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FESTIVAL DE CANNES
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2022 OFFICIAL SELECTION

FOREVER YOUNG

a film by Valeria Bruni Tedeschi

Drama - France - 2h05 - 1.8 5 - 5.1

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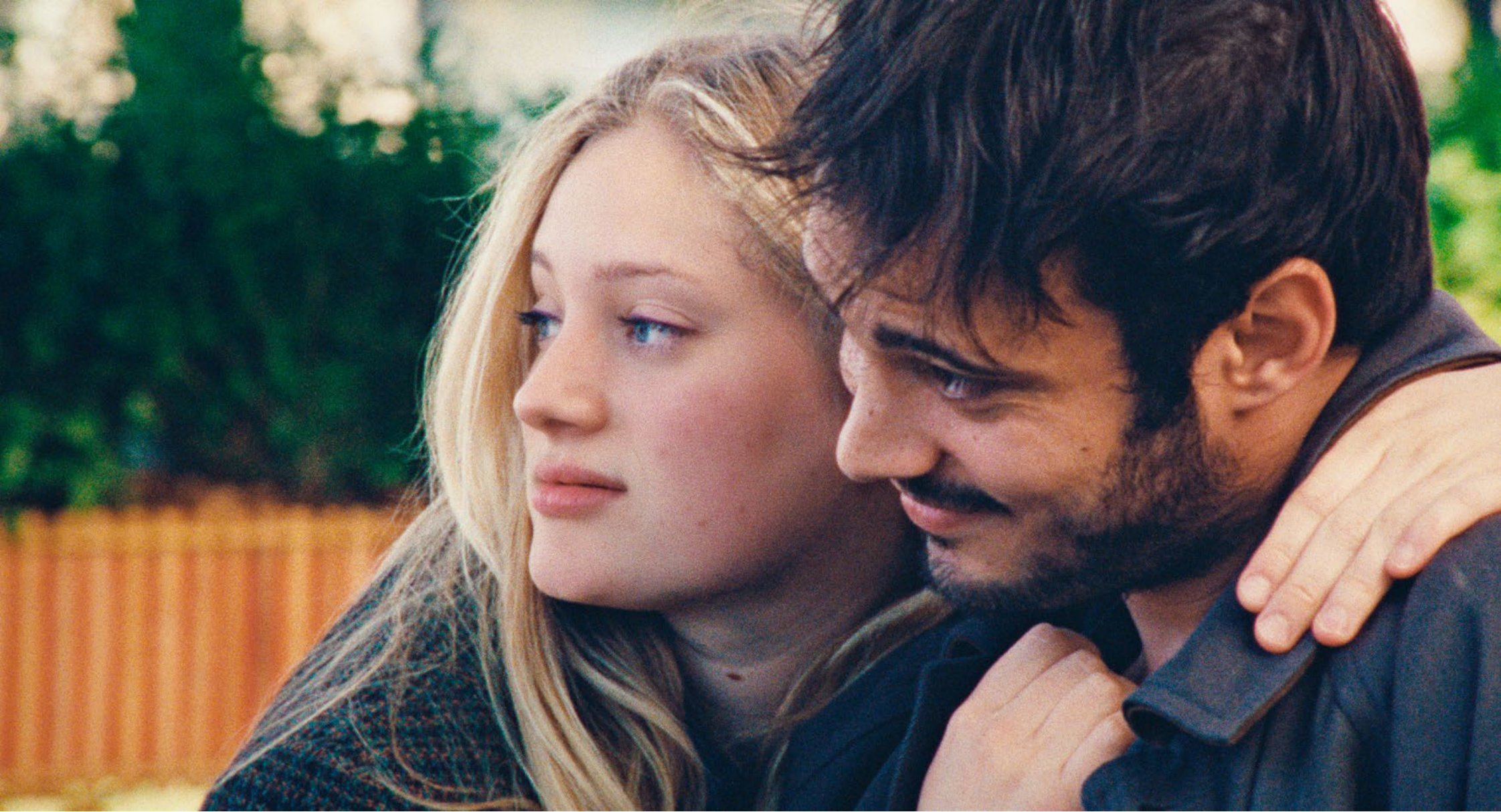
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SYNOPSIS

It's the end of the 80s in Paris, a young troupe of comedians have just been admitted to Les Amandiers, the prestigious theater school headed by Patrice Chéreau. They set out in life and in their early career. Along the way, they will learn, act, love, fear, live to the fullest and also experience their first tragedies.

