

SCHOOL'S OUT

α SÉBASTIEN MARNIER picture



MOSTRA INTERNAZIONALE
D'ARTE CINEMATOGRAFICA
LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA 2018
Official Selection





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SYNOPSIS

A high school teacher throws himself from the classroom window before the terrified eyes of his students. Despite the tragedy, six of them remain oddly cool and unemotional. Pierre, the new substitute teacher, notices the hostile behaviour of this close-knit clique. Smart and precocious, the six teenagers seem to be preparing a mysterious plan after school. Pierre becomes obsessed with them and is quickly sucked into their sinister game. His life soon turns into a nightmare.

France / 2018 / 103' / Scope / 5.1 / French

CAST

Laurent LAFITTE
Emmanuelle BERCOT
GRINGE
Grégory MONTEL
Pascal GREGGORY
Luàna BAJRAMI
Victor BONNEL
Véronique RUGGIA SAURA
Thomas SCIMECA
Adèle CASTILLON
Matteo PEREZ
Thomas GUY
Léopold BUCHSBAUM

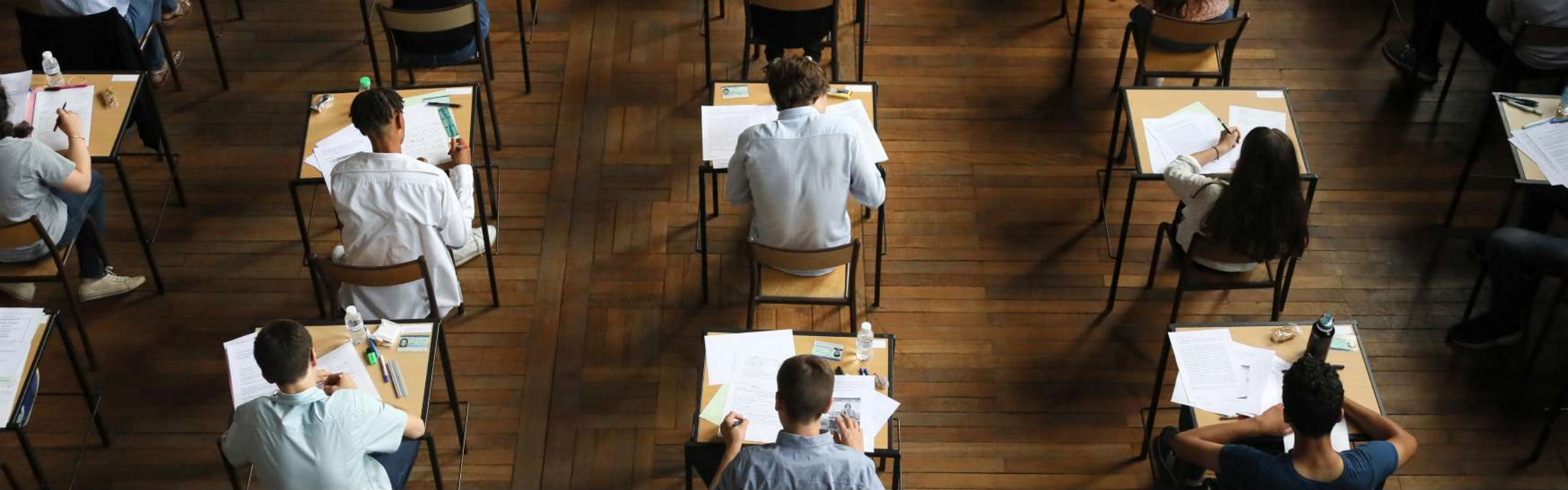
Pierre
Catherine
Steve
Michel
Poncin
Apolline
Dimitri
Françoise
Victor
Clara
Sylvain
Brice
David

INTERVIEW WITH **SÉBASTIEN MARNIER**

School's Out is based on the novel by Christophe Dufossé, published in 2002. What motivated you to make it into a film?

