AN ORDINARY EXECUTION
(UNE EXECUTION ORDINAIRE)

A FILM BY MARC DUGAIN

RUNNING TIME: 1H45
FRENCH RELEASE DATE: FEBRUARY 3, 2010
Fall 1952.

A young urologist and healer who works in a hospital in the Moscow suburbs is desperate to fall pregnant by her husband, a disillusioned doctor who is only surviving because of the love binding him to his wife. To her great terror, she is secretly called upon to look after Stalin who is sick and who has just fired his personal physician. The dictator worms his way into their relationship and creates a relationship with the young woman involving a tangle of secrets and manipulation. By turns friendly and perverse, the monster reveals his skills in the art of terror as never seen before.

STALIN TO ANNA: “DON’T FORGET YOUR HANDS, I WILL COME WITH MY PAIN.”

STALIN: “I’VE GOTTEN RID OF EVERYONE WHO WAS INDISPENSABLE. SINCE THEN, THEY’VE SHOWN ME THAT THEY WEREN’T.”

SYNOPSIS

A young urologist and healer who works in a hospital in the Moscow suburbs is desperate to fall pregnant by her husband, a disillusioned doctor who is only surviving because of the love binding him to his wife. To her great terror, she is secretly called upon to look after Stalin who is sick and who has just fired his personal physician. The dictator worms his way into their relationship and creates a relationship with the young woman involving a tangle of secrets and manipulation. By turns friendly and perverse, the monster reveals his skills in the art of terror as never seen before.
Your book, “The Officers’ Ward” was adapted for the screen in 1991 by François Dupeyron. Did you think back then that one day that you would become a director yourself?

In my career, cinema has been more important than literature. I’ve always been a big movie-goer and I started writing because it was what required the least money. But even if I wanted to make a film myself back then, nobody would have trusted me because I was so removed from that world – I was the chairman of an airline, but then I had that fortuitous meeting with Jean-Louis Livi. We bumped into one another at a David Lynch exhibition at the Fondation Cartier, just around the corner from where I live. He said it was a real coincidence because just that morning he’d called my agent because he wanted to acquire the film rights to “An Ordinary Execution”. Initially I didn’t believe it, given that in the world of movies, this kind of approach is fairly common and normally goes nowhere. But in this instance, Jean-Louis Livi didn’t stop talking to me about the project, and then one day asked me the killer question – why didn’t I direct it myself? Of course, I asked him if he thought I was capable of doing so and he said yes, given that I was used to directing teams of people, and he made sure I worked alongside a great cinematographer, Yves Angelo.

AN ORDINARY EXECUTION is about the last days of Stalin and covers the first half of your book of the same title...

Yes, the film’s subject boils down to the fundamental question I ask myself: What makes a dictator? The answer is linked to psychology; the greatest deviants are those who were harmed by their fathers – either they were abused or they were submitted to other forms of violence, which was the case for both Stalin and Hitler. When the father figure is destroyed, the notion of good and bad is removed. There are no limits. The danger, when one wishes to portray a dictator, is slipping into caricature – one creates a representation that suits one’s purpose; a dense and uncultivated brute. But that’s not enough. Stalin was an educated man, he studied at a seminary. He had that foundation of orthodox culture which one can see in the way he expressed himself.

What research did you do on Stalin?

I read everything that has ever been written about him, of course. But my reading was fed with my own subjectivity: If I found myself face-to-face with him, how would I describe him, what scares me about him, how does he represent for me a human being gone awry? He is a monster, but if you just say that, it means nothing. What I’m interested in is MY Stalin. I’ve always said that the way to...
impunity.

critic of the Stalinist regime, Yudina lived her life with unprecedented
greatness. She was a famous pianist of the time, woken from her sleep to make a special
performance. Her virtuosic playing was known well, having played it myself. It's totally authentic that Stalin
ask Anna, the young doctor, to find the second track of Mozart's
gymnastics for the film. The space had become empty and we filled
it. Stalin is sick, his arteries are clogged, he's been drinking and
to the world. Smoking for too long, having too many long lunches with Beria so
he walked into the room and he was Stalin. He spent three-and-
half hours in the room, studied the morphology, the look.

