COME WHAT MAY

NORD-OUEST AND **PATHÉ** PRESENT

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COME WHAT MAY

A FILM BY
CHRISTIAN CARION

RUNTIME: 114 MINUTES

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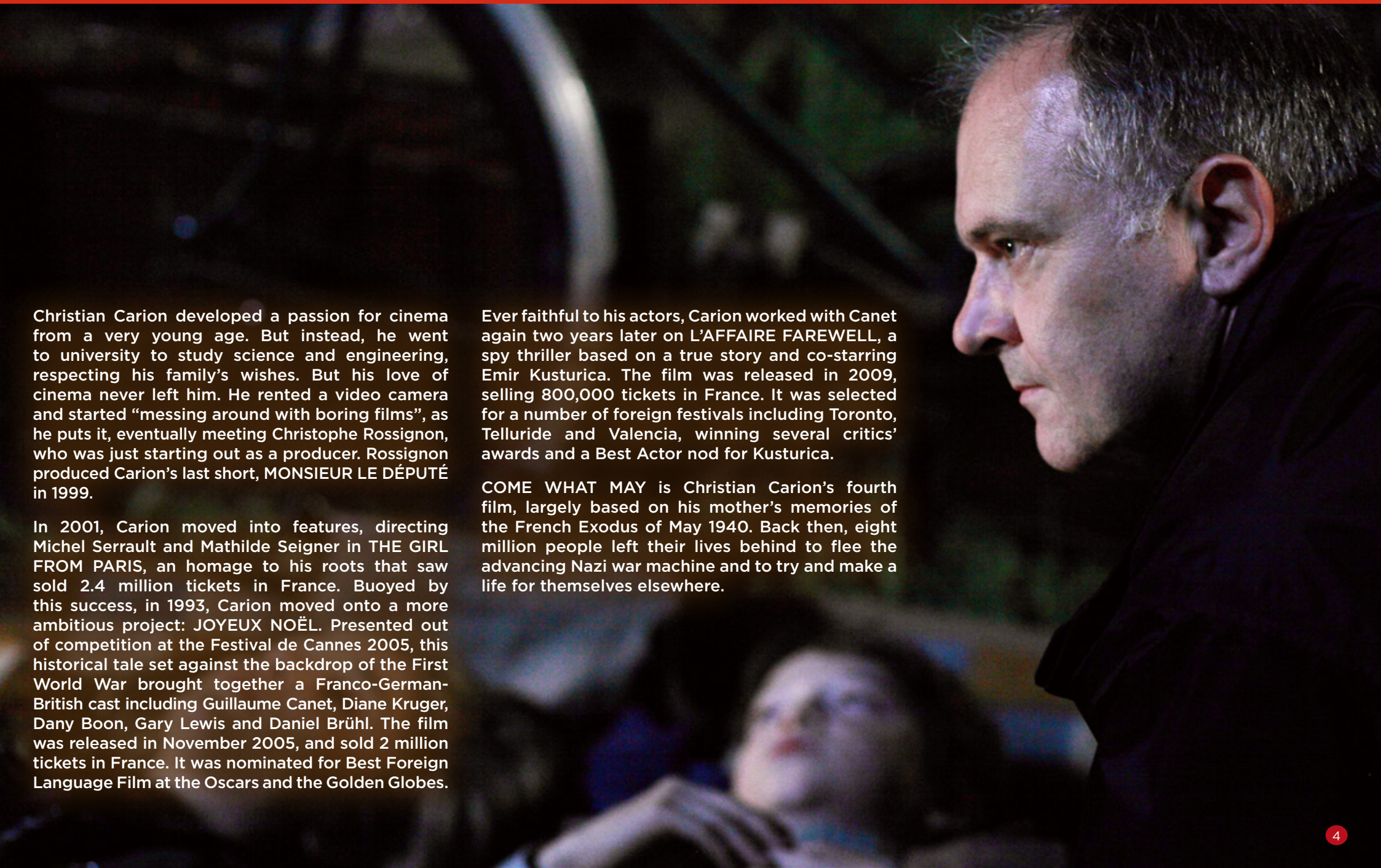
THE STORY

May 1940. To escape the imminent German invasion, the inhabitants of a small village in northern France flee their homes, like so many millions of their compatriots. Max, a German boy, travels with them. His father, Hans, opposed the Nazi regime and was imprisoned in Arras for having lied about his nationality. Hans is eventually set free and sets off to find his son, accompanied by a Scottish soldier who is trying to get back home.

CHRISTIAN CARION - BIOGRAPHY



Christian Carion developed a passion for cinema from a very young age. But instead, he went to university to study science and engineering, respecting his family's wishes. But his love of cinema never left him. He rented a video camera and started "messing around with boring films", as he puts it, eventually meeting Christophe Rossignon, who was just starting out as a producer. Rossignon produced Carion's last short, MONSIEUR LE DÉPUTÉ in 1999.

In 2001, Carion moved into features, directing Michel Serrault and Mathilde Seigner in THE GIRL FROM PARIS, an homage to his roots that saw sold 2.4 million tickets in France. Buoyed by this success, in 1993, Carion moved onto a more ambitious project: JOYEUX NOËL. Presented out of competition at the Festival de Cannes 2005, this historical tale set against the backdrop of the First World War brought together a Franco-German-British cast including Guillaume Canet, Diane Kruger, Dany Boon, Gary Lewis and Daniel Brühl. The film was released in November 2005, and sold 2 million tickets in France. It was nominated for Best Foreign Language Film at the Oscars and the Golden Globes.