INTERVIEW WITH VALERIA BRUNI TEDESCHI

Was *Forever Young* a project you'd been wanting to make for a long time or did the idea come to you more recently?

Valeria Bruni Tedeschi – It's a friend of mine, Thierry De Peretti, who gave me the idea for the film. Giving someone an idea is a beautiful gift. I discussed it with my writing partners Agnès and Noémie, and it was like Columbus' egg, something obvious. This school was a fundamental chapter for me, both in my work and my life. The people I met there and the experiences I lived through left a profound imprint on me to this day. A few months after I started writing, Noémie suggested we conduct interviews with former students as well. I contacted them one by one, and we had a reunion. It was joyful; I had this strange feeling that time hadn't passed at all. They knew that the film would be fictional, that we were going to modify the reality and that their names would not appear. They were all very generous with their stories. These interviews were extremely precious.

As with all your other films, *Forever Young* is based on your personal experience yet transcends it through fiction. We are always at the junction of autobiography and imagination, a reconstruction of sorts: is this also how you perceive it?

Let's just say that the base is made up of memories. Not only mine but also Noémie's and Agnès' and in this instance other former students' memories. Afterwards, however, we give ourselves complete freedom to rework, fictionalize, mix, blend, and invent. All this constitutes our playing field. Imagination must be given the possibility to have fun, without self-censorship or too many taboos.

All your films are family films but can be split into two subcategories: your biological family, and your artistic family. *Forever Young* belongs to the second category and is in the same vein as *Actresses*.

It's true that my films nearly all involve the family as a subject of exploration. Even with *Three Sisters*, which I adapted from Chekhov's play for Arte, I felt as though I was speaking about my own family. In *Forever Young*, it's my work family we're talking about, my artistic family. I would even venture to say that Chéreau is a little like my work father.

One of the film's sequences takes place in New York at the Lee Strasberg Institute. You show a connection between the Actors Studio and Les Amandiers. What does it entail? What would you say Chéreau's method was?

Chéreau was modern. Right away, right when we started theater school, he sent us to the very place that was the center of acting modernity at the time: America, where Lee Strasberg's method acting had originated a few years before. Strasberg's method was, for me, like a window opening onto the horizon; it was decisive in my work as an actress. Sandra Nkaké plays a character inspired by Susan Batson, one of the great coaches at the Strasberg Institute, a member of the Actors Studio, whom I met over there and with whom I've worked my entire life. Strasberg's method is welcoming and, in a certain way, gentle. Chéreau's directing was more masculine, more brutal. But Chéreau and Strasberg both aimed for the same goal: truth. It's difficult for me to summarize Chéreau's way of directing; let's say he did put a lot of thinking into it and worked a lot, I mean a lot of hours... He also demanded hard work of us, and asked us to give a lot of ourselves. If what Patrice

brought me could be summed up in words, these words would be "demanding" and "unrelenting" – words that have guided me my whole life. They still guide me today and when I stray from them, I feel as though I'm betraying my profession.

You managed to depict Chéreau's magnetism but also how demanding and harsh he could be.

We didn't keep the students' names but after careful consideration, we decided to keep Patrice Chéreau and Pierre Romans' names. Though Pierre Romans is less known, Chéreau and Romans have become legendary; they've entered the collective unconscious and we weren't ready to abandon this legend. We also didn't want to abandon how unconventional the school was. The Amandiers theater school wasn't like the more classic Conservatoire, but rather a strange, alternative school, "not really a school." These two men, to us, were like the gods of Mount Olympus; they were extremely handsome, young, charismatic. Whenever they arrived in a hallway, everyone would instantly go quiet. When we started writing the script, we only described Chéreau at work, the only thing we dared write about were rehearsal scenes. We used his notes, his letters, his interviews; we drew from the show that Pascal Gregory put together based on his writings. We tried to approach Patrice's intelligence and precision by using what he'd actually said, sometimes word for word. In short, at first the character was a hard-working, serious man who was pretty interesting but a bit theoretical, without much texture. We needed to make him complex, bring in more depth and edges. Concerning Pierre, shaping his character came fairly quickly, I had no difficulties recounting his contradictions, his flaws. For Chéreau, I had



to force myself. I told myself he would have hated being depicted without flaws. He didn't care for flat characters, he preferred characters who had a dark side to them. He passionately cared for human beings and would have hated being represented as an idol. Irreverence was fundamental in his films and his approach to directing. Out of respect for him, I had to disrespect him.