From the first time I read the novel, I felt like I was flooded with imagery and fascinating situations: a middle school professor who commits suicide during class, strong suspicion surrounding the students, a mysterious project. Within a week, I optioned the book rights, without a producer or financing or anything - except for the certainty that the story promised to be a great film. For a long time, I hoped it would be my first film, but it was probably too ambitious for a first try. So I set it aside, but I never gave up on it. When I was working on *Faultless*, I told my producer Caroline Bonmarchand about it. She was also very interested in the project and encouraged me to pick it up again. Ten years after the first version of the script, I got the idea of completely rewriting it, without rereading the novel. I could tell that I had to stay with my first impressions, the memory I had of it, and the situations my memory had selected or invented over time. Through that blur of subjective memories, the outline of the movie I really wanted to make gradually appeared.





Over the past fifteen years, the world has changed. Your story revisions are evidence of those upheavals.

The context we write from conditions and influences the way we look at things. I started on that new adaptation in 2016, when the whole world, and France in particular, was subject to new worries. Reality got harder, and so did the vision kids have of the future.

Above all, I think the more recent generation became more conscious of the world we live in. We spent a lot of time casting to find the 9th grade students, especially the group of six. Each time, we asked them questions about their fears and worries, and we were struck not only by how sharp their vision of the world was, but how pessimistic it was, too. It wasn't surprising that the recent terrorist attacks linked them all together like an invisible thread. In middle school, they get reminded every September of emergency procedures to follow in case of a terrorist attack. Parents and teachers tell kids they shouldn't hang around out in front of school because there is a higher risk of getting shot. You don't have to do much more to give kids the idea that chaos is lurking around the

corner. That collective sense of fear wasn't necessarily a surprise us, but we were startled by how much they cared, and worried, about environmental issues specifically. They were conscious of the fact that humanity is actively killing the planet or driving animals to extinction.

The generation I'm portraying in the film is one that lives amidst this chaos. They already have an idea of what the end of the world might look like.

But in your film, the threat doesn't come from the outside. It's coming from the students themselves.

That's how it starts out, and to the adults that's how it seems. There is something extremist about their clique, and we know their despair has indeed driven them to radical thinking. But the teachers play a role in what's happening, too: they have given up and become indifferent to the suffering of the kids they are supposed to protect. In the film, there is a kind of blindness and irresponsibility among the teaching staff. They put their heads in the sand, even though they know a strange,

silent anger haunts the school after the suicide that's taken place there. Even worse, the teachers try to rationalize the violence and extremity the students are capable of. And that tension and ambiguity is what I am exploring here. Over the course of the film I hope the audience keeps wondering who the real monsters are, the adults or the kids.

This is also why the kids had to have something exceptional about them, why they are gifted. They had to give off a disturbing sense of strength and sophistication right away, like the kids in *Village of the Damned* or *The White Ribbon* by Michael Haneke. I also had the graphic novels of Charles Burns in mind - the way he represented teenage monstrosity.

Though *School's Out* has something to say about school, about the breakdown of the relationship between adult and child, teacher and student, it is still above all a suspense movie. The more Pierre "gets closer" to the kids, the more he is actually sinking into their darkness, the more he is poisoned by the nihilistic vision he discovers.