Ever faithful to his actors, Carion worked with Canet again two years later on L'AFFAIRE FAREWELL, a spy thriller based on a true story and co-starring Emir Kusturica. The film was released in 2009, selling 800,000 tickets in France. It was selected for a number of foreign festivals including Toronto, Telluride and Valencia, winning several critics' awards and a Best Actor nod for Kusturica.

COME WHAT MAY is Christian Carion's fourth film, largely based on his mother's memories of the French Exodus of May 1940. Back then, eight million people left their lives behind to flee the advancing Nazi war machine and to try and make a life for themselves elsewhere.

INTERVIEW WITH CHRISTIAN CARION

Had you been thinking about the story behind COME WHAT MAY for a long time?

To be honest, I don't remember when I began thinking about making it into a film. The Exodus had a profound impact on my family, and I heard the story of it every Sunday, at every communion, and at every christening. When you're a kid and you hear stories like that, you tend to exaggerate them a little, and in my pantheon of major stories, the one about May 1940 had a special place. As my desire to make movies grew, I realized I had a subject right there. But I was aware of the magnitude of the task and the difficulties it presented, like JOYEUX NOËL, which was first feature I wanted to make. But I first had to go through an intermediate phase which was THE GIRL FROM PARIS. COME WHAT MAY turned out to be more complicated to make than JOYEUX NOËL, but in the end, this film came along at the right time.

With COME WHAT MAY, you once again mingle the intimate with the historical...

Yes. It's my fourth film and they are all directly linked with my family and my own personal history. THE GIRL FROM PARIS reflects the story of my parents who are farmers. Being raised in the north of France, I was very familiar with the First World War which is the subject matter for JOYEUX NOËL. Even L'AFFAIRE FAREWELL is linked to my family because François Mitterrand was a living god for my father. But COME WHAT MAY couldn't be more personal. Indeed, I swapped things around to make this film more quickly so that it could be a 90th birthday gift for my mother. This story is the story she told me. COME WHAT MAY feels like I'm closing a chapter, the one in which I viewed my parents from a child's perspective. I'm growing older. I have to move onto something different, I need to want to make different movies now.

What was it that struck a chord with you about your mother's story?

My mother told me that the weather that month was the best she'd ever seen. It was the hottest month of the 20th century. They slept out under the stars. My mother was a scout on her bicycle, like the teacher in the film. Just like her, my mother didn't always reveal what she had seen. The world was turned on its head. But for someone aged 14 at the time, it must have been amazing. I always tried to keep in mind that vital energy, which guided us during the writing of the film. I worked on this project with Laure Irrmann, who had already provided valuable input on L'AFFAIRE FAREWELL; and Andrew Bampfield, who provided a British touch.

Other than your mother's memories, what else fed into the writing of the film?

I had very happy memories of writing JOYEUX NOËL because I had access to all the accounts of the soldiers that fraternized. With COME WHAT MAY, I had my mother's account, but I wanted to talk to other people who had experienced it. So I went on the local France 3 Nord-Pas-de-Calais and Picardy TV stations to ask viewers to share their memories of May 1940 with me, telling them that I wanted to make a film that would bring their experiences of that time to life. We were overwhelmed with responses. We received lots of letters, but also journals, recordings of grannies and grandpas in retirement homes, all kinds of unimaginable things like one story in which some children came across a dying German soldier who asked them to help him die more quickly. That's what I wanted to bring back to life in this film.

Is it easy to raise financing for a film such as this?

I remember a very important meeting I had with Jérôme Seydoux the day I told him I wanted to make a film about the Exodus. He said he thought the Exodus was a debacle, that I wanted to portray an ugly episode in France's history, something sinister. He asked me why and I told him: "When you watch TITANIC, you know that at the end the ship is going to sink. Well the Exodus of May 1940 was when France sank. It's perhaps not very beautiful to witness, but just like on the Titanic, the roads of France were full of people who wanted to live, to survive. I'm interested in the energy of those people who didn't just want to drown. I want to make a film worthy of those French people on the roads who didn't want to founder." I also told him that I wanted to make a Western, a film with horses, wagons, and wide-open spaces. I eventually reached an agreement with Pathé and was able to make the film I wanted to make.

And make it on the roads of France...

For financial reasons, we had to make a choice whether to shoot in France or abroad. I cut it short, saying if I had to shoot in Romania or Bulgaria as I did with JOYEUX NOËL, it would be cheaper but it would be rubbish because the people there don't care about our story. So we decided to shoot in the Pas-de-Calais department where the people had actually experienced the Exodus. The extras were from families who had all been part of the story.

How did you manage the crowd of extras?

