ROSCHDY

MANUEL MUNZ PRESENTS

LE BIHAN

FORESTIER

PARIS HAS ITS OWN RULES. THIS COP TOO.

PARIS BY NIGHT

















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ROSCHDY

SAMUEL

SARA

ZEM

LE BIHAN FORESTIER

PARIS BY NIGHT (UNE NUIT)

A film by Philippe Lefebvre

French release date: January 4, 2012

Screenplay and dialogue: Simon Michaël, Philippe Isard & Philippe Lefebvre Based on an original premise by Philippe Isard

Running time: 100'



6 Place Abel Gance - 92 100 Boulogne Billancourt - France Tel: +33 1 41 41 31 18 - Email: sales@tf1.fr www.tf1international.com

Synopsis

Paris. Night. Simon Weiss, head of the Brigade Mondaine, begins his regular rounds checking up on the city's late-night establishments. It's business – but not as usual. Weiss soon figures out that somebody is trying to set him up. Caught in the crossfire between gangsters and the internal affairs division of the police, Weiss will have to stand up to cops, businessmen and thugs to survive.

NIGHT AND THE CITY

I don't know of a more emblematic title for the genre Alain Corneau called "crime-noir" than NIGHT AND THE CITY. It describes both its preferred location (the city) and its main subject (the night). When the city sleeps, another world awakes. Or as we are told in PARIS BY NIGHT (UNE NUIT), "Night is the underside of life."

When he chose that title, Philippe Lefebvre joined the great tradition. His camera is literally hooked on a character whose nocturnal wanderings are a quest as well as an escapist dive into the dark danger he fears. From the very first shot, we feel the mute angst brewing. The audience understands it's in for a story of tragedy and destiny, not just a picturesque tour of gangster land. The journey through that particular Paris is a path paved with appearances, and lord knows how appearances can be as beautiful as they are misleading, when the day goes dark and the neon lights up. "People don't like to be seen at night," says the cop magnificently incarnated by Roschdy Zem, "and my job is to see them." Philippe Lefebvre's job is also to see beyond appearances, to strip them away, right down to the bare bone, to reveal a city we only thought we knew, to track down those pitiful, evil and heartrending human beings that make his dark heart beat, to draw us into the hypnotic thrill and disillusionment of it all.

All of which he does – and well! PARIS BY NIGHT is an invitation to enter a world where nothing is certain and everything is possible: the world of *Film Noir*.

François GUERIF, Publisher, Literary Director and Film Critic, is founder of the leading crime novel collection Rivages/Noir.

Interview with Roschdy Zem

How did you get involved in PARIS BY NIGHT?

I immediately wanted to be a part of this project because it's the kind of film and role I've only rarely been asked to do, and I liked it. My character Simon Weiss is a real cinematic hero, dark, taciturn, silent. He is a man who has his own way of taking on the world of the night with his physical presence and charisma. He is a link to the people who "make" the night, who belong to a world I know nothing about.

Did you talk a lot with Philippe Isard to immerse yourself in that world?

I used my interviews with him but I also added in my own dose of fantasy. I worked on behaving in different ways according to the environment I was in. I also feel that, despite everything, it's a world that inspires people who don't have any real experience of it. That imaginary part has to exist through the character's point of view, which means you have to think of each place he goes to either like a danger he has to face or like a stage he has to get through. That was the part I imagined. And you always have to keep in mind that for Weiss, it's just everyday life. I tried to bring a sense of the ordinary to the dialogue, to keep it natural. I couldn't play the cowboy like in an Abel Ferrara film, where the cop is quick to hit out or pull his gun. It was important, even in threatening situations, to keep the interactions polite.

Is it fair to say you resemble the character you play?

There is a lot of myself in this character. I'm not an actor who does a lot of character building and I rarely find myself in roles that require it. The first thing I look for when I am working on a role are the things we have in common, then I make the character work for me, not the other way around. That is what allows me to feel comfortable and compensates for my lack of experience.

You seem especially comfortable in the dark criminal world of film noir.