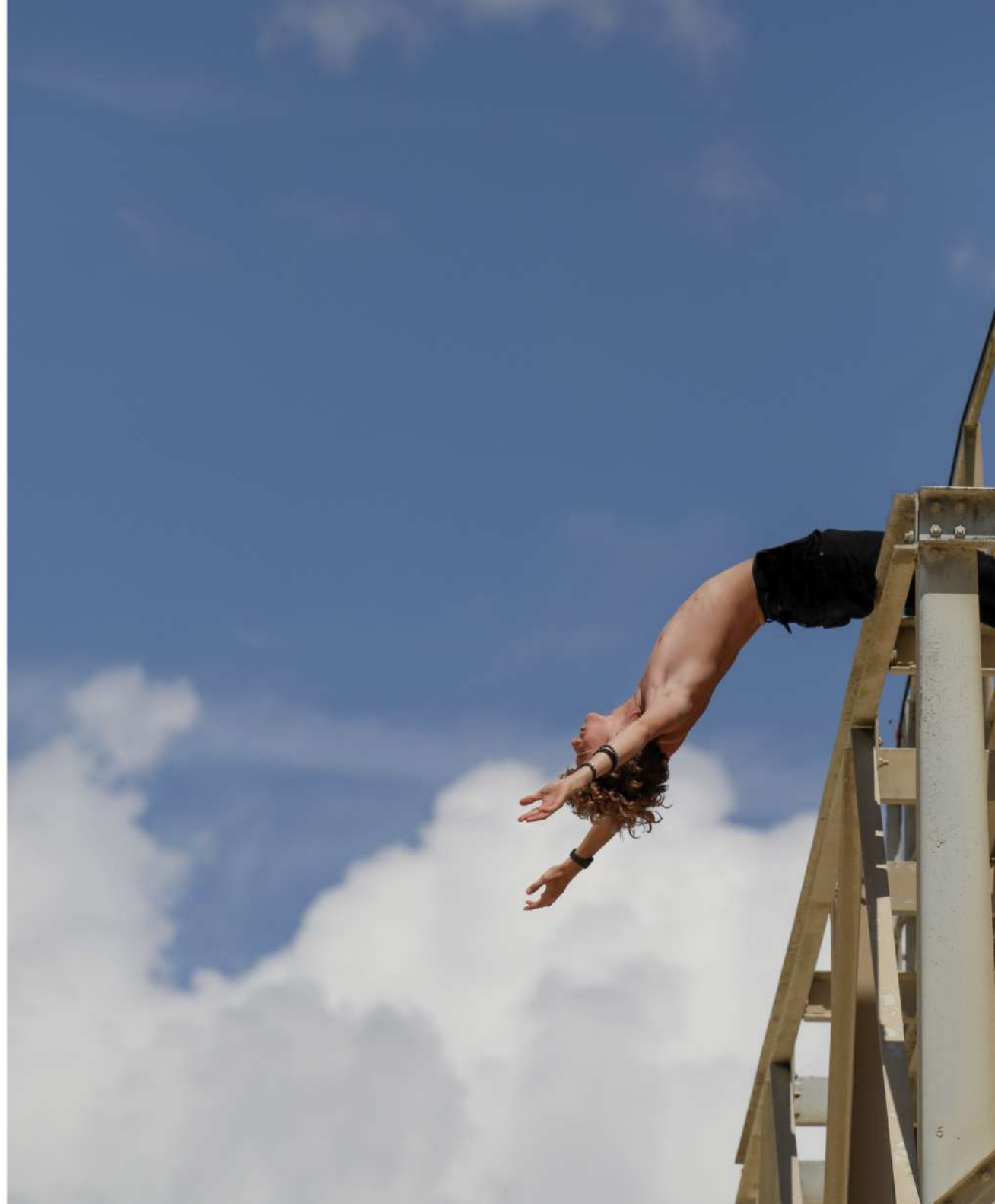
**What about Pierre, the substitute teacher?
Where does he stand?**

Pierre stands right in the middle. As soon as he gets to Saint Joseph and joins the school as the new teacher, we can tell he doesn't fit in. He's not familiar with this kind of private, elitist institution, and above all there is a real communication problem. Pierre's character acts in the film as the link between the viewer and the group of teenagers, because he transgresses and crosses the boundaries several times by spying and following them home. And it's because Pierre hopes to pierce their mystery and learn their secrets that he begins to lose his bearings and things start to go wrong.

In a way Pierre is forever condemned to speculate upon their motivations - a bit like the viewer. Most things remain hidden during most of the film.

School's Out is a film that contemplates the tragedy that is happening now, and I hope by its end, makes us viscerally feel something about our world's merciless failure. The idea was to make the story continue to evolve while still retaining a certain mystery about the kids' intentions. What are they preparing? And why? Do they want to get rid of their teacher? Or are they victims of some kind of external manipulation? I wanted to keep all those possibilities in suspense, let them float in the air and then twist the perspectives in each sequence. The goal was to start with an uncertain plot, almost at a standstill, and then build up, minute by minute, to a feeling of worry, fear and panic. It's the same as the underlying structure of my previous film *Faultless* (Irréprochable).

In *School's Out*, something is growing within the walls of that institution, like a rumor, and we can feel that at any minute, it might explode. Except in this case, I wanted the sense of worry to depend less on the details than on the directing - the length of the shots and the atmosphere of the film. I wanted the structure and editing to feel contagious, to act hypnotically on the audience as it does upon Pierre.



How did you build up the power struggle between Pierre and his students, which persists and evolves throughout the film?