COME WHAT MAY is an ensemble film with French actors, a German and a Scotsman. But there is that other character who is very important: the village, and the convoy that travels with the them. My only concern was the historical reconstruction and it was the same with JOYEUX NOËL and L'AFFAIRE FAREWELL. It can be too clean, too perfect, and not alive enough. To avoid that, we chose local extras, gave them costumes, and let them manage on their own. We didn't have any dressers for them because we wanted them to appropriate their costumes – they had to dress themselves and live with their characters. We gave them 1940s haircuts, but then left them to do their own hair every morning. As a result, they no longer respected their clothes – in the best possible way. We were on the road, it was hot, so everyone was loosening their clothes and nobody could have done it for them. It came naturally, and not from a hair, make-up, and styling team. Granted, it saved us some money, but it was also about gaining realism. The convoy was 300 meters long and it was tricky to manage – you couldn't just make everyone turn around by clicking your fingers. So that made the logistics of the shoot rather complicated. I decided I wasn't going to be able to film the actors and what was going on in the convoy simultaneously. But the action in the convoy was probably going to be very interesting. So we brought in a camera operator, a kind of twin brother to our DP Pierre Cottereau. We gave him a camera, dressed him in the style of the period, and put him in the convoy. He was with them, living with them, and depending on what was happening, he filmed what was going on. We used a great deal of this footage because the images really illustrated life in the convoy. Not to mention the interactions with the main narrative. It was fabulous. We found a color, a truth in the faces and in the attitudes that we could never have otherwise hoped for.

Filmmakers are sometimes compared to generals. Is that how you see yourself?

I felt more like a brigadier on JOYEUX NOËL than on COME WHAT MAY. With JOYEUX NOËL, coordinating the fraternization sequences was complicated. That wasn't the case with COME WHAT MAY. My biggest task, once the screenplay reflected the film we wanted to make, was to lead the whole team in the same direction. That's the hardest thing. I spend a huge amount of time on set making sure everyone shares the same desire. I believe in desire, in the "joy of doing", in things as simple as that. If people are happy on set and there is a joy of doing, then all that comes out in the film. With COME WHAT MAY, the team was perfect, both for the shoot and in terms of postproduction. A dream team.

On COME WHAT MAY, you worked with Pierre Cottereau, who has been behind the photography for historical films like THE MAN FROM ORAN, and more intimate ones like A COMMON THREAD. Is it that combination that led you to want to work with him?

Exactly. I had seen his work, in particular CAFÉ DE FLORE, which I thought was incredible. And once I'd seen his range, it was time to meet the man if I was going to spend more than three months with him. We met in a café and after five minutes, I knew I was going to have some good times with him during the shoot. I always try to establish why people want to work on my films and to weigh up these reasons. It was obvious that Pierre Cottereau wanted to tackle a film that, on the one hand, explored the history of the village on the roads, and on the other, dealt with the German and the Scotsman fleeing the invader. This construction appealed to him. We also share the same cinematographic references.

Such as?

We watched all Terrence Malick's films again, for the sense of space, for the treatment of nature. The framework in which the people are moving is for me a character in its own right, that we had to be able to feel. My mother told me that the fields – which back then were her place of work – felt like a totally different place when she walked through them during the Exodus. I tried to translate that in my work, mainly in the composition of the image. For the other part of the film, with these characters being hounded by the war, we sought a different esthetic. That said, there was no question of creating a pastiche of THE THIN RED LINE or SAVING PRIVATE RYAN. Rather, when you find yourself in a situation, it's about knowing where to point the compass.

This shoot was a huge enterprise. What did you fear the most?

The weather. If it had rained, it would have been impossible to shoot because we had no covered sets. We were very lucky in that not a drop of rain fell during June 2014. And that's pretty unusual for the Pas-de-Calais region. Managing the extras was also pretty risky. Choosing to shoot in France paid off because when the extras are really invested in the task, it saves a huge amount of time. And my last fear was the scene with the dive-bomber attack which lasted for one week. This was the first time I've ever had to create a scene over such a long time. Everything was broken down and everything took ages from reloading the impacts on the ground to managing the stress of the horses. That week was exhausting, but I'm very happy with the result.

The danger when you make an historical movie is that you end up filming the set more than the characters. Do you agree?

Absolutely. Firstly, I work with someone who is very precious to me – the set designer Jean-Michel Simonet. He is extremely rigorous and meticulous regarding the signification of each object. He has a philosophy of set design and is the guardian of feasibility and credibility. I always tell him he's going to be disappointed because we won't show everything he did. But I always remember what Michel Serrault told me when we were making THE GIRL FROM PARIS: "You might be the one who writes the dialog, and chooses the costumes and the sets, but we actors interpret that dialog, we wear the costumes, and we walk around the sets. If those things aren't right, we can't save the day and be right ourselves." So that osmosis is essential, in order that we only see the actor. My films deal with characters and not with roads. I work on the human side of things because I'm telling the story of my parents. The human side of things helps us get into the subject. And although the subject here is May 1940 in France, in the end, it is a universal and timeless subject. People who take to the roads, who have to leave the places they live for climate-related, religious, or political reasons, are, sadly, commonplace nowadays. That said, I'm not trying to reflect to that reality here. COME WHAT MAY tells the story of a displaced population as it is so modestly called. For me, that's an eternal, universal theme.