In the film, he says something like: “The time spent on stage, and whether you have a leading or supporting role matters little, what really counts is the work.” Do you share his vision of an actor’s work?

Yes. What matters is concentration. For me, acting and writing are a form of meditation. In everyday life, I feel I'm pulled apart, not entirely mindful of things. When I work, on the contrary, I feel focused. Regardless of whether it's a leading role or a small part, a feature film or a short, a simple scene, this is the moment when concentration is achieved. It's like when my son starts building something with Legos and as I watch him, I tell myself: “This is just like my job!” That's what my job is about and nothing else: strive to build something well with my hands, my imagination, my memories, and my emotions. And the moment spent doing just that is a blessing, a moment of grace. Perhaps it has something to do with a form of faith.

In Forever Young, there's once again a side of your work that I particularly like, which is the mix of comedy and tragedy, sometimes right in the same scene. I'm specifically thinking of the scene where the students discover that everybody has slept with everybody, which is rather funny, but as they figure this out, they're then afraid they've perhaps caught AIDS, which is terrible.

My taste for tragicomedy probably comes from Chéreau. He loved laughing. During rehearsals, or when on film shoots, we would sometimes hear him chuckle and we would be pleased as it was a good sign. He wasn't a terribly serious person. Noémie is another person, since writing *It's Easier For a Camel*, who has always nudged me towards humor. I believe this personal taste also comes from my being Italian. Italian cinema is my parent's, my childhood's, my subconscious' cinema, and tragicomedy is part of Italian cinema's DNA. I need this blend, whether I'm acting or directing. And also as a moviegoer. I need to laugh about our existence and our misery, I need it as badly as I need oxygen.

The film's most tragic moment is when Etienne dies. We imagine Etienne as being a mix between a youthful romance and your brother who passed away prematurely.

No, there isn't much of my brother in Etienne. The character was inspired by someone in my youth who is no longer here, but who will always be a part of me. Thanks to the film, I can talk about him, and my memories come to life, with joy. I'd like to quote a few lines that Noémie wrote in the writer's statement, and which seem to precisely express this idea:

"Thanks to fiction, people become characters, and then thanks to actors, these characters become people once again. And these people, who are alive and present in front of the camera, allow the past that rests within us not to be mummified, but instead to be alive and once again become part of the present. Only fiction can tear memories away from nostalgia."

One of the beautiful moments that the film allows for is this relay between the 1980s Amandiers troupe and the group of actors and actresses you gathered for the film, akin to a handing down of talent and spirit.

With Marion (Touitou, casting director), we had a challenge, which was to recreate a troupe that was like the one they'd formed with us in the 1980s. We weren't looking for the best, we were looking for personality types. And then we also sought to form couples and a group. I felt as though I was assembling an orchestra. The tests lasted a very long time, for everyone; I sometimes tested an actress in two or three different roles, we tested out couples or pairs, I switched and matched them, boy-girl, boy-boy, girl-girl, Sofiane and Noham, Nadia and Clara, Nadia and Vassili, etc. One day, I was struck by the screen presence of the couple formed by Nadia and Sofiane - a true cinematic couple, and I couldn't let them go. The time the casting took allowed us, the young actors, actresses and I, to develop a common language. It's essential for me, this common language that is specific to each film. I needed to understand

whether each of them would agree to lose control over a scene. I also needed to sense if they could take humor, whether directed at them or in relation to the situation. Once the final selection was made, we rehearsed some more for a month, all together, to find our own method collectively. The most important thing for me, today, is that these young people be loved by the audience as much as I love them.

Your film reminds us that the Amandiers generation was also that of the AIDS years, when the disease was claiming the lives of thousands of young people.

It was truly the era of Eros and Thanatos. That's what we felt while we were writing the script. We wanted to show the energy of youth while touching upon tragedy. In the film, there is the constant pull of these two opposing forces that are life and death.

A little like Jean Renoir's The Golden Coach, or more recently Christophe Honoré's Guermentes, Forever Young blurs the boundaries between acting and life, between feelings truly experienced and feelings that are performed. In your life and experience as an actress, have you sometimes fallen prey to this confusion between reality and acting?

