



AGNÈS VALLÉE & EMMANUEL BARRAUX
PRESENT

VINCENT LACOSTE FRANÇOIS CLUZET ADÈLE EXARCHOPOULOS
LOUISE BOURGOIN WILLIAM LEBGHIL LUCIE ZHANG BOULI LANNERS

A REAL JOB

A FILM BY
THOMAS LILTI

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INTERNATIONAL SALES

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SYNOPSIS

Benjamin is a PhD student without scholarship support. Under the pressure of his parents, and in need of money, he becomes a substitute teacher in a middle school.

Without training nor experience, and facing a declining public educational system, he discovers how tough this job can be.

Hopefully, his supportive and committed colleagues will lead him to take a fresh look at the profession.

INTERVIEW WITH THOMAS LILTI DIRECTOR

Almost all your films and series so far have been about medicine. Did you feel you had fully covered that subject?

HIPPOCRATES: DIARY OF A FRENCH DOCTOR, IRREPLACEABLE and THE FRESHMEN became something of an unintentional trilogy. We have just finished shooting the first part of the third season of HIPPOCRATES. It was all-consuming, but even then, I knew that my return to cinema would happen in a universe other than medicine.

A REAL JOB, an ensemble film with a divided narrative, resembles my previous feature films in that I approach fiction through reality. But, more than that, it is a continuation of my desire to explore the question of engagement through a profession.

The engagement of caregivers has been at the heart of my work for more than a decade, and this time I wanted to put the spotlight on teachers. How does one find meaning in a profession that is increasingly disparaged, pauperized, and downgraded? Telling the story of a group of secondary school teachers came from the desire to observe them to better understand their profession. Where do they find their motivation to teach in the face of adversity, within this weakened institution? What kind of students were they? What kind of parents are they? Where do they stand with their vocation? Teaching is different from medicine in that it is not a matter of life and death, yet teachers are guarantors of a universal mission: the transmission of knowledge. This responsibility is met with little appreciation today. We live in a world focused on profitability, but knowledge cannot be sold, it must be shared. That is the foundation of society. It's the most beautiful thing: you cannot be dispossessed of knowledge.

A REAL JOB is driven by this observation and by the desire to paint a realistic portrait of the men and women who are with us from childhood. Paradoxically, these women and men who never left school.

Is the story in A REAL JOB an attempt to rehabilitate the image of teachers?

There are a lot of teachers in my family, including my mother, who was a schoolteacher. She taught French, and I admired the investment that represented. Even beyond that engagement, I could sense what school meant to her, as for many women in the 80s. It was a place of emancipation. The idea is not to say that teachers are heroes, but that we must take care of them and recognize National Education as a valuable asset. I wanted to show the humans of this huge machine, whose desire to teach reveals a certain care for others, a sense of community, an understanding of the importance of school in nurturing social ties and the transmission of values.

My characters are no exception to the rule. As in all professions of general interest, they are confronted with dysfunction and society's violence, but also with their own contradictions, limitations and powerlessness, and obstacles that trip them up in their mission.

In A REAL JOB, meticulous attention is paid to making the school world as realistic as possible. How did you approach that?

That dedication to reproducing reality is an essential element of my work. I need to grasp a world as best I can, so that I can feel justified in telling its story and infuse it with a novelistic dimension. This confrontation of the real and the fictional is the cornerstone of my approach as a director. This required - even more so than for my previous films - an enormous amount of preparatory work.

Before I even wrote the first line of the script, I read and studied as much as I could on the subject, essentially testimonials. I watched television programs, read news reports, society magazines. I also read blogs, journals, and sociological essays, gradually immersing myself in the subject. I am

careful never to draw inspiration from works of fiction. This long preparatory work allows me to gradually build a vision of my playground as if I'd experienced it myself, and that is when the characters can be born. They are generally a skillful blend of myself, the actor I have in mind, and people I've encountered over the course of my research. I think that realism emerges from this approximate fusion.

Our work on the set follows this method, too: give the characters room to develop so they are not limited to written sequences, constantly invent new dialogue, allow life to gradually fill the cracks. We shoot a lot and always leave the script open to questioning.

Also, the fact that we were shooting with middle-school students and drawing on their experience, was an important asset.

Over the two years of production, I found my antennae were particularly sensitive when I was summoned, like any other parent, to a new school year meeting, or occasionally to the principal's office.