THE CHARACTERS AS SEEN BY CHRISTIAN CARION

HANS, THE GERMAN REFUGEE
AUGUST DIEHL

During my historical research, I discovered that from 1933 onwards, hundreds of thousands of Germans fled their country and many came to France. I also learned that they weren't treated very well. When war was declared in September 1939, they were sent to camps, and when the Germans invaded, they were handed the keys and deported the prisoners back to Germany so the Exodus began there in fact. Hans is a man who was forced to flee, and who ends up as a refugee in France before being caught by the Nazis again. Having a German character in the film gave us a different perspective that appealed to me.

PERCY, THE SCOTTISH SOLDIER
MATTHEW RHYS

I created a Scottish character in memory of my father. I was raised in a very pro-British culture. My father told me how, as a child during the war, he would watch formations of British bombers flying towards Germany and in the evening, he'd watch them head back towards England. He would count the missing planes, watching with emotion along with my grandfather, saying how they died for us. My father loved the British, and always used to say that without Churchill, we wouldn't be where we are today. He was the only who stood firm. So I was destined to create a colorful British character, someone with panache, who would never give in.

PAUL, THE MAYOR
OLIVIER GOURMET

The character of the mayor is again a reference to my father, who was very politically engaged. He was a militant socialist and a man of the countryside – two traits that couldn't be more in opposition. To him, it was all about the land. And my maternal grandfather was the village mayor. The Republic was his daily business. He was obsessed by the idea of raising awareness of what a republic is and what it means to be a group of people living according to rules. So when he set off on the journey, he took the statue of Marianne with him. He even took the baize off his desk for municipal deliberations! Everyone thought it was very funny, but when he pulled Marianne out during a council meeting on the road, it was very reassuring.

SUZANNE, THE TEACHER
ALICE ISAAZ

Back then, the power of the mayor relied a great deal on the local school teacher, who was also often the secretary to the mayor. They were also representatives of the Republic. As the Exodus progresses, Suzanne grows more mature and takes on some much greater responsibilities.

MADO, THE OWNER OF THE BISTROT
MATHILDE SEIGNER

The bistro was the only place where people could have some social contact. Since childhood, I have known several bistro owners and they were all very colorful people. They have to stand up to their customers, who aren't there just to drink water. They have to especially tough if they're female. They require a certain charisma. In the film, Mado manages the daily lives and morale of the troops. When the village takes to the roads, she brings along a gramophone. She wants to hold on to a flavor of the past.

ROGER, THE FARMER
JACQUES BONAFFÉ

I wanted to include a character who is always "against". A real Frenchman. In every village, there is always one who is "against". But in the end, Roger comes round to the group – at one point, he no longer has a choice. And the journey changes him in the sense that he is no longer systematically "against" anymore.

ALBERT, THE GOOD FRENCHMAN
LAURENT GERRA

Albert is a straight out of one of my mother's memories. She had a neighbor who had a very good cellar. The day her village took to the roads, the neighbor was completely drunk. When he sobered up a couple of days later, he came out into his yard and saw a German motorbike going past with a pig in the sidecar to feed the troops. He turned to his wife and said, "They're already here. We're staying!" To him, leaving meant dying.

ARRIFLEX, THE GERMAN DIRECTOR
THOMAS SCHMAUSER

This character was born from my historical research. Some German filmmakers made some macabre reenactments of how villages were taken – they'd arrive after the fight, take people prisoner, give them weapons loaded with blanks and ask them to recreate the action for their news footage and propaganda.

ENNIO MORRICONE/CHRISTIAN CARION : TWO VOICES FOR A SINGLE FILM BY STÉPHANE LEROUGE

This is the story of an Italian genius of motion picture music, an overactive, abundant, inexhaustible genius, whose inspiration seems to defy the passing of time. It's also the story of a French filmmaker from the new world, whose love of film music has been shaped by the work of the Italian master, his infinite lyricism, his touch of grandeur and elevation. And lastly, it's the story of a miraculous, unexpected encounter, despite being separated by two generations, a language barrier, and thousands of kilometers. A two-way interview with Ennio Morricone and Christian Carion about the film which brought the Maestro back to French cinema after a 30-year absence.

Ennio Morricone, how did you react when Christian Carion first contacted you about COME WHAT MAY? What aspects of the subject and its treatment drew your attention?

Ennio Morricone: It didn't take me long to make my mind up. I was won over from the first footage I saw. The film has the power of simplicity, with a very clear narrative. I felt I could bring my own sensibility to the story of these people who abandon their village, their houses and their daily lives to head off in search of newfound freedom. I found the subject moving because I, too, am a child of the war. I was aged 12, and in Rome at the time of the events related by Christian. That said, although I obviously knew that the Germans had invaded France in 1940, I had no idea about the phenomenon of the Exodus. It was the combination of these two factors that convinced me: a new subject, and a new director.