This confusion, as I remember, was what Chéreau and Romans were encouraging us towards, as if they wanted to remove the boundary between life and work. In fact, we spent nearly all our time there, in Nanterre, always immersed in work. Today, still, I enjoy that sensation; I need to erase boundaries, but I am now able to step out of a film shoot or a theater stage and go back to my life. It's as if work was a small planet: before I would always stay on it, and now I've learned how to come back down to Earth with a small ladder. I go on with my life, take care of my children,

etc. and then when it's time to go back to work, tap tap tap, I climb back up on my little planet, the planet of make-believe. Let's say that, today, it has become easier for me to go back and forth with the small ladder.

Nadia Tereszkievich plays Stella, inspired by you, with beautifully fierce gusto. How did you find her?

We both played in Dominik Moll's Only The Animals; she was my lover. I remember being on the casting panel with Dominik for his film and one of the young women was Nadia. She had a fit of uncontrollable laughter and blushed. And although I didn't particularly want to share my opinion, I couldn't help telling him I thought she was exceptional. For Forever Young, I thought at first that she was too old for the part, but Marion and I realized that all the actors and actresses we were interested in were in their mid-twenties, and not 20 years old as we'd initially planned. She worked really hard, watched film and documentaries, read texts, rehearsed with me and the others, and also did her own personal thing which she didn't share with me. One day, towards the end of the rehearsal period, something just fell into place. Something had happened with her, and she'd understood the direction in which I wanted her to go. She'd accepted the possibility of letting herself slide, of losing control, experiencing something that she hadn't anticipated. I was amazed. I felt that there was a before and after that specific moment. And she's never ceased to amaze me since.

How did you find Sofiane Bennacer, who plays the poignant role of Etienne?

Stanislas Nordey told me about Sofiane. We contacted him, and then he sent us - Marion Touitou and myself - a video. At the beginning of the video, he introduced himself, gave his name, talked about himself a little

and then he kept on talking and after a while, Marion and I wondered: "Is he still speaking with his own words or is this from a play?" He had imperceptibly segued from his own words to a Koltès monologue without our realizing it. Koltès' language was strangely familiar to him; he delivered it with a precision and depth that were truly impressive. I instantly thought that he had the range, the charisma and the depth of a great actor. Sofiane has a type of energy that is different than the one I had in mind for the character. He took Etienne to a different place, a more inward place, less edgy than what I'd imagined. But it didn't bother me to shift a little from my initial idea. I wanted to film that face, those eyes, this way of speaking and walking – I found it all interesting, and that's something that is very important. I think it was Truffaut who said that movies are just a pretext to film the people we're interested in.

Is there a film that inspired you in particular for Forever Young?

There are several, obviously, but one in particular: Jerry Schatzberg's *The Panic in Needle Park*. We organized a screening of the film during rehearsals. I wanted to show the young actors and actresses the truthfulness in Al Pacino's and Kitty Winn's acting. I also wanted to show them this world, this era, this youth. And in particular I wanted Nadia and Sofiane to understand the connection between love and drugs. Drugs are like a third person in a love relationship. One major difference between my story and Schatzberg's is that Etienne and Stella have this passion for theater and acting while the characters played by Pacino and Winn have no passion except for the love that binds them to one another.

We discover Clara Bretheau, who plays Adèle and brings a nice whimsicality. We believe we recognized Eva Ionesco in her.

This character is indeed a little based on Eva. Some of her colorfulness, insolence, freedom, and beauty come from Eva but that's all. After that, we made her up, combining different memories, various characters; we had fun. As for Stella, Etienne and the others, we took it someplace else. At the screenplay stage, Adèle was already Adèle, and no longer Eva. And then Clara, who has a strong personality and a strong sense of humor, reeled the character in and completely made it her own. What I'd meant to recount, with this character, and with several of the other characters that are students in the theater school, was that in spite of their young age, they hadn't been spared life's harshness. And yet, this hadn't prevented them from keeping in them the ingenuousness, energy, and innocence of people in their twenties.

Let's talk about your writing partners, Noémie Lvovsky and Agnès De Sacy. What role do they play in your work?