Was your first question who could carry the role of Stalin?

I took photographs of Stalin and studied his morphology, his look.

And suddenly it was obvious. I called Jean-Louis Livi, and told him
that Stalin was André Dussollier. He has Stalin's facial structure and he is
an extraordinary special effects specialist, Fabrice Herbert and
called Christina Ohlund-Lago from the UK. We had some trouble
with a first team of make-up artists, but we ended up discovering
a wonderful actor. After some understandable hesitation, Dussollier
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Does this story have a contemporary echo for you?

Yes, because I adopt the same obsessional process in everything that I do. I am interested in very ordinary people who come face-to-face with great historical events. Thus Anna, who asks for nothing from anybody, and who suddenly finds herself face-to-face with Stalin, is sucked into events outside of her control. If we didn’t have her own drama, the drama of her relationship, there’d be no identification and we would be looking at a reenactment; a documentary. Whatever era you’re in, if you can identify with a character, you take them to heart and realize that nothing is set in stone and anything can happen. Today we live under a varnish of civilization and that varnish can crack at any moment. In the same way, when I wrote “The Officers’ Ward”, I wasn’t seeking to paint a picture of the Great War, I wanted to tell the story of my grandfather who went to engineering school, who was happy and married and promised a good career. Then suddenly, his face got smashed in. His face was more damaged than Eric Caravaca’s in the film by François Dupeyron... My grandfather used to stick his tongue out at me through his nose when I was a kid. Devastation. Identification.

You banished any scenes of torture or physical violence from AN ORDINARY EXECUTION...

That is something very personal. Every vacation I had as a child, I lived among those people whose faces had been damaged in the chateaus where they lived together. When I’d have lunch with my grandfather, there were 300 disabled veterans there, plus those known as the “broken wings”, meaning they’d had limbs amputated. So I know what physical violence is and I think showing that violence in the cinema works like a vaccination, an alleviation, a trivialization. I think psychological violence, such as there is at the heart of AN ORDINARY EXECUTION is more frightening; it allows the viewer to feel it. In the film, Anna is on the receiving end of such violence. Confronted by Stalin who reels her in, who takes back what you thought he wanted to give her in paternal way and then suddenly becomes inflexibly ferocious, André Dussollier and Marina Hands portray each twist in this deadly game of cat and mouse. When Stalin has his attack and Anna leaves him on the ground and comes out of the office, Marina makes a gesture that I didn’t tell her to make – she readjusts her chignon and recovers her dignity. It was absolutely perfect. Because that’s the stamp of a dictator: What all dictatorships share in the destruction of others is above all, making them lose their dignity. All the rest follows on from that.
Born in Senegal on 3 May 1957. After studying political science and finance, Marc Dugain had a range of different roles in finance and aviation before dedicating himself to writing.

“The Officers’ Ward”, his first book, published in 1998 by Lattès, won 18 different literary prizes including the Prix des Libraires, the Prix Nimier and the Prix des Deux-Magots. It was translated into many languages for Germany, the UK, the US etc. and features on the national school curriculum in France. Adapted for the screen by François Dupeyron, the resulting film represented France in competition at the Festival de Cannes and won two Césars.

After “Campagne Anglaise” (Lattès, 2000); “Heureux Comme Dieu en France” (Gallimard, 2002), winner of a Best Foreign Novel award in China; and “La malédiction d’Edgar” (Gallimard, 2005), which was translated into 22 languages; his fifth novel, “AN ORDINARY EXECUTION” was published by Éditions Gallimard in February 2007 and won the RTL Lire Grand Prix.


POLICEMAN TO ANNA
ARE YOU OK?

ANNA
“YES, I’M FINE.”

POLICEMAN
“IF YOU’RE FINE THEN YOU’RE HIDING SOMETHING FROM ME.”
One day, someone calls you up and asks: “André Dussollier, do you want to be Stalin?” What’s your first reaction?