Finally, I think I can say today that my work as a doctor influenced my view of things. It allowed me to develop a particular sense of observation. I sincerely believe that I shoot like a doctor. I observe, dwell on details, analyze, diagnose... My characters have become my patients.

Was the choice of set particularly important?

I absolutely wanted to set my film in a “normal” middle school. The type that you hardly ever see on TV anymore, one like the hundreds that exist all over the country: socially mixed, middle class. My fictional middle school is neither a problem school, nor elite. I didn’t want to make *A REAL JOB* about a specific pedagogical method, but about the teaching profession. I wanted to show a school we could all identify with, to touch on a form of universality. *A REAL JOB* is not a film about “doing”; it is a film about “being”.

To answer your question more concretely, a middle-school during term time is not an easy place to shoot. So, I recreated one by bringing together three locations: the exteriors of a school in Meudon, the classrooms at a disused middle school in Vitry-sur-Seine, and finally the staff room and offices in Pantin.

The opening credits feature archive footage images. Why did you make this choice?

School remains at the heart of our lives, whether as children, adults, parents, through the generations. Everyone finds a Proust’s madeleine here, reminding us how central the role of school is to our lives. The images also illustrate the evolution of the social position of the schoolteacher. More vertical 50 years ago, more horizontal today. Yet two things remain unchanged: the students as individuals in training, in whose lives school is central, and the commitment of teachers, whose mission remains the transmission of knowledge and providing training for life in society.

What was your own relationship like, with your studies and with your teachers?

I don’t have a happy memory of my school days, and for a long time, learning was a source of frustration, as it felt forced on me. However, school for me was a place of socialization that enabled me to blossom outside the family home. At several stages of my schooling, I met influential teachers who gave me a taste for their subject or who enlightened me in one way or another about life. I think that we can all remember the name of a teacher who made an impression on us. In my view, school is a place for both the individual encounters and the collective emulation that help us grow. I was always very interested in the adult in the midst of all these children. What is their life like? Do they have children of their own? What are their joys and sorrows? Do they get along with colleagues? What do they think of us? I believe that this film stems from my desire to answer these questions.

Education naturally involves the question of legitimacy, which is a recurring theme in your films.

The question on the film’s characters’ minds is, “Am I a good teacher?” They each, at some point in the film, question their qualities, ability, and actions. When Vincent Lacoste’s character finds himself in conflict with a student, he cannot escape his own process of self-examination. This is necessarily painful, but the prerogative of all good teachers.

Teaching is a deeply confronting profession. Every day, the teacher finds himself alone in front of a classroom. What interests me is not so much their legitimacy to teach, but how the constant attacks intimately resonate. My feeling is that, for them, salvation lies in the group. It is the only way they can overcome their ordeals.

In a way, they are also a bunch of kids.

Yes, because there’s this idea that teachers have never left school. I wanted to keep this childish angle, to show the teacher as ultimately an extension of the student. I was driven by the desire to approach the theme of the collective as a survival instinct, and the only way to overcome the difficulty – even the violence – of this professional adventure.

This collective is also a source of joy and comfort for the characters. I wanted to show that their bond goes beyond solidarity – teachers are people, who look out for each other with benevolence and care. In a way, there’s a lot in common between the teacher community and the student community.

By opening the door to the staff room, was the idea to let us into a forbidden world?

That was such a pleasure for me because I have always been fascinated by the staff room. My curiosity was piqued as a kid when my mother would talk to me about it. Were the teachers the same way behind the scenes as the way we perceived them in the classroom? Was the stern teacher suddenly relaxed? Were there friendships? Love affairs? Rivalries? As students, we know nothing about the intimate lives of our teachers. We don’t even know their first names. Perhaps it was this curiosity that prompted me to make this film. In fact, my very first idea was to follow teachers at a secondary school without ever showing any students, but it was too theoretical.

I soon realized that you cannot access the intimacy of teachers by ignoring the essential part of their profession: the link to their classrooms and their students.

By highlighting the failings of the healthcare system or the school system through people's stories, would you call your film a social comedy?

That is not really a question I've asked myself. I make films about characters who inspire me. Of course, thematic links can be woven from one film to the next, but that's never the primary motivation. A lot of things escape me. I sincerely believe that we make the films we can and that they find us. Looking back, I realize that my films, in seeking to describe today's world with realism, have a social dimension, but they are not militant and do not, I believe, respond to the expected codes of social comedy. I am not attached to the drama genre either, I always want to bring my characters some light. A REAL JOB does not shy away from its "chronicle" angle... Whatever the case, it's always the characters who make the film. They are the story. I strive to create a space for them to exist.