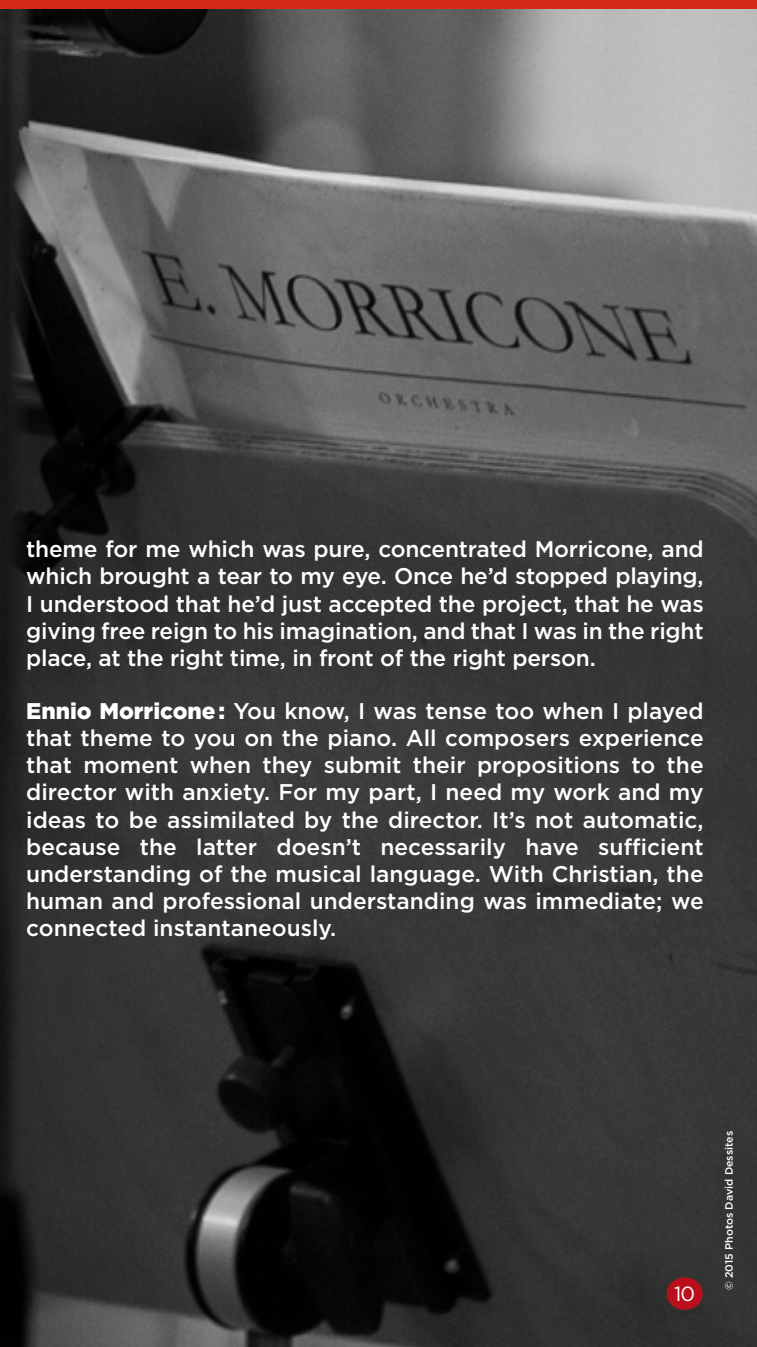
For you, Christian, was offering the film to Ennio Morricone the dream of a film-lover, or of a filmmaker?

Christian Carion: : Let's say, both! When I presented the project to my producers, Christophe Rossignon and Jérôme Seydoux, I told them it was a Western, with wide open spaces, wagons and horses. To bolster this dimension, the screenplay was written against a backdrop of music, from ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST; DUCK, YOU SUCKER; and even THE MISSION. Some months later, during the editing, since we needed some temporary music to provide a backbone, I suggested to the editor, Laure Gardette, that naturally we should use that which had accompanied the writing process. It was like a lab experiment, totally magical: the lyrical air of the main theme from ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST over the scene of the convoy's departure gave us goose bumps. Someone working on the production dared to suggest: "What if we contacted Ennio Morricone? We've got nothing to lose." I didn't think it would happen, until one day someone told me: "We could have a deal, but he wants to meet you first." Suddenly, the fantasy during the writing was becoming a reality. But a complex one that was hard to comprehend: he's a legend, who doesn't speak our language, who is used to recording in Rome, and who hasn't composed anything for a French film since 1985.

Were you in the same state as Martin Scorsese in front of Bernard Herrmann, in other words, feeling a mix of excitement and anxiety?

Christian Carion: How could you not be nervous faced with a composer whose music has marked out some key moments in your life? When I rang at his door, he'd already read a synopsis of COME WHAT MAY in Italian. He welcomed me very politely, but stipulated: "My ideal working method is to compose from the script, so the director can shoot to the music." Thanks, Maestro. I'll know that next time. Too bad for this film. But he said since I'd come all that way, we should talk about it, and he asked what I'd brought with me. I had the script in Italian and two versions of the film, the first with the temporary music, the second without. I suggested he watch the second, but he wasn't having any of it: "Out of the question! I need to know your musical tastes; that will allow me to know if we can get on together." We found ourselves in front of a little TV set, the Maestro with his nose up against the screen, me behind. You can imagine the mise en abyme: I became the spectator of Ennio Morricone, who was himself the spectator of my film. He made a few comments, especially at the beginning, then let himself go with the narrative. At the end, he was visibly moved: "Molto bello! You have my blessing to buy the rights to the pieces of music in question." I countered: "How can we reuse ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST? No, I need original music!" He led me through to his monumental lounge, and sat at the piano: "After reading the synopsis, I thought of this." He placed a manuscript on the music stand, and I asked him for permission to film with my phone. He smiled in agreement, then he played a theme for me which was pure, concentrated Morricone, and which brought a tear to my eye. Once he'd stopped playing, I understood that he'd just accepted the project, that he was giving free reign to his imagination, and that I was in the right place, at the right time, in front of the right person.