Yes, even more so because it's a genre we haven't seen much lately on the big screen. When you're a kid, there are two things you dream of: being a cop or being a cowboy. And since no one makes westerns anymore, *film noir* is all I have left! But seriously, I do have the impression that the genre of crime drama has endless variations and there is still plenty there to explore.

Even if Weiss accepts bribes once in a while, he has a very strong code of honor that he never betrays.

I think betrayal is something he can't imagine, because betraying would be signing his own death sentence, and it's also how he preserves a certain sense of respect. Those are the essential things that allow him to get up every night and go face his job and his world. The code is a necessity to him, in a way: it is not only a code of honor, it is also his survival kit. It's also how you build a reputation. Throughout the film, you sense that respect in the other characters' attitude towards him.

What is his relationship with the character of Laurence, so much of which is left unsaid?

Laurence is a complex character that required a great actress. Everything happens below the surface, and yet her presence is strong. For me, it was important that Simon Weiss think of her simply as an assistant, to establish that kind of routine in his work: the day before, he had someone else, tomorrow it will be someone different again. Weiss has a certain empathy for Laurence, who is relatively docile; but despite her silence and reticence – and that is where Sara's talent comes in – she succeeds in exuding the force of her character. That is not lost on Simon. He is sensitive to it, and I would even say there is a bit of an attraction between them. But it was equally important to make sure that their relationship was anodyne for a good two-thirds of the film.

How was it working with Samuel Le Bihan?

Even though we didn't know each other very well and had never worked together, we've run into each other over the years because we started out pretty much at the same time. I mentioned Samuel's name to Philippe Lefebvre. I couldn't tell you why – it just occurred to me as obvious. And it's interesting, because even though we are from the same generation, I felt how differently our methods are for working on scenes and characters. Personally, I like to put myself at risk, and so I also put my acting partners at risk, and Samuel was humble enough to accept that. But it doesn't always work that way. Even though at the beginning I felt he was a little destabilized, he chose to let himself go to that and he played it out. It was a great pleasure for me and I hope for him as well. He has a more cerebral approach to his character. Yes, very cerebral. For example, he asked a lot of questions when we did read-throughs. I often work with actors like that. It's true that I ask very few questions before the shoot, because until I am actually on the set, I don't know what is going to help me and give me direction. That is not a judgment. Everyone has their own method and I don't think there is any one right approach in this business. Bringing those different approaches together is so enriching.

What kind of director is Philippe Lefebvre?

He is someone who knows exactly what he wants and who gets it with a light touch. He is not very directive – he guides actors more than he directs them, in that he doesn't give orders. He manages to lead you to the place he wants you to be. That gentleness suits him well. You feel secure enough to give the emotion that is needed, but also sufficiently at risk to stay alert. That fear and doubt that invade me when the camera is rolling have always been what drive me. But for it to work I need a "conductor" who can judge what I have done. For me, that is essential.

Interview with Sara Forestier

How did you get involved in this project?

Philippe Lefebvre came to see me at the theater where I was playing a sort of lost and eccentric diva in a play called "Interview." Then that same week he saw *The Names of Love*, and saw how radically different my character Baya in *The Names of Love* was from the futile doll I played in "Interview." I think seeing me in two contrasting roles made him think I could create something different for the character of Laurence, and he offered me the part.

What did you think of the script?

What I liked about the writing was how sober it was, the realism, atmosphere and melancholy of it: everything about it was *film noir*. It's not a script where the characters pull out their guns every five minutes and start shooting everywhere. On the contrary, it's a solid film. Also, the progression of the protagonist's wanderings was very well described, and at the same time sober and understated. I thought the direction had to be faithful to the writing – there was no other way for the film to be. Because when you have primary matter that is so powerfully subtle, you can't add in frills. That is what struck me when I met Philippe: he wanted to stay on the rails with the script, and he knew the film's form could be found in the script's ingredients – subtlety, precision and realism.

Were you especially tempted by the fact it was a *film noir*?