I said: “You’ve had a nasty bump on the head, what a strange idea – I look nothing like Stalin!” And at the same time, something inside me thought that it would be an amazing challenge all the same. So I said to the producer, Jean-Louis Livi, that it would be best to do some tests. We did the tests under the best possible technical conditions, without relying too much on the makeup, a moustache and a wig, nothing more. A team of makeup artists got to work and the start of the shoot was looming. Back then, I’d been shooting with Jean-Pierre Jeunet, I was talking about the difficulties with the makeup artist on that film, Nathalie Tessier. She recommended Fabrice Herbet and Stéphane Chauvet, who were very excited about the challenge. They immediately came up with lots of ideas and we started testing again, gradually getting closer to the desired result. The wonderful thing was doing that work in a fairly simple, handcrafted way. I put on some weight a used the suit which came up high to accentuate the double chin. I had prosthetics on my face to age my skin, to add spots of pigment right up to behind my ears. We used everything we could and it’s all invisible. And at the same time, I was working on the character on the inside.

Did you do much research to get closer to your character?

I mainly read the speeches – four speeches that Stalin gave to the party. You can see and feel his character, the way he behaves, his presence, his every gesture, the way he takes a glass of water without taking his eyes off his audience, and then he throws the glass down on the ground with awful brutality. He’s a walking terror.

You made that terror real by distilling it with a gentleness...

Yes, because despite all that, he’s a man at the end of his life and he’s sick. He’s suffering from arteritis and he can’t remain standing for very long. To obtain that heaviness that I didn’t necessarily have in my legs, I told the costume designer, Sophie Breton, that we had to find something, and find something we did. I went to a sports shop and found something certain athletes use – bags filled with lead that they attach to their ankles. But I couldn’t wear them like that as my boots prevented me. So Sophie Breton dismantled the little bags and put them together again, fixing them along the length of my legs which made my progress considerably slower.

“ONE OF THE STRANGE EFFECTS OF INTERROGATION IS MAKING PEOPLE TALK OF WHOM YOU ASKED NOTHING”
In addition to his physical qualities, you also had to find Stalin's voice...

Yes, and that was a very complicated problem to solve. It wasn’t about reproducing his real voice, which the general public isn’t particularly familiar with, unlike those of Hitler or Mussolini. The challenge was making him speak French. For it to be credible, it mustn’t be an imitation or a reproduction; it’s more of an evocation. Our big fear, Marc Dugain’s and mine, was that suddenly, just because of a too-harsh light or a particular camera movement, people would stop seeing the embodiment of Stalin on the screen for there suddenly to appear a recognizable actor in his place.

AN ORDINARY EXECUTION is the first film by Marc Dugain. How would you judge his entry into cinema?

For the first time at the controls of a film, Marc Dugain didn’t have the pretension to think he knew everything. He was accompanied by Yves Angelo, his cinematographer and himself a director. We quickly saw that he understood perfectly that making a film is a team effort, he knew to listen when he needed to and to handle any problems when they arose. Marc Dugain is a writer so it’s normal that he started out with a lot of dialogue. I permitted myself to tell him that if he told the whole story, I’d have nothing to act! With courage and simplicity, he accepted he had to make some cuts and abandon his primary role as a writer to take on a new one as a filmmaker. Moreover, he offered an exceptional acting partner with Marina Hands. It was a joy to perform beside her. There is lots of density and concentration in her performance and in her way of being. Once again, I’ll mention theater, but you can’t not think about it when you see Marina, her relationship to the text and her generosity with her acting partners, that immediate naturalness she has for tackling her work. We did a lot of readings, rehearsals and set-up before shooting, which meant we got to know one another, we advanced, we built things and we found our confidence.

Looking back on your career, one sees that Stalin is the first tyrant you’ve played...

That’s true, I’ve never performed in that register before. And I would have liked it as someone who has played more lighter characters. I belong to a generation of actors who like transforming themselves. You have to play with it. Transforming yourself, becoming another person – even Stalin – isn’t that the reason why we become actors?
2009  AN ORDINARY EXECUTION  by Marc Dugain
       WILD GRASS by Alain Resnais
       UNE AFFAIRE D’ÉTAT by Éric Vallette
2008  MICMACS by Jean-Pierre Jeunet
2007  CRIME IS OUR BUSINESS by Pascal Thomas
       A DAY AT THE MUSEUM by Jean-Michel Ribes
2006  CORTEX by Nicolas Saufmief
       TRUE ENOUGH by Sam Karmann
       PRIVATE FEARS IN PUBLIC PLACES by Alain Resnais
2005  TELL NO ONE by Guillaume Canet
       BY THE PRICKING OF MY THUMBS by Pascal Thomas
       DEPARTMENT 36 by Olivier Marchal
2003  A VERY LONG ENGAGEMENT by Jean-Pierre Jeunet
       STRANGE GARDENS by Jean Becker
2001  TANGUY by Etienne Chaillet
2000  A CRIME IN PARADISE by Jean Becker
       THE OFFICERS’ WARD by François Dupeyrton
       César for Best Supporting Actor 2002
1999  CRIME SCENES by Frédéric Schoendoerffer
       UCH by Sophie Fillières
       ACTORS by Bertrand Blier
1998  CHILDREN OF THE MARSHLAND by Jean Becker
1997  SAME OLD SONG by Alain Resnais
       César for Best Actor 1998
1994  COLONEL CHABERT by Yves Angelo
1991  A HEART IN WINTER by Claude Sautet
       César for Best Supporting Actor 1993
1986  MÉLO by Alain Resnais
1985  THREE MEN AND A CRADLE by Coline Serreau
1984  LOVE UNTO DEATH by Alain Resnais
1983  LOVE ON THE GROUND by Jacques Rivette
1982  LIFE IS A BED OF ROSES by Alain Resnais
1981  A GOOD MARRIAGE by Eric Rohmer
1980  EXTERIOR NIGHT by Jacques Bral
1978  PEREVAL by Eric Rohmer
1974  AND NOW MY LOVE by Claude Lelouch
1972  A GORGEOUS GIRL LIKE ME by François Truffaut
How did you get involved in AN ORDINARY EXECUTION?

Through Jean-Louis Livi. I have a lot of affection for him and I am very grateful to him. When I was just graduating from the Conservatory, and I’d not done any movies, he called me up to arrange for me to meet Yves Angelo who was in preparation on a movie and was looking for an actress. The first time a producer calls you up, having spotted you as a total unknown is unforgettable! Even before the script for AN ORDINARY EXECUTION was written, Jean-Louis Livi asked me to read Marc Dugain’s book, telling me he was considering me for the role of Anna, and also told me that Yves Angelo was involved. He is another person who had confidence in me very early on, with whom I worked on AT MY FINGER TIPS before joining forces with him again on LES ÂMES GRÈSES. I knew before I started that there were two men involved in this project to put me at ease. Then I met Marc Dugain and realized what was at stake; I became aware that I was going to be carrying the responsibility of a very significant role in a first film. I’m used to being docile with directors — would Marc Dugain direct me, I wondered, as someone who loves being directed. I soon got the picture – the answer was yes.

How did Marc Dugain present the character of Anna to you?

He told me she was nobody exceptional to whom something exceptional happens. He said that to him, she was the most mysterious character and he was interested in everything I could bring to her. One thing very important to him was that I avoided the pitfalls of sentimentality. Even in Anna’s desire to have a child, even in the love she has for her husband, he wanted her to be determined, not disarmed. And we were in agreement on that. Everything suited me — if I don’t have a journey to make through a character, I’m lost. When I started thinking about the role of Anna, I thought about Adrian Brody’s performance in Polanski’s THE PIANIST. In terms of that essential question of “too much” or “not enough” I remembered the unique way he has of reacting in a tragic situation, never overly pathetic but always with an ordinary heroism of survival.
Did you do any preparation or rehearsals?
Yes. Right from the outset, rehearsals seemed essential to us to find the path we were going to take but also to remove any doubts. I had many over my ability to bring Anna to life. She doesn’t talk much so it’s all in her movements, her whole body has to express a strength of resistance. To get into her, I could count on Marc Dugain, on his honesty in terms of directing. He doesn’t handle you with kid gloves. If it’s not right, he says so. And that’s good. There was no leniency in terms of what we were acting, in terms of egos. There was no moment when I felt spared because I was experiencing something difficult to express. No, we were constructing something. And of course, the person the most involved in that journey, to stay on course in the most exceptional way was André Dussollier. I was totally knocked out performing beside him. I’ve never seen someone work like he works. It’s not something you talk about. He doesn’t say it himself because work as essential to him as it is natural, and perhaps also because we also often associate the notion of work with one of effort. With him, it’s a need; an ethic. He asks for rehearsals and more rehearsals. Takes and more takes. He’s never satisfied. Right from the first day of shooting, he knew every single one of his lines. Having an acting partner like André Dussollier is better than a help, it’s an extraordinary stimulant as he sets the bar very high. From time to time, when we weren’t totally happy with a scene, even after several takes, we’d go off to one side and go through the scene but not with the words of the dialogue, with our own words to rediscover the real meaning, what was at stake, to refresh our feelings and emotions. Throughout the shoot, I had the feeling we were kind of crazy and perhaps that’s why I’m particularly attached to the film. That’s one of the things I love in life: If there’s no danger, I’m not bothered. But that notion of danger was made up for by a complicity, mutual help and solidarity surrounding the project. It was the first time I’ve had the feeling of making a film as much with the director as with the cinematographer, as much with the sound engineer as with the producer. Everybody invested 100%. Yes, AN ORDINARY EXECUTION is a first film, but I can safely say that Marc Dugain was the captain.

FILMOGRAPHY
César for Best Female Newcomer and Acting Prize at the New York Tribeca Film Festival for her performance in Pascal Ferran’s LADY CHATTERLEY.
Before working with many directors including Pascal Ferran, Patrice Chéreau, Denys Ancarid, Andrzej Żuławski and Yves Angelo, she worked at the Conservatoire National d’Art Dramatique and spent a year in London studying at the prestigious London Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts (LAMDA), where she became fluent in English.
She has appeared in Denys Arcand’s THE BARBARIAN INVASIONS (Oscar for Best Foreign Film), TELL NO ONE by Guillaume Canet, LADY CHATTERLEY by Pascal Ferran and THE DIVING BELL AND THE BUTTERFLY by Julian Schnabel (Best Director at the Festival de Cannes 2007), CHANGE OF PLANS by Danièle Thompson and STORY OF JEN by François Rotger.
Currently starring in HIDDEN DIARY by Julie Lopes Curval, she will be appearing in 2010 in AN ORDINARY EXECUTION by Marc Dugain as well as in ENSEMBLE, NOUS ALLONS VIVRE UNE TRES GRANDE HISTOIRE D’AMOUR... by Pascal Thomas.
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# Jean-Louis Livi - Selected Filmography

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<td>1995</td>
<td>CONJUGAL DUTY</td>
<td>Benoît Barbian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CAST

André Dussollier Stalin
Marina Hands Anna
Edouard Baer Vassili
Denis Podalydès Concierge
Tom Novembre Head of department
Gregory Gadebois Beria
Gilles Gaston-Dreyfus Alexandra
Anne Benoît Uncle Anton

Crew

Producer Jean-Louis Livi
Director Marc Dugain
Adaptation and dialogue Marc Dugain
Based on the novel «Une exécution ordinaire» by Marc Dugain
Executive producer Julie Salvador
Production manager Christophe Jauffroy
Director of photography, artistic and technical advisor Yes Angello
Sound Pierre Gamet
Set design Yes Fourrier
Costumes Jackie Budin
First assistant director Patrick Armissen
Script supervisor Lydia Bigard
Editor Fabrice Rouaud
Sound editor Sylvain Malbrant
Set photographer Arnaud Bonet

A.F.COMME FILM / STUDIOCANAL / FRANCE3 CINÉMA coproduction
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In association with CINEMAGE 3
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International sales STUDIOCANAL