Ennio Morricone: You know, I was tense too when I played that theme to you on the piano. All composers experience that moment when they submit their propositions to the director with anxiety. For my part, I need my work and my ideas to be assimilated by the director. It's not automatic, because the latter doesn't necessarily have sufficient understanding of the musical language. With Christian, the human and professional understanding was immediate; we connected instantaneously.



How does one compose the music for a film made in a language you don't speak? Can that be an advantage?

Ennio Morricone: Faced with a film, the most important thing is what I see, more than what I hear. In the case of COME WHAT MAY, the story was clear enough that the images, the structure and editing were sufficient for me to understand everything. I didn't even ask Christian for any clarification on, say, the psychology of a given character. In one way, not being able to follow the dialog word-for-word helped me to remain detached. What spoke to me directly was the dramaturgy of the Exodus, the collective dimension of the story, told against the backdrop of the tragedy of war.

Indeed, one of the film's originalities is not to use music to underline the violence of the war sequences, such as the attack by the Stukas, and the confrontation with the scouts. The music operates on a different level.

Ennio Morricone: That was what Christian wanted, and was totally in line with my own convictions. The violent situations were enough in themselves: the sequence when the Stukas bombard the convoy doesn't need any musical dramatization to be more terrifying. On the other hand, to tell the story of the quest for freedom – in my view, the film's deeper theme – the music plays a key part.

Christian Carion: Your exact words, Maestro, were: "It's not a war film, but a film which takes place during the war." Which meant, let's forget the historical context, and concentrate on the collective, on the human beings who make up this long convoy and their destiny. The war had to be present through the image, not in the music.

Ennio Morricone: In any case, if it had just been another war film, I would simply have refused to take part! (laughs)

After that first meeting, what working method did you adopt?

Christian Carion : Three weeks later, at the end of November, we met in Rome with the editing team to decide with Ennio on which sequences should be put to music. There he was, old-school, with his timer, taking notes in a school exercise book.

Ennio Morricone : The more times I saw these sequences, the more I absorbed them. The rhythm and the tempo of the convoy gave me the idea for the main theme; a slow, processional march. Then once Christian had returned to Paris, I cleared it all away to start over. Let me explain why. First off, in the film's title, there's an allusion to springtime. It's a tragic spring, but a spring nonetheless. This idea of spring made me think of the inner flame of these people on the march, driven by the hope of inventing a new life for themselves. So in the course of the writing process, I somewhat belatedly became aware that something was missing – a broad, generous piece that would illustrate that quest for freedom I mentioned before. Built on a great crescendo, this piece composed at the last minute changed the perspective of the overall score in its very architecture. Usually, I never write any additional material without first consulting with the director. After half a century in cinema, this was my first exception to this principle.

Christian Carion: I'm very honored, Maestro. (laughs) I'll never forget our phone call at the start of January to wish each other Happy New Year. We were due to record 10 days later. And you just dropped it in there, all casual: "Oh, I forgot to tell you, I've written a second theme, totally outside what we agreed. You'll get to hear it in the studio!" Which is what happened on Monday 12 January, a day that will remain etched in my memory forever. It was the day after the big march following the attack on Charlie Hebdo. It was on the front page of La Repubblica. We arrived in Rome in an emotional state, with a certain fragility. And you started the recording by conducting this mystery theme composed in secret. You resuscitated us right there and then! That piece became the theme of the "people of the roads". It went with the images as if it had been planned since our very first meeting.

Ennio Morricone: I just followed my instinct. I simply had to spend some time alone, one-on-one with the film until it called out for this theme, claimed it as something self-evident.

Christian, what was the recording in the Forum studios like for you, where the Maestro has recorded so many iconic scores?

Christian Carion: It was a magical period. Between the recording and the mixing, we spent a week in Rome, totally immersed. I was fascinated by the Forum studios, built under a church in the Piazza Euclide. The Maestro had brought together an orchestra of 55 musicians who only just squeezed in. I asked him: "Have you ever thought of enlarging the place?" The answer was unequivocal: "Are you joking? These are God's foundations!" Then there was the downtime, the lunches, which allowed us to get to know each other better. He broke the ice, opened up, telling me some juicy anecdotes about Sergio Leone and Elio Petri. His wife Maria did not attend the recordings. But after finalizing the mix of the big finale theme, the Maestro asked Fabio Venturi, his sound engineer, to tee it up at the start. He picked up the phone, called a number, and held the handset up towards the speakers. We had no idea what he was doing. It was Maria on the end of the line; he just wanted to have her opinion. Luckily, she liked it, so we kept the piece in the film. (laughs) During those days in the studio, Ennio said something that shook me: "You know, we always do too much. In the end, you have to make a choice." That meant that from the 60 minutes of music recorded, I was going to have to make a selection. And I was faced with a composer who was aware of this, and who demanded it of me.