Above all I had the feeling PARIS BY NIGHT was a real *film noir*, with psychological intrigue, urban exteriors, the social reality of the world of gangsters and the night, a dark aesthetic approach, a complex, ambiguous lead character and rich, autonomous supporting roles. When I read the script, I often thought of Michael Mann's *Collateral*. Between the character of the driver and the unity of time and location, I found a lot of similarities between the two, and I liked that resemblance.

What did you like about the story?

I liked the fact the film was constructed upon conflicts of interest. Reading the script, you think, "that character is protecting his money, that one is protecting his son, that other one is protecting their friendship," and those are realistic human risks and stakes. The fact that values and interests come into conflict creates a storyline that we, as spectators, are eager to follow.

We discover the world of the night through the eyes of your character.

For the spectator to identify with Laurence, I had to play "virginity" without pretending to be naive. Like her, we are virgins when it comes to experiencing the world of the night – or at least we don't know it like Weiss does – but that doesn't mean we are completely naive and surprised by everything. Laurence can have an idea of what that world is like, even if she doesn't know a lot about it. That was key to our being able to identify with her.

Though present on screen, your character stays mostly on the sidelines until the end of the film.

It was interesting to all of a sudden have this silent realm offered to me: to be able to exist as a presence, a silhouette, and build an undercurrent in the relationship between characters with unvoiced communication, silence and looks. Laurence is a character who is reticent, who holds back. She has a past and an interior world that we don't know, that doesn't just spill out in broad daylight. I like the idea of being allowed to frustrate the audience and not reveal everything.

The relationship between Laurence and Weiss seems to build up gradually.

When two people spend time together, something happens between them, no matter what. Time creates a bond that isn't necessarily related to the things they do together or say to one another, but is simply due to the fact of being side by side for a certain amount of time. I loved being able to simply take advantage of that time – an hour and a half during which Weiss wanders through Paris – and not having a lot of jumps forward, but just being in the temporal unity of one night.

Was it important to figure out Weiss's character in order to create your own?

I needed to get a feeling for who Weiss was before we started filming, because he is the one who brings her into his world, and my character is built in response to that, like an echo of his world, who he is, his melancholy and mystery.

So I asked Philippe Lefebvre if I could meet Philippe Isard to get a better understanding of who Weiss was. I wanted to know how a man who had lived through so much could remain modest and mysterious. And I was also interested in seeing how I would react to what Philippe Isard said to me – and also to what he didn't tell me.

Laurence is the only female character of the film, in a world of men.

Yes, and the choices for wardrobe, haircut, and makeup were very important in that respect. Laurence has a feminine silhouette, even if she is in the hybrid situation of being both a cop and a woman. She is a driver, but not necessarily the stereotyped cop with a leather jacket, ponytail, flat shoes and a tomboy's figure. She works with a cop who is not just any cop, who lives in the world of the night. So I couldn't see her going out with an old sweatshirt and leather jacket like a fake tough guy! Keeping that subtlety and functionality in mind, I also thought it was a believable way for the character to express her femininity. She is in heels, but they are platform heels that she can walk in, her jacket is belted at the waist, but she wears a vest to keep warm that isn't all that shapely. It's that mix that, in my opinion, makes the character believable.

It's your first time working with Roschdy Zem.

I had an innocent relationship with him. I really think that relationships between characters influence the relationships between actors; I get the impression that also helps the film take form. My relationship with Roschdy was very grounded, a mix of innocence, respect, attachment and humor.

How does Philippe Lefebvre direct his actors?

A lot of things happened before the shooting started. We did very focused read-throughs to map out our character arcs. I made quite a few suggestions to Philippe to flesh out the character and humanize her: the fact that she can doze off in the car or have a drink with a barmaid – those are elements that weren't initially in the script. Philippe was attentive to all those things that would have been so easy to forget and worked them into the script.

Interview with Philippe Lefebre, Director

How was this project born?