You cast several actors you had already worked with on previous projects. Why did you make this choice?

I like the idea of making films as a family. It brought me great joy to know that I would be reunited with François Cluzet, Vincent Lacoste, and William Lebghil. It's like seeing close friends you haven't seen in a long time. It was a source of both stimulation and inspiration when writing the script. Knowing them so well also allowed me to put a lot of them into my characters. There are also many other actors who are part of the "family", who can be found in my films and series. They are often secondary characters, but they are faithful companions. I'm thinking of Sylvie Lachat, Théo Navarro, Mustapha Abourachid, Michael Perez, Christophe Ntakabanyura, José Laprun, Géraldine Schiffter, Hubert Myon. From one film to the next, you'll see them again and again, and they contribute greatly to the atmosphere of my films.

All this, and I haven't even mentioned the crew yet, who return time and again, helping to create this

feeling of working as a family. This atmosphere is important to me. And more rationally, I felt there was a coherence in bringing together the young HIPPOCRATES intern, the country doctor from IRREPLACEABLE and my FRESHMEN in a new story. I wanted to form an intergenerational group, bringing a universal dimension to the profession. I wanted to show that the problems of a 60-year-old teacher are closer to those of a 25-year-old teacher than to those of a peer in another profession.

What do you particularly like in each of your actors?

After three feature-length films, Vincent Lacoste and I have a mutual affection and trust for each other. This is rare, and the result of growing up together in the industry. What I like about him as an actor is that he brings an eternal candor to his characters, a unique rhythm. Besides, whilst he is very committed to his craft, he also knows how to hold it at some distance. He has been cast more than once as "Benjamin" in my films because he's a bit like my fictional double, our complicity allows me to take more risks and feel more at ease. We can laugh at ourselves, our obsessions, our tics.

Vincent knew how to bring an unexpected maturity to his character. Underneath his clumsy adolescent appearance, Benjamin embraces his new profession with real seriousness. In the face of his conflict with Enzo, he challenges himself, calls himself into question. This new version of the character Benjamin Barois is more grown up, in large part due to Vincent. He's no longer the intern of HIPPOCRATES. Vincent has matured, and so have his characters. I feel very privileged to be able to watch an actor accomplish so much.

François Cluzet and I have also forged a genuine friendship. I have never met an actor who takes more pleasure in playing with his partners. It is amazing how much he shares. He brings so much of his humanity to his character and to the group. And on a personal level, he gives me the extra confidence that

every director needs. Always an encouraging word, demanding and available at the same time. And then there's that inner turmoil, that intensity, that anger that drives his characters. François' character, Pierre, is constantly questioning himself, feeling that he could have been another kind of teacher, but that his time is past. The character holds weariness, loneliness, and fatigue, but also a great deal of benevolence. Pierre looks after the other teachers. They are his family.

Louise Bourgoin plays a rather rigid character in HIPPOCRATES, who has difficulty forming relationships with others. I thought it would be interesting to use this distance and the avoidant dance of her relationship with others and the world around her, to have her play a teacher who fails to bond with her students despite her desire to do her best, and despite her commitment. She embodies a teacher incapable of transmitting knowledge, a teacher at the end of her rope.

William Lebghil brings a nonchalance to his characters, and I wanted to rely on this to take his character elsewhere, to a form of moral fatigue. What I like about William is his ability to relate to things literally, at face value, and convey tenderness at the same time. By taking his character seriously, he developed something greater than what was in the script. Besides, since William is very close to Vincent, I knew the chemistry would work between them. There was no need for them to play up their friendship for it to appear on screen. Finally, I did get a guilty pleasure from having him play an English teacher because he speaks it very poorly.

Bouli Lanners joined to play the role of Vincent Lacoste's father. He accepted without even reading the script. He was the hero of season 2 of HIPPOCRATES and meeting him was very professional and friendly. His generosity is absolute. Just one sequence but oh so important for me. He represents all of society's contemptuous violence towards teachers. Bouli can do it all. He's always an obvious choice for me.

This was the first time Adèle Exarchopoulos joined the group. What do you like about her?