Did you follow this recommendation?

Christian Carion : Yes, by deliberately having his music come in after 25 minutes, when the convoy leaves. The Maestro is one of the stars of the film, and like a lot of stars, he orchestrates his entrance, knowing how to incite anticipation. Despite all that, I was afraid that this decision would bother him. In April, when I showed him COME WHAT MAY mixed and subtitled in Italian, he cheerfully told me: "During the first part, I wondered why I agreed to do this film; during the second, I understood why."

Ennio Morricone: You simply followed my advice by appropriating my work. Seeing the finished result made me appreciate your film more, with its blend of power and simplicity.

And it's worth pointing out that the finale of COME WHAT MAY already features on the program of the Maestro's concerts.

Christian Carion: That was the icing on the cake. We were in Lyon at the end of March, and Ennio was performing a concert at the Tony Garnier Hall in front of a wildly enthusiastic audience of 4,000. And he did indeed open the concert with COME WHAT MAY, a piece of music that no one knew from a movie that had not yet been released. Hearing the theme from my film in that huge venue, in the middle of an audience, was totally uplifting, especially as part of a program packed with some classic scores that I grew up with. The story of COME WHAT MAY, with its intimate, family resonance, had joined the Morricone legend.

Ennio Morricone: You might be blown away in future, because I'm counting on doing it again! (laughs) Christian, can you tell me what was the reaction from those audiences who have already seen film?

Christian Carion: At the end of screenings, the emotion is tangible, in part due to the last seven minutes of the film. No one moves, the audience remains seated right to the end, under the spell of the music. When I come to discuss with the audience, I almost have the feeling I'm disturbing them. The two recurrent themes in the discussions are: "Ultimately, it's the story of today's migrants, it's a parable on the call of freedom." The second subject is the "Morricone effect". I always have to answer questions on our collaboration, our working method, the recording. The French public is fascinated to see your name appear on the credits, like a magical apparition, almost unreal.

Maestro, do you see COME WHAT MAY as the first step in a joint adventure with Christian Carion?

Ennio Morricone: Why not? It all depends on what he wants. He's the filmmaker. A first film is an opportunity to get to know one another, to get to grips with the personality and tastes of the other. From the second one, the foundations are already laid, you can start to build on a deeper, shared universe. When it comes down to it, I'd like COME WHAT MAY to be a starting point, not a destination.

Rome, 15 september 2015

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT BY OLIVIER WIEVIORKA

On 10 May 1940, the Wehrmacht put an end to eight months of inaction and went back the offensive on the Western front. Crushing Belgian and Dutch defenses, and breaking through the French front, the Germans quickly forced the French to lay down their arms. Millions of petrified citizens fled their homes, fearful of what the future might hold. Dutch and Belgians were the first to flee, followed by eight million French people who took to the roads and joined this seemingly endless Exodus. Such a phenomenon had never been seen before in France, and still gives rise to some contradictory interpretations. To explain the reasons why, some look to the very highest level of state, while others view the situation from the roadside itself.

Seen from on high, by those in power, the Exodus initially seemed like the result of a military and political collapse. Granted, nobody had predicted such a debacle – far from it. When Great Britain and then France declared war on Hitler's Germany on 3 September 1939, the administration was feeling confident. The French Army was considered to be the leading army in the world at that time, and the generals had high hopes for the Maginot Line, which was meant to hold back the first waves of the enemy while the country was able to calmly mobilize. However, Hitler upset this scenario by adopting an extremely bold plan: His forces would attack in Belgium and the Netherlands to suggest a reprisal of the German strategy of 1914, while his main focus would be on the Ardennes, which was poorly defended. The French generals fell head first into the trap that had been set for them. General Gamelin foolishly sent his troops to Belgium and the Netherlands to head off the German forces,

and once they were well underway, Hitler launched his assault in the Ardennes. On 13 May, German tanks crossed the Meuse. And on 14 June, German forces arrived in an undefended Paris. On 22 June, in the Compiègne Forest, France signed the Armistice. This sudden military collapse led in turn to the collapse of the French state. Prime Minister Paul Reynaud tried to remain calm but soon gave in to panic, although he did reshuffle his cabinet on 5 June and brought in an unknown, Charles de Gaulle, as Undersecretary of War. But on 10 June, his government surreptitiously fled Paris for Tours and then Bordeaux. Even worse, his ministers were divided. Some, following Philippe Pétain, wanted to reach an agreement with Hitler, while others, including De Gaulle, were determined for France to continue to fight alongside Great Britain. A battle-weary Reynaud resigned on 16 June, handing power over to Pétain who, the following day, began negotiations with the Reich that concluded on 22 June with the signing of the Armistice.