I wouldn't be able to write without them. I met Noémie as I finished the *Amandiers* theater school, over thirty years ago. Her knowing me so well is extremely precious in our work. They bring me their talent and their friendship. We rarely work all three together; we have sessions in twos and every now and then the three of us assess things together. For *Forever Young*, I thus went back and forth from one to the other for two years. We went through many versions to achieve the final result. It's important for me to say that there's very little improvisation in this film. There's some for the scenes with Chéreau, as Louis improvised a lot, making the scenes more true-to-life, livelier, sharper. But aside from that, it's a film that was fully and thoroughly written. I needed to question and explore everything at the writing stage: the relationship between Chéreau and Romans, the stage directions for Platonov, each student's backstory, how drugs were sneaking their way into the school, the fear of AIDS, death, life after all that. We also had to, at the writing stage and later at the editing stage, ceaselessly alternate between the love story and the group's story, querying one and the other, swinging from one to the other. This alternation, this balance, is the film's vital inner balance.

Where does the character of the rejected auditionee who comes to work at the theater's cafeteria come from? Did this person really exist?

It's an entirely fictitious character. I imagined her late in the process, just before the film shoot. There was something missing, the film needed a character with a loser profile. A friend of mine who is a director, Yann Coridian, gave me the idea to have the character work at the theater's cafeteria. This also provided me with the opportunity to share an outsider's perspective, and to recount how people viewed this place at the time, what it triggered in the collective imagination. The *Amandiers* Theater, in 1985-90, was the epicenter of the cultural world. The greatest authors, the greatest directors, the greatest actors, the greatest European talents of the moment all attended the 1985 press conference. Koltès would lunch at the cafeteria, Catherine Deneuve would come to see the students work. We couldn't quite sense, upon reading the screenplay, this awe-inspiring ripple effect outside. This small part, the waitress imagined at the last minute, allowed me to relate all this in a few sentences, and to film Suzanne (Lindon), who brings a touch of humor to the film in places where the narrative is particularly heavy.



Let's take a moment to talk about Louis Garrel, who had the difficult task of playing Chéreau and does a superb job of it.

The day Patrice Chéreau died, I was on the train with Louis and he said: "It's as though we were losing the captain of our ship." Indeed, Chéreau was a captain, a guide, a beacon, not only artistically but also intellectually, and politically. I wouldn't want to speak on his behalf, but I believe that Louis, although he didn't spend much time with him, had a secret and intimate bond with Chéreau, and my offering him the role instantly touched a chord with him. He did his own thing with it, and I let him do so freely. We only grappled about one thing: one evening, during rehearsals, I called him and I asked: "Louis, where are the little cigars?" "I don't care about the little cigars, I stopped smoking and I'm not going to start again for a film," he replied. "Even so, Chéreau's little cigars are like Proust's madeleine cakes, I don't like the idea of not having them." He stood his ground, and we had a fight over the phone. But the next day, he showed up with the little cigars. Aside from that, I didn't ask him anything with regard to how to play Chéreau. I just watched him do it, propose things, guide the younger ones. I just watched him work. His humor, which is unique and which I find irresistible, made all his scenes very surprising and personal. He didn't want to imitate but rather to convey, to channel Chéreau. And also, I think, to talk about him.

Can you tell us about Micha Lescot, who plays Pierre Romans?

Micha is one of our greatest theater actors. I wanted to film him, and for him to be as free in a film as he is on stage. As free and beautiful. Romans was very handsome, very charismatic, mesmerizing. Micha, working with his own take on Romans, bewitched us all during the film shoot. I also wanted to film the pair that Louis and Micha make together. This was a pair I'd seen on stage when they were working with Luc Bondy, as they were part of his troupe. It was a powerful

thing to see them together on stage, and when I was casting actors for the film, this image resurfaced in my mind. I thought that they would make a wonderful silver screen pair. One day, while filming, in Micha/Pierre Romans' office, the set designer had tacked tons of posters of Luc Bondy's plays. That's when I realized that there was another character also present in the film's subconscious: Luc Bondy. I strongly believe in films having a subconscious, more or less visible connections that run through a film, giving it depth and something the audience relates to. All this, all these invisible connections bring tears to my eyes. I make films to summon all the ghosts who are so very alive within me.

Your director of photography is Julien Poupard. It seems to me that you and Julien strove to stay quite close to the actors and actresses, as though you could feel them breathing. What was it like working with him?

