial in 2007, a place to conduct a constructive exchange of ideas. Those who felt offended by the cartoons had the possibility of being defended in court and to debate in the public place. The court verdict was rendered in favor of freedom of expression. However we have not learned a lesson from this. From the verdict in 2007 to the assassinations of 2015, the feelings of waste and the loss of quality debate that the Charlie team defended is saddening. First we have lost fabulous human beings and now we realize that the “circus press” is going to rewrite the events backwards, accusing them, for example, of being responsible

for their own deaths, like has been written here and there. We just want their voices to be heard and oppose their words against those reactions trying to destroy the spirit of the demonstration all over France on the 11th of January. This attempt to deconstruct and destroy this day of incredible coming together for the Charlie team was, for us, like another terrorist attack.

DL : It was like the terrorists had the right to strike again: that showed up the attitude of a certain milieu of intellectuals in France (and others in the world) who showed themselves as allies of these fundamentalists. These intellectuals played the part of relaying the killers’ objectives, all the while slowing down the awareness of the issue. No one has of yet truly studied the most historical mobilization of people, demonstrating all over the country, greater than that of the French Liberation in 1944! We wanted to do a “film-hommage” to make this moment last. We made the film to let viewers love the Charlie team and show what we have lost; that people can realize the emptiness that is left and at the same time say: “They are still here, they are alive”.

Was it difficult to obtain the Charlie team’s permission to interview them?

EL : First we worked on the material that we had at hand. Beginning on the 8th or 9th of January I started to review the rushes; and on the 11th of January we marched in the demonstration with the people from Charlie who were crushed emotionally and stressed though under high police protection. We obviously did not speak with them about our project at that time. So we started to work in the inverse manner of what is usually done and edited images we had without knowing precisely in what order they would ultimately be used. It was only in the second phase that we approached the Charlie team.

DL : We started by gathering all the archival images and at the end of February, Richard Malka, Charlie Hebdo’s lawyer, proposed that Emmanuel and I present the project to the team.

EL : We were there before people who had been traumatized by the events, by what they had become in the eyes of the media and were under a huge amount of pressure. It was in this context that we told them about the film we wanted to do with them!

DL : We told them that we needed them and that we could not do the film without them. Luz (the author of the cartoon of the front page after the assassination) was the only one who did not want to speak out publicly: he was in such a state that he did not know what he could say, but without any animosity towards us. About 10 days later we began interviewing. It took a little while to get things rolling but the moment we explained to them that we wanted to make those who were no longer there speak; for them to share their memories of those who were murdered and their convictions, they all wanted to talk about Cabu, Charb, Tignous, Wolinsky, Honoré, Elsa, Bernard, Mustapha and all the others. In the end, they confided the most wonderful memories and the part that we thought initially to be the most important, the archival images, diminished and gave full importance to the interviews.

EL : We have to say that their words were very moving for us. I think that in what they told us, Coco, for example, there was a sort of catharsis.....

DL : That was the challenge: let her tell her story so that she could be heard and not be broken by it. We could not interview her without saying what had happened. It was very important for me to make people understand what it is to be put in the position of a hostage and under the threat of a terrorist. To make someone do something terrible: it is the very principle of totalitarianism. It had to be said because I think it is part of what happened.

EL : We were fascinated by the resilience and the determination of the Charlie team, be it Riss, Portheault or Coco. A few weeks before they had been the target of a terrorist attack, and, all of a sudden they showed such serenity and sincerity as to impress us and reassure us.

Among those personalities exterior to Charlie, you chose Soufiane Zitouni. Is he one of the rare Muslim intellectuals to adopt such a point of view?

DL : He is also a part of the story as he wrote a tribune in the newspaper Liberation entitled “Je suis Charlie” just days after the attack. For a Muslim, at that moment to come out and write “Je suis Charlie”, then explain that the cartoons done by Cabu were conform to the will of the Prophet, is courageous. In any case, we did not look for experts: those who speak out have solid reason to do so.



Did you hesitate to evoke the terrorist attack against the Kasher supermarket? The targets – the cartoonists for their use of liberty of expression and the Jews assassinated because they are Jews were not the same....

EL : To attack Charlie, is to attack humor and intelligence, the capacity to understand the second and third degree, put things at a distance, laugh without discriminating. To attack the police, is to attack the Republic and the founding of our country. To attack Jews is to attack difference and culture. That means to attack France. It was important to talk about all these attacks in the film.

At the end of your shoot, how many hours of rushes did you have to work with? How did the editing go?

EL : We had about 30 hours of rushes. We had to work quickly and stay in the energy of the moment. There was so much going on that we risked being dispersed. We shot a lot but not too much. What gave us a good starting point was to begin with those who were no longer there.

DL : We worked with my main editor who also edited “It’s Hard being Loved by Jerks”. The most stressful was that we could not afford to make a mistake: for such a project, good esthetic and editorial judgement was of prime importance. It was as if we were “on live” and had to constantly concentrate on how to best relate the events and set the story in those seven days.

What are you hopes for the film being internationally shown at the Toronto Film Festival?

EL : Terrorists tried to exterminate the newsroom of a weekly newspaper. This horrible act constitutes a new level of modern terrorism and has affected the entire world. That said, it is important that we speak with our sensitivity on the international level to evoke our French specificity: a newspaper as free and as irreverent as Charlie Hebdo could not, unfortunately, exist in many countries in the world.



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