But these decisions taken in a distant city were ignored by millions of civilians fleeing the German advance. They are the subject of this film by Christian Carion, who, rather than looking at those on high, prefers to consider the abyss, viewing the situation from the perspective of those on the roads. People were not ordered to leave their homes by the public authorities. On the contrary, it was a personal choice by individuals based on their memories and what they understood. For some of them, the memory of the dreadful occupation in Belgium and northern France during the First World War was so terrible that they could not imagine repeating it. Others hoped for military intervention, on the Seine, and then on the Loire. Some feared the fighting and bombing that would ensue. But whatever the motivation, the rumor mill played a key role that explains how the Exodus spread like an epidemic. The Belgians and Dutch first took to the roads in May, before the French joined them in June. Leaving was far from simple. Fleeing populations were fearful of losing everything, so they took their most precious possessions with them, whether livestock or jewelry. The road was exhausting. The refugees shuffled along in suffering, under constant threat from the Luftwaffe. Finding enough to eat and drink was made even harder by certain farmers or shopkeepers who tried to profit from the situation. A single egg cost up to four francs! Homes were pillaged and people were robbed. And in the panic, up to 90,000 children were separated from their parents. These desperate refugees were hostages to fortune. Public figures often left first, giving no orders – and for good reason. And public servants from firefighters to doctors just disappeared. This sense of abandonment explains why the French were relieved to welcome Marshall Pétain to power and the signing of the Armistice. Although the question of how they would get back home was yet to be resolved. It would be no mean feat. The transportation infrastructure was lacking, and the Germans had no intention of allowing those who'd left their homes to return to them, the Jews in particular. As a result, the return was spread out from mid-July to the end of September 1940. But thousands of French people preferred to put down roots where they found themselves, rather than return to live under the Nazi jackboot. Some settled in Brittany or in the South of France, while others headed for even more distant horizons, in America for example.

The Exodus remains a paradoxical phenomenon. For many, it was a terrible trial, but for others, it represented adventure or first love. It often revealed the realities of war and the terrible things one learns in a country at war, but sometimes it meant the discovery of solidarity and new horizons for people who previously had never left the confines of their village. Above all, it forced individuals to choose. Some submitted to the fatality of defeat, trusting a veteran marshal with their fate. Others, however, refused to believe the propaganda, flocking to enlist in unprecedented numbers with the Resistance or with General de Gaulle's Free French. As such, the experience of setting out on the road was, to a large extent, a decisive factor in people's subsequent fates, inspiring some to give in, and others to stand up and be counted. Lastly, and perhaps above all, the Exodus reflects the total collapse – both politically and militarily – of a country that had, until that point, believed itself to be invincible. This perhaps explains why this event is still largely absent from the national memory. However, millions of French people's memories still bear a wound that continues to bleed today.

Olivier Wieviorka – French historian
and specialist on the history of World War Two.

10 JULY	The National Assembly in Vichy grants full powers to Philippe Pétain.
25 JUNE	The Armistice comes into force.
22 JUNE	Conclusion of the Armistice.
17 JUNE	Pétain orders a ceasefire.
16 JUNE	Paul Reynaud resigns Pétain replaces him.
14 JUNE	German troops enter Paris.
13 JUNE	The government, which has fled to Tours, is divided over the question of an armistice.
10 JUNE	Italy declares war on France. The government flees Paris.
4 - 5 JUNE	Start of the mass Exodus of Parisians.
27 MAY	Capitulation of the Belgian army.
21 MAY	Allied counter-offensive in Arras.
18 MAY	Philippe Pétain enters the government Cambrai falls.
15 MAY	Dutch forces capitulate.
13 MAY	The Wermacht crosses the Meuse.
12 MAY	Belgian Exodus begins.
10 MAY 1940	Germany attacks in the West.
3 SEPTEMBRER 1939	Great Britain and then France declare war on Germany.

CAST

HANS (THE GERMAN REFUGEE)	August DIEHL
PAUL (THE MAYOR)	Olivier GOURMET
MADO (BISTROT OWNER)	Mathilde SEIGNER
SUZANNE (THE TEACHER)	Alice ISAAZ
PERCY (THE SCOTTISH SOLDIER)	Matthew RHYS
ALBERT (A VILLAGER)	Laurent GERRA
MAX (HANS' SON)	Joshio MARLON
ARRIFLEX (THE GERMAN DIRECTOR)	Thomas SCHMAUSER
ROGER (THE FARMER)	Jacques BONNAFFÉ

CREW

DIRECTOR	Christian CARION
PRODUCERS	Christophe ROSSIGNON
	Philip BOËFFARD
SCREENPLAY	Christian CARION
	Laure IRRMANN
	Andrew BAMPFIELD
COPRODUCERS	Romain LE GRAND
	Patrick QUINET
ASSOCIATE PRODUCER	Jonathan BLUMENTAL
LINE PRODUCERS	Eve FRANÇOIS-MACHUEL
	Stéphane RIGA
ORIGINAL MUSIC	Ennio MORRICONE
PHOTOGRAPHY	Pierre COTTEREAU
EDITING	Laure GARDETTE
FIRST ASSISTANT DIRECTOR	Thierry VERRIER
SET DESIGN	Jean-Michel SIMONET
SOUND ENGINEER	Pascal JASMES
SOUND EDITING	Thomas DESJONQUÈRES
MIXING	Florent LAVALLÉE
COSTUMES	Monic PARELLE
SCRIPT SUPERVISOR	Marie LECONTE-HENRIET
CASTING	Susie FIGGIS
	Anne WALCHER
	Franziska AIGNER
HEAD OF POST-PRODUCTION	Julien AZOULAY
MUSICAL SUPERVISOR	Pascal MAYER
PRESS ATTACHÉ	Dominique SEGALL

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