The film developed naturally out of my work with Simon Michaël over the past few years. We have the same taste for *film noir* and stories with double or triple plot reversals. Since we were looking for a strong original story with a psychologically motivated plot about men fighting one another, Simon had the idea of calling on Philippe Isard. A screenwriter himself, Philippe was also a cop in a previous life; for over fifteen years he was in charge of the "cabarets" of the "Brigade Mondaine," which are what they call the late-night establishments of Paris. So we agreed to the idea of inventing a story based on that reality of Paris at night. What we actually wanted to talk about were the people who "make" the night happen, not those who live in it. We wanted to get behind the scenes, behind the counters, not on the dance floors. Between Simon Michaël's sense for dramatic structure and incisive, realistic dialogue, and Philippe Isard's talent for real stories filled with dramatic invention and the science of human relationship, I was in good hands. That's how we got started on PARIS BY NIGHT, a night in the life of Simon Weiss, the character played by Roschdy Zem.

It's no accident that the film is entitled PARIS BY NIGHT (UNE NUIT).

That's true. We respected the rule of three, limiting the time of the story to only one night and the place to Paris, with the action being the trap set up for the story's hero. It was a real joy to put this script together. Right from the beginning I wanted to make the film as realistic as possible. And Philippe Isard's experiences and stories, which are undeniably authentic, a landmine of edifying anecdotes and mind-blowing encounters, totally helped me work towards that goal.

So the character played by Roschdy Zem actually existed.

Yes, and he still exists. Several times while we were writing the script, I went on the rounds with the cop in charge of the "cabarets" of the "Brigade Mondaine," one of Philippe Isard's successors to the job; he was one of the people who helped me build the character of Simon Weiss. Everything was just like it is in the film: he rides around with a driver, he is kind to the "small players" of the night, the valets and the working girls, and authoritarian with the hoodlums and the wannabe gangsters, who fear and respect him. Everyone knows him and calls him by name. They listen to him, and he is a little like a judge or godfather of the night. But as Philippe Isard and his successor explained to me, these days the policemen who come to work at the "Brigade Mondaine" are kids who haven't taken the time to really get a feeling for the world of the nightlife. So we have really illustrated the end of an era. PARIS BY NIGHT reflects the evolution of society, and at the same time expresses a bit of nostalgia. Through the protagonist, we feel the page is about to turn, that the world of the night will never be the same again.

There is a feeling of freedom in the way you made the film and told the story.

In my very first meetings with the producer Manuel Munz, I told him I wanted the film to be what the Americans call an "independent production." I wanted the audience to share in the feeling of urgency we were trying to convey, while putting the expressive capacities of film to use as well. Actually, from the very start I felt that we had to shoot the film in High Definition instead of 35 mm; when you shoot at night, HD is so sensitive that you can film without lighting and still obtain amazing contrast, especially in the black areas of the image. The typical example of this is the scene when Roschdy walks through the VIP and we can clearly see people dancing, though we didn't light the scene at all. The medium was a perfect match for the subject of the film, for diving into the night on the shoulder of the main character, discovering along the way a whole gallery of characters around him. That dive into the night naturally went with a visual style of dark images and hand-held shooting; everything is seen from Roschdy's point of view.

The film is a sort of road movie through an unexpected vision of nocturnal Paris. I thought it was interesting to shoot his rounds in the city like a road movie through places we are not used to seeing, from a prostitute bar with three barstools to a chic

nightclub for up to 3500 people.

Did you shoot in real locations?

Thanks to the HD camera and its extraordinary capabilities, Director of Photography Jérôme Alméras and I decided to shoot in real locations. We actually shot in almost all the locations we scouted, including the big nightclub under construction, which really exists. We strove for the same realism in the locations as we did for the acting and the camerawork.

As chance had it, it rained on the first day of shooting. Far from being an unpleasant surprise, the sudden downpour delighted Jérôme Alméras and I. Actually what it meant was we would have to wet down every bit of dry pavement throughout the shoot, which is what we did. So in the end, the streets glisten, the city lights are reflected in every little puddle, and the brilliance that this adds to the night is fantastic. It's cold, it's night... Also, Paris itself is one of the main characters of the film. Paris with its tiny backstreets and its grand avenues, its legendary squares and monuments, immediately recognizable the world over.