The cornerstone of this project lay in finding the right way to make us feel how opaque and impenetrable the teenage world really is. That's what *School's Out* is all about: how we as adults are almost never able to understand the mystery of adolescence, even though we were all teenagers ourselves once! I know well how teens can make their world inaccessible, because I lived through some very painful experiences at that age, and it was only at the age of thirty-three years old when I wrote my first novel, *Mimi*, that my parents found out about all the violence I endured in middle school.

So as a director, I had to create a wall between Pierre and the group of six. I didn't want Laurent Lafitte to meet the young actors until the first day of shooting. I knew that would create, on both sides, a kind of mistrust, as well as natural tension and electricity. Laurent even refused to eat lunch with them for two weeks. It was important for us to minimize their interactions and keep them from becoming friendly and comfortable with each other. For Pierre, the

group represents an opaque otherness, a microcosm he can't break into, even though he wants to be a part of it.

How did you find and cast the teenagers that make up that group?

We auditioned almost 150 young people. First, there were the two leaders of the group, Luàna Bajrami (Apolline) and Victor Bonnel (Dimitri). I knew they were right for the part just by looking at their photos. What I was really looking for were actors right on the edge of puberty, who were still really children but already exuded a strange, almost frightening maturity for their age. We shot the film just a few months ago, and it's pretty amazing to see those same kids today. They have matured. Something has already changed in them. They have transformed. So I am happy the film succeeded in catching them right on the edge of that mutation, in that totally fascinating, neither-here-nor-there, uncertain period.

In both of your films, the soundtrack contributes to that strangeness. *School's Out* is full of "parasitic" noises. We often don't know where they come from. How did you choose them?

"Parasitic" is really the right word. There is often a disturbing, piercing sound that we don't necessarily pay attention to, but it ends up sticking in the head of the viewer like a little insect. It might be a baby crying in the next room, or an alarm, or the hum of a refrigerator. But whatever the source or the nature of the sound, I wanted that auditory matter to be invasive and unnerving, both familiar and destabilizing.

To be honest, that sound work points to what I love most in movies: dragging out a feeling of anxiety for reasons that are never clearly identifiable.

All the auditory layers are intrinsically linked. For the opening sequence, I asked Etienne Jaumet, Cosmic Neman and Jérôme Lorichon, who make up the group Zombie Zombie, to find me a "sound" for the sun. Or more precisely, a sound texture capable of expressing that oppressive heat that closes in on the film like the lid on a pressure cooker. I wanted that sequence to sweat through its sound. As for the rest of the film, the goal was to compose music that could conjure up the powers of the earth, go hand-in-hand with the world as it becomes unhinged, and incarnate the existential crisis that Pierre is going through.



We see a lot of sweating on screen, and Pierre's character has feverish moments that veer further and further towards delirium - almost like he's hallucinating.

That was a way of taking an approach diametrically opposite from the sordid, dark imagery this kind of film ordinarily uses: night shots, fog and cool tones. I wanted to create a feeling of claustrophobia, heat and suffocation within the film, like a steam room, and make that sensation gradually poison the viewer's mind. The goal was to make us feel how heavy and physically tiring that persistent heat can be, binding you like a straitjacket, to the point of driving you crazy.

My main point was to show that Pierre's daily life and thinking gets inexorably contaminated by fear and madness. I love the idea of making the production design express the character's dementia, like in *Repulsion* by Roman Polanski. That said, it wasn't enough to rely on just those few quasi-hallucinatory events; the whole world of the film needed to be an expression of anxiety. That was visible, first of all, in the cinematography: the shots are mostly static, straight as an arrow, and when there is camera movement, it's insidious, almost imperceptible. As a matter of fact, I was constantly reminding my Director of Photography, Romain Carcanade, that his camera needed to stay at a strange low angle, like most of Carpenter's films, and the slasher movies I saw when I was a teen, like *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. We also used a set of anamorphic lenses to give the scope those

those characteristic flairs and distortion. It was like a language we used so we could play around with the horror genre, which allowed me to give the film an unrealistic feel. Like in *Faultless*, taking that step aside is what allowed me to feel like I stood in the right place to talk about the socio-political issues that I feel strongly about.

The end of the film is particularly fatalistic. Yet on the other hand, you also portray a reconciliation between the world of adults and the world of youth: as they face imminent disaster, they look in the same direction and hold hands.

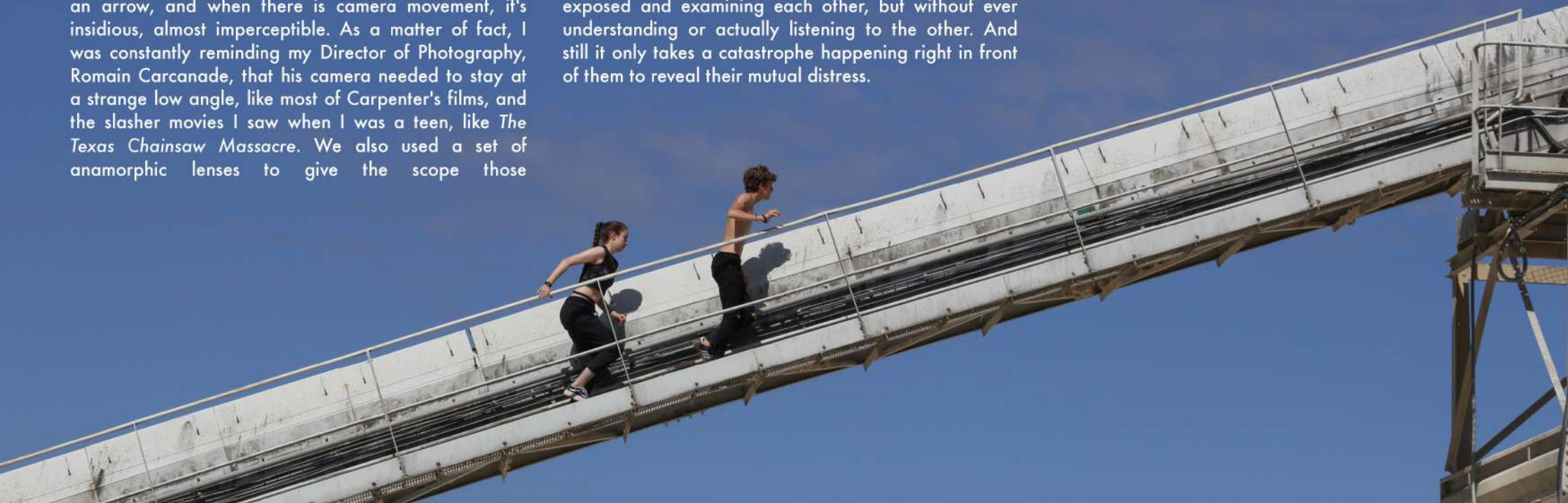
School's Out is in my eyes a truly political film, and the ending should create a strong, cogent image of the potential for responding to disaster. The fact that the teacher becomes part of the group at that particular moment gives rise to contradictory emotions, something positive and maybe even beautiful, and I really like that.

Throughout the entire film, we see two generations are exposed and examining each other, but without ever understanding or actually listening to the other. And still it only takes a catastrophe happening right in front of them to reveal their mutual distress.

What has struck me the most over the last few years is seeing so many catastrophes happen before our eyes, and yet most of our leaders and major financial lobbies remain blind to them. Their decisions almost always move in the wrong direction, and we can feel increasingly that the world might just tip over the edge any day now, in several places on the planet.

When it comes to the issues of terrorism and the environment, it's strikingly obvious. But each time, it's the same thing: we have to wait for a catastrophe to happen in order for "togetherness" and collective consciousness to emerge and grow. It's terrible as well as fascinating! At the end of the film, faced with catastrophe, the two generations are swimming together through the dark waters of the same nightmare.

Interview by Louis Blanchot





About SÉBASTIEN MARNIER

After Applied Arts and Cinema studies, Sébastien Marnier wrote three novels: *Mimi* and *Qu4tre* published by Fayard in 2011 and 2013, then *Une vie de petits fours* published by JC Lattès in 2013.

He is co-author of the animated series *Salaire net et monde de brutes* broadcast by Arte in 2016, an adaptation of his own graphic novel published by Delcourt.

Marnier has directed three short films, and his first feature film *Faultless* was a success with audiences and critics alike. Actress Marina Foïs received a César nomination in 2017 for her work in the film.

School's Out is Marnier's second feature film.





Laurent Lafitte

was born in Paris on August 22, 1973. He attended the Cours Florent and the Conservatoire National Supérieur d'Art Dramatique in Paris and ultimately completed his dancing and singing training at the Guilford School of Acting in England.

His film work includes Claude Miller's