Julien liked the screenplay. He instantly and enthusiastically embraced the members of the cast, all these young actors and actresses, all these fresh faces. His way of seeing them was almost maternal. He kissed and hugged everyone and his way of filming them was so powerful and natural that I felt I just needed to let him do things his way. I rejoiced in watching him work. It was a wonderful encounter.

Now, let's talk about editing with Anne Weil. Do you have a specific idea in mind or do you edit intuitively as you go?

I would like to use this opportunity to talk about all the people I've worked with for a very long time and who are very important to me. Olivier Genet, first assistant director; Emmanuelle Duplay, set designer; Caroline de Vivaise, costume designer; Caroline Deruas-Péano, continuity girl for my films, who also collaborated in the writing of the screenplay; Emmanuel Croset, sound engineer; and all the people whose talent I regularly call upon. One of the reasons why I make films is to have the chance to work with all of them again.

I also spend a lot of time with Anne Weil, the editor. Editing is like rewriting the film. I believe it was Truffaut (again) who said that the film shoot corrects the screenplay, and the editing corrects the shoot. Anne questions every shot, every frame. She tirelessly questions the meaning of the film, the actors' truthfulness, the rhythm. She is brilliant. I thoroughly enjoy working and spending time with her. She is a friend.

What about the film's score, which mixes classical music with pop music and rock'n'roll classics? Was this the music you'd listen to while you were at the Amandiers?

Some of the pieces come from my obsessions. For instance, Janis Joplin's Me & Bobbie McGee is a song I've listened to my entire life. "Freedom is just another word for nothin' left to lose" is a cult phrase for me. In the film, there are a lot of songs from that era that instantly trigger a surge of emotions. And then there is also a lot of classical music, Liszt, Bach, Vivaldi. That's the music of my childhood.

This is your second film with producers Alexandra Henochsberg and Patrick Sobelman, not to mention the adaptation of Three Sisters for television. Is there a companionship forming?

They are a duo of producers who have become important in my work since Three Sisters. They accept me as I am and give me structure. I feel that they trust me even if they sometimes put specific restrictions or constraints on a project. Sometimes we argue, disagree or even happen to fight but it's all good, it's part of the creative process, and there is a profound mutual trust. What truly matters in life is to work, talk, laugh, eat, have a good time with the people you feel like being with. Alexandra and Patrick, like all the other people I mentioned, are people I am happy to get up to see in the morning. It's important to have joy underlying it all.

CAST

Stella **Nadia TERESZKIEWICZ**
Etienne **Sofiane BENNACER**
Patrice CHEREAU **Louis GARREL**
Pierre ROMANS **Micha LESCOT**
Adèle **Clara BRETHEAU**
Franck **Noham EDJE**
Victor **Vassili SCHNEIDER**
Claire **Eva DANINO**
Juliette **Liv HENNEGUIER**
Baptiste **Baptiste CARRION-WEISS**
Anais **Léna GARREL**
Laurence **Sarah HENOCHSBERG**
Stéphane **Oscar LESAGE**
Camille **Alexia CHARDARD**
The waitress **Suzanne LINDON**
The guardian Alain **Franck DEMULES**
Patrice CHEREAU's assistant **Isabelle RENAULD**
New York Teacher **Sandra NKAKE**
Le Majordome **Bernard NISSILLE**

CREW

Directed by **Valeria BRUNI TEDESCHI**
Screenplay and dialogues by **Valeria BRUNI TEDESCHI, Noémie LVOVSKY, Agnès DE SACY**
With the collaboration of **Caroline DERUAS PEANO**
Director of photography **Julien POUPARD**
Editor **Anne WEIL**
Production designer **Emmanuelle DUPLAY**
Costume designer **Caroline DE VIVAISE**
Casting **Marion TOUITOU**
Sound designer **François WALEDISCH**
Sound editor **Sandy NOTARIANNI**
Sound mix **Emmanuel CROSET**
Make-up & hairstyle **Caroline PHILIPPONAT**
1st assistant director **Olivier GENET**
Location manager **Logan LELIEVRE**
Production manager **Marianne GERMAIN**
Post-production manager **Déborah AUMARD UNGER**
Script **Caroline DERUAS PEANO**
Co-produced by **BIBI FILMS TV and ARTE FRANCE CINEMA**
Producers **Alexandra HENOCHSBERG and Patrick SOBELMAN**
Co-producer **Angelo BARBAGALLO**
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