Was Roschdy Zem the obvious first choice for the main role?

In the 1990's I made a series called "Le Juge Rives" for Canal Plus. Roschdy Zem was a young actor who played the lead role in one of the episodes. He was already recognizable for who he is today: straightforward and reserved, with incredible charisma. So I was really happy, twenty years later, to be able to offer him the lead role of this film and proud that he accepted. In the end I feel he broadened the character, which is largely due to the natural authority he exudes. I was assistant on two films with Jean Gabin and I have to say I feel there is something in common between that incredible legend and Roschdy, in their understated acting style as well as how absolutely they incarnate a character. For me, the minute Roschdy appears in PARIS BY NIGHT, Simon Weiss is there – it's him and no other!

What about Sara Forestier?

She is absolutely magnificent. She is an actress who is very accessible and unbelievably mature for her age. She fed her character with a multitude of intelligent ideas. Every day she played her character with meticulous care. She had only one thing in mind: how to

get into the character of a young female cop assigned to being a night driver.

Samuel Le Bihan is a completely different kind of actor.

Samuel accepted the role of Garcia generously, without hesitating a second. I like working with him. He's a worried type, who thinks out what he does. In the end, he was superb in the part. He gave his character, a longtime buddy of Weiss, the feeling of friendship and the ability to listen that I was hoping for, and then some.

The music punctuates the story in a subtle way.

I didn't know Olivier Florio. He had composed the music of *Tiger Brigades* for Manuel Munz, and he did that so well I couldn't really see how it could work for my film. When I met him, he made me listen to interesting music, disturbing, troubling and strong. He had even written the song at the end, which he himself performs. Like Hitchcock recommended, the music is omnipresent, but you have to forget the theme. It fed the dramatic development of the film wonderfully.

Interview with Simon Michaël and Philippe Isard, Screenwriters

What made you want to do a crime drama?

Simon Michaël: With Philippe Isard and Philippe Lefebvre, director and co-author of the film, we wanted to create a *film noir* with an emphasis on the personal journeys of the characters, with the crime story as a subplot. We ruled out investigations on serial killers and the like, which we get more than enough of on television. We were looking for a different approach.

PARIS BY NIGHT sprung from the experiences of Philippe Isard, who worked for seventeen years in the "Cabaret Brigade," a part of the "Brigade Mondaine," whereas I worked in the central office for the prosecution of human trafficking, which fights prostitution. The "Cabaret Brigade" was exactly what we were interested in, because to our knowledge it had never been the subject of a film.

Philippe Isard: Philippe Lefebvre, Simon and I wanted a solid story with strong characters, and dramatic stakes with rapid resolutions. As for the choice of subject, we thought the "Mondaine" had never been seen quite like this, not on film or television. What we showed only exists in Paris and nowhere else in the world. So we used reality to build the story arc for our main character.

Simon Michaël: Regarding that specifically French aspect Philippe mentioned: it comes from the incredible power that cops from the "Mondaine" have, since they give out the authorizations for establishments to open at night. That power is leverage that allows privileged relationships to develop with managers, so it is founded on a system of mutual exchange: cops from the "Cabaret Brigade" are more like secret service than your regular policemen. What they are looking for are those famous "blanks," which are unsigned notes that give information about the activities of a certain person. That's where Philippe's experience was very useful because you have to know how to identify the groups that move in, observe the behavior of the clientele and recognize rackets in disguise.

Philippe, what was life like for you back then?

Philippe Isard: It felt very lonely. There is almost no interaction with hierarchy. That doesn't exist anywhere else in the world. You alone bear the pressure of the night and choose your own way of working. You either cross the line or you don't. No one knows if you take money or not. There are two concepts: either a nightclub manager is giving you information, or you pretend he is giving you information when he is actually giving you money.