What a superb actress and what a formidable teammate! She makes everything seem so easy. I didn't know her personally before, so her involvement put me in unfamiliar territory. When I proposed she play the role of Meriem, I was particularly interested in building a character focused on work rather than seduction. A teacher with a very concrete relationship with things. She holds an appropriate distance from the students. She sets boundaries with them, loves them, protects them. Adèle has a natural authority and sincere affection, she is everything at the same time, balanced, fragile and strong. Just like Meriem, Adèle is a brilliant mind, extremely lively, quick, and instinctive, but paradoxically, she's not academic. That is what makes her presence so apt. She is the opposite of the top of the class, and through her, I wanted to show that teachers aren't necessarily former good students.

How did you approach your work as a director on this film?

For A REAL JOB, I wanted to give as much space as possible to the actors. All my work revolves around this objective. From film to film, this obsession leads me to shoot more and more! Longer and longer takes without the cameras cutting. There are always two cameras rolling, and I make sure all the actors are always being filmed. My goal is for us all to end up forgetting about the set-up, despite the unwieldiness of a film crew. The set must remain a playground for the actors. There is a disciplinary scene that was supposed to be shot in several small sequences, but I ended up shooting it in one take, as if it were a real disciplinary board. I started the action, and we did not cut until 40 minutes later. It was exhausting for the actors and crew who were operating without a net. It was also physical hell for the boom operators.

Would you like to tell us a bit about the editing and the music?

I really enjoyed working with several editors on the HIPPOCRATES series, and I wanted to repeat the experience on A REAL JOB. The two editors from the series joined me for this film. Once again, I really enjoy the exchange that takes place when there are more than one of us, the continuous competitive spirit. I am not a huge fan of the long, solitary work of the editing room, which can quickly become paralyzing. I like teamwork, and I like to find that energy in the edit. The pride of having succeeded means a lot to me. As for the music, my thought process went through many different stages. I even considered the complete absence of music, but gradually brought back existing tracks, almost all of which we kept in the end. Jonathan

Morali, with whom I was working for the first time, composed several pieces that create a very singular unity to the whole soundtrack. Finally, it took some time to find a song for the end of the film. I thought of a cover of "Temps du muguet", which musician Sylvain Ohrel had concocted for FRESHMEN. This song was sung by Vincent and William in the film, but the scene was cut during the edit. Suddenly, it seemed to me to make sense in A REAL JOB.

THOMAS LILTI

FILMOGRAPHY

CINEMA

2023 A REAL JOB
2018 THE FRESHMEN
2016 IRREPLACEABLE
2014 HIPPOCRATE
2008 LES YEUX BANDÉS

SCRIPT

2023 A REAL JOB
2018 THE FRESHMEN
2016 IRREPLACEABLE
2014 HIPPOCRATE
2013 WELCOME TO ARGENTINA by Edouard Deluc
2012 PIRATE TV by Michel Leclerc
2008 LES YEUX BANDÉS

TV SHOW

2023 HIPPOCRATE – SEASON 3 (in production)
2021 HIPPOCRATE – SEASON 2
2018 HIPPOCRATE – SEASON 1



CAST

| | |
|---------------------|-------------------|
| Vincent Lacoste | Benjamin |
| François Cluzet | Pierre |
| Adèle Exarchopoulos | Meriem |
| Louise Bourgoin | Sandrine |
| William Lebghil | Fouad |
| Lucie Zhang | Sophie |
| Theo Navarro-Mussy | Sofiane |
| Léo Chalié | Alix |
| Bouli Lanners | Benjamin's father |

CREW

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| Director | Thomas Lilti |
| Screenplay | Thomas Lilti Agnès Vallée |
| Producers | Emmanuel Barraux 31 Juin Films |
| Delegated producers | Les Films Du Parc |
| Executive producers | Les Films Du Parc Le Pacte France 2 Cinéma |
| Cinematography | Antoine Heberle |
| Production director | François Drouot |
| General manager | Élisa Touraine |
| Script | Lydia Bigard |
| 1st Assistant Director | Elodie Gay |
| Set Designer | Philippe Van Herwijnen |
| Costumes | Dorothee Guiraud |
| Make-up | Vesna Peborde Olivia Carron |
| Hair-Dressing | Gérald Portenart Sophie Farsat |
| Sound | François Guillaume |
| Editing | Gwen Mallauran |
| Sound Editing | Raphaël Sohier |
| Mixer | Jean-Paul Hurier |
| French Distribution | Le Pacte |
| International Sales | Le Pacte |