

LEGENDE FILMS AND STUDIOCANAL
PRESENT

MAX & LEON

Starring

DAVID MARSAIS and GREGOIRE LUDIG

Directed by

JONATHAN BARRE

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Synopsis

It's 1939, Max and Leon are inseparable friends and both utterly immature and foolish. Thrown into the middle of WWII, their sole objective quickly becomes to desert their platoon and return to their home town, their old simple life and their wine-drinking ways. But the harder they attempt to escape, the more they find themselves drawn into history in the making, all the way to the beaches of Normandy.

- Interview -

JONATHAN BARRE

You have known Grégoire and David for a long time, and together, you created Blagbuster Production in 2008. Where did the desire to work together come from?

It was completely by chance. We all come from the same village, Montfort L'Amaury, west of Paris. My parents moved there to open a wine store, and my little brother's babysitter was a friend of Greg's. Back then, I used to do sketches at home on my own, but I was a crappy actor so I was looking for people to direct. On their side, Grégoire and David happened to be looking for a "director", or rather someone who handled a camera less badly than them, to re-record a sketch they had messed up. We got along right away.

What are your references, where does your inspiration come from?

We have the same taste for 1980s US blockbusters, like *BACK TO THE FUTURE* and *GHOSTBUSTERS*. But Grégoire and David are more fans of French acts like *Les Inconnus* or *Les Nuls*. I like that typically French side. Unlike so many others, they don't try to imitate the rapid-fire flow, the oneliners, and the whole universe of American stand-up. I am personally a huge fan of the *Saturday Night Live* and all their skits, and of Chevy Chase, whose 1985 film *FLETCH* is one of my favorite movies. We balance each other quite well.

How would you define your vision of humor as a group?

I think the most important for us is rejecting the easy path, avoiding that tendency to explain jokes, and point at the moment where one should laugh. We trust the audience's intelligence, the codes and references we all share. I also think that the three of us are all equally allergic to pathos. So even in a very serious or tragic moment, we always look for a spin – following the Pixar or Spielberg model – to avoid the obvious violins and tears!

With MAX & LEON, you are moving from a fairly short TV format to a much longer, more developed feature. How did you approach that?

I always wanted to shoot a movie, so I approached it with a child's joy. And the fact that the three of us made MAX & LEON makes me even happier, since it is the achievement of our joint efforts. To be honest, I still can't believe it!

How did you manage to avoid making a film that was just a series of sketches?

It was indeed our main concern, so we worked hard to avoid that. Right from our first brainstorming sessions, we were focused on making an historical film – deliberately choosing the Second World War so it would be a story that runs over time with a real cinematic atmosphere – and on making it as different as possible from our TV sketches which are more sliced up. I also made sure, along with the crew, to create elaborate images with wider shots. This allowed us to set David and Grégoire in an historical context and to have them together all the time. If you pay attention, you will see that they both figure in almost all the shots. Together, they create a comic entity.

Two sequences stand out– the musical comedy scene and the cabaret one. They are two arduous sequences with extras and choreography, etc. This is tricky for a first film. How did you manage it?

We have already worked a lot on music videos and songs in the Palmashow, so those two scenes were almost compulsory to the movie. We know that our fans would have been disappointed without those crazy musical interludes that are a trademark of the show.

There are many guest appearances in the film, including those by Florence Foresti, Kad Merad, Sébastien Thoen, Baptiste Lecaplain, and Kyan Khojandi.

Why were you so keen on including them?

We wanted to include people who are our references in terms of comedy or cinema. My inspiration in that respect is obviously ASTERIX & OBELIX: MISSION CLEOPATRA, in which Alain Chabat brought together everyone he loves, Jamel, Edouard Baer, Jean-Paul Rouve,

Isabelle Nanty, and Marina Foïs. And we all know how successful it was!

What's next? A TV series? A second feature?

I've been working around the clock for five years, so I'm going to take a few weeks off. But I'd really like to adapt a graphic novel for the big screen, with the same ambition which is bringing families to the movie theaters, children and grandparents included! And to make sure that nobody is disappointed. That's the most important thing to me.

- Interview -

GREGOIRE LUDIG - DAVID MARSAIS

French audiences know the Palmashow, which has had millions of hits on the web and which has screened on the D8 TV channel. That was a great success, but why did you want to try your hands at the risky, costly, and time-consuming genre of cinema?

G: We initially set out to make movies, and we grew up with the cinema and its references, so we always knew we would make a film one day.

D: Very Bad Blagues and the Palmashow were important experiences because it took us almost two years to develop a good sketch!

G: The funny thing is that the success of Very Bad Blagues and the Palmashow helped. We had a lot of offers for films starring our characters. But we didn't want to stretch two-minute roles over an hour-and-a-half without depth.

D: We wanted to create real characters for ourselves. And that is a whole different dynamic. It requires depth and consistency, which is very different from what is required to create a sketch. But this doesn't make cinema a higher form of art than TV. We like both. Actually, we both naturally returned to TV after the film.

How did the idea to make a buddy movie in occupied France during the Second World War come about?

D: We wanted to make a combination of films we love like LA GRANDE VADROUILLE, NOW WHERE DID THE 7TH COMPANY GET TO?, ATLANTIC WALL, GRAMPS IS IN THE RESISTANCE, and SAVING PRIVATE RYAN. It's not easy moving from the web to TV and from TV to cinema, so we deliberately opted for a very visually cinematographic subject to break away from the TV or web image we might have. And we wanted to address our modern society through the Second World War.

G: The idea was to have these two big kids, like two happy fools, traveling around in occupied France. Our characters are apolitical, committed to nothing, indifferent to the struggles between Vichy France and the Resistance. They just want to save their skins. In this respect, they reflect our generation which has trouble investing in modern politics, which has little appeal. The interest for us was that during their tribulations, our two characters develop habits like helping and supporting one another – a kind of humanity, let's say – that they didn't think they had in the start.

D: Beyond the context, we also thought about what we'd like to perform, and what would make us laugh. How could we be complementary? And we just expanded on what we are like in real life, but to an extreme degree. I'm pretty structured and anxious, while Greg is the opposite.

You had to move from a fairly short TV format to a much longer, more developed feature. How did you approach that in order to avoid making a film that was just a series of sketches?

G: That was indeed our primary concern. And without Jonathan, our director, with whom we have worked since the beginning, and with whom we have a real alchemy going on, it wouldn't have been possible.

D: Moreover, the idea for this road trip in occupied France allowed us to integrate sketches, such as when we meet new characters for example, as the story unfolds.

G: We quickly got into the pace of cinema, which is much slower. For a sketch for the web or TV, you shoot six or seven usable minutes per day. For a film, this is down to two minutes. You soon understand that it is much more demanding and there is a more sophisticated story dynamic.

This period of occupation immediately conjures up a lot of stereotypical characters. It would seem you had a lot of fun playing with that.

D: To take the opposite approach to other films on the same subject, we wanted the real

danger to be closer to home. The Germans were kind of secondary. So we had fun playing with the codes, like in that scene when the Nazi soldier hides... to visit a nightclub. And in that same offbeat way, the Resistance fighter is hilarious... when he is a loser!

G: Along with Jonathan and the set and costume designers, we made sure that the film feels real, and that everything that happens is plausible. We didn't want anything to be anachronistic, and nothing too over-the-top, so that the audience could believe in it.

You have had some 100 million hits on the internet. What can you expect from a theatrical release?

G: We don't think in numbers of clicks. We do what makes us laugh. That's all. And with Jonathan, we make sure, whatever the medium is, that we are not the only ones laughing! In this case, we said, "Come on, we've been dreaming about making a film since we were kids. Now is the time."

D: I think that in all modesty, we wanted to make sure that "French comedy" wasn't a curse word. So we tried to escape contemporary comedic codes that favor an accumulation of one-liners to the detriment of the situation, and simply did the opposite.

There is a clear mix of the eccentricity of Monty Python and the total freedom and sense of absurdity of Kad & O for example. Would you agree with that analysis?

Did you have other references in mind?

D: Our references are Les Inconnus and Les Nuls. They started with sketches and ended up making films. We wanted to achieve something similar. It is a nod to them that we completely acknowledge.

G: We also have references like Louis de Funès, Pierre Richard, and Depardieu. Or Police Academy and all those films with characters both dumb and straight-edged who end up helping one another out. It's a very human thing in the end.

D: At one point, we used a joke (the scene with the time in Berlin) from Les Inconnus. It was a tribute, a way to say "thank you". We shot a sketch with them a couple of years ago and told them how important they were to us. They were moved by that, even if they didn't really get it!

You've been writing together since you were at school. How does your partnership work? Who does what? Do you often row? Do you agree on everything? Do you take turns being the boss?

G: Over time, we realized that we need to both agree when it comes to finding new ideas

or pieces of dialog. If one of us disagrees, it is a sign that something is wrong. So we ditch the idea and keep looking.

D: That "technique", if I can call it that way, works between us and with Jonathan as well. If he isn't taken by something, we know we must work on it a little more.

G: Writing is a very academic process to us. We write from 8:30am to 4:00pm. And because neither of us can work at home, we do it old-style, in cafés. And we work best and are more productive in the morning. At midday, we re-read it all. And then at around 4:00pm, when it becomes a drag, we break off until the following day.

Two sequences stand out and work well – the musical comedy scene and the cabaret one. They are two arduous sequences with extras and choreography, etc. Weren't you worried about them when you were writing them?

D: On the contrary, it made us laugh! We like the musical stuff in our sketches, and the scene in the gay bar is a reference to GRAMPS IS IN THE RESISTANCE or when, in LA GRANDE VADROUILLE, they dance around the chairs.

There are many guest appearances in the film, including those by Florence Foresti, Kad Merad, Sébastien Thoen, Baptiste Lecaplain, and Kyan Khojandi. To what extent are they your comedy "family"?

G: Above all, this is a matter of affinities. We know Florence, Kad, Sébastien, we have worked with them, and we love their work. For us, it was obvious to associate them in some way with this experience.

D: But we didn't push ourselves to include them. The only characters we were absolutely determined to include, those on which we worked the most, were those of Nicolas Marié and Dominique Pinon. Because it was those guys who made us want to be actors when we were young.

What's next? A TV series? A second feature?

G: No feature films in the immediate future. And no desire to favor movies over TV. Indeed, we are shooting a show for D8 right now.

D: We let ideas germinate and allow our desires to mature. It might seem like nothing, but it's an excellent way to ensure a project succeeds.

CAST

MAX.....DAVID MARSAIS
LEON.....GREGOIRE LUDIG
ALICE MARCHAL.....ALICE VIAL
SARAH.....SASKIA DILLAIS DE MELO
MICHEL.....DOMINIQUE PINON
CELESTIN.....BERNARD FARCY
MADAME DORMEUIL.....CATHERINE HOSMALIN
PICHON.....JULIEN PESTEL
EUGENE.....NICOLAS MAURY
COLONEL MARCHAL.....NICOLAS MARIE
FATALISTIC MAN.....BRUNO WOLKOWITCH
WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF.....KYAN KHOJANDI
.....JONATHAN COHEN
.....BAPTISTE LECAPLAIN
.....KAD MERAD
.....CHRISTOPHE LAMBERT
.....PASCALE ARBILLOT
.....FLORENCE FORESTI

CREW

DIRECTED BY..... JONATHAN BARRE
SCREENPLAY AND DIALOG..... DAVID MARSAIS
..... GREGOIRE LUDIG
WITH THE COLLABORATION OFJONATHAN BARRE
PRODUCED BY.....ILAN GOLDMAN
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERSCHRISTOPHE LAMBERT
.....GURVAN RIOU
COPRODUCERSSYLVAIN GOLDBERG
.....SERGE DE POUQUES
.....NADIA KHAMLICH
.....GILLES WATERKEYN
ASSOCIATE PRODUCER..... CATHERINE MORISSE-MONCEAU
PRODUCTION MANAGER.....STEPHEN SEZNEC
A PRODUCTION FROM..... LEGENDE FILMS - BLAGBUSTER
COPRODUCED WITH..... STUDIOCANAL
.....TF1 FILMS PRODUCTION
.....LE 12^E ART
.....C2M PRODUCTIONS
.....NEXUS FACTORY
.....UMEDIA
WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF CANAL + , CINE + , TF1 & D8
IN ASSOCIATION WITH UFUND
WITH THE SUPPORT OFTHE TAX SHELTER
.....OF THE FEDERAL BELGIAN GOVERNMENT AND TAX SHELTER INVESTORS
EXECUTIVE POST-PRODUCTION.....SLM MEDIA
.....ABRAHAM GOLDBLAT
CINEMATOGRAPHY..... SACHA WIERNIK, SBC
EDITINGDELPHINE GUILBAUD
ORIGINAL MUSICCHARLES LUDIG
CASTING.....MICHAEL LAGUENS
SET DESIGN.....STEPHANE CRESSEND
COSTUMES..... FLORENCE SADAUNE
FIRST ASSISTANT DIRECTORSTEPHANE LE COZ
SOUNDGILLES VIVIER-BOUDRIER
.....ARNAUD TROCHU
.....ANTOINE BAUDOUIN
.....FRANÇOIS-JOSEPH HORS