You have to keep in mind the financial stakes night businesses represent: a nightclub on the Champs Élysées takes in revenues of several million Euros a month. So when a club is closed as an administrative decision – which means a cop of the "Cabaret Brigade" has requested it – the business can lose a lot of money. So you have to be very grounded and have real values to work in a position like that in the police.

Simon Michaël: The cop is on the front line and can't rely on hierarchy. So he is in a

give-give dynamic and has a huge amount of responsibility, which brings in the problem of corruption. In the movie, we chose a cop who isn't corrupt, but he goes out to eat with a guy who he has been following for years and who he has helped to build an empire of night business. That's more aiding and abetting than it is corruption. With Garcia, Weiss operates more out of friendship and loyalty. His friend happens to be an emperor of the night and he has a certain flexibility with him, but otherwise he doesn't cross the line; he has a real code of honor, which is needed to earn the respect of others. A corrupt cop isn't respected; the bribers will inevitably turn him in.

Simon Weiss is an extremely complex character.

Simon Michaël: We didn't want a binary protagonist who could be immediately pinned down – we incite the viewer to see things from his perspective, to understand how he operates.

Philippe Isard: You see Weiss never asks for money, but once in a while he'll accept some. That is totally different, because it's asking for money that ruins your reputation. Basically, Weiss obeys a certain code of honor: he is willing to sacrifice the rotten lawyer, but in exchange he gets Garcia off the hook. He's obviously a loner, with a life that hangs by a string, because he is constantly on the hunt for the slightest trap he may be walking into. And in those moments when his life seems expendable, it's all like a game to Weiss. Adrenaline is almost like a drug that drives him.

How did you construct the plot?

Simon Michaël: The cops of the "Brigade" only work nights. Our dilemma was to address the subject of all of those nights. So we took the approach of condensing all the different cases into one single night, since it would be hard to recreate all of Philippe Isard's rounds and the relationships built over time that are very complicated to manage. We chose to show the result of those years of work in just one night.

Philippe Isard: The cases that Weiss manages in the film actually happened over a period of more than a year. That said, sometimes I also had to solve certain problems in a matter of minutes, to keep the day from taking over a situation that could become uncontrollable. The job of a "Cabaret" cop is to control what happens at night, and that span of time is very short. In the end, we opted for temporal unity, but what happens in the film could have actually happened in just one night.

Simon Michaël: We wanted to give the story a bitterness and dryness that you don't find in most crime stories anymore. With Philippe Lefebvre, we were aiming for a kind of rigor, as if paying our respects to Melville, who's a master to us all, by throwing out all the current police folklore of cops doing coke and pulling out their guns at every turn. For us, the realistic approach is beautiful. For example, when Simon goes to the bowling alley, he leaves his gun in the car. He knows a gun won't help him to make any headway with the mafia. That's true to reality.

What did you think of the finished film?

Philippe Isard: To be honest, I got totally into Roschdy Zem's character – the way he moved, how he entered a nightclub or talked to the working girls. At the end of the film, I felt like I'd been out on the job!

Cast

Roschy Zem Simon Weiss
Sara Forestier Laurence Deray
Samuel Le Bihan Tony Garcia
Grégory Fitoussi Paul Gorsky
Jean-Pierre Martins Jo Linder
Jean Paul Muel The Baroness

Sophie Broustal Josy Gerald Laroche Alex

Helene Seuzaret Danièle Weiss

Kamel Labroudi Abdel

Crew

Director Philippe Lefebvre Producer Manuel Munz

Screenplay Simon Michael, Philippe Isard, Philippe Lefebvre

Original Music Olivier Florio
Casting Pascale Beraud
Casting - Extras and Bit Parts Gaye Yatera

Sound Pierre Gamet, Hervé Guyader, Hervé Buirette

Wardrobe Anne David
Production Manager Gilles Loufti
Directeur of Photography Jerôme Almeras

Set Photographer Arnaud Borrel, Eddy Briere

Press Relations Florence Narozny

assisted by Constance Tembremande

Artwork Rageman

Teaser FA SoniaToutCourt

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[&]quot;With the participation of Richard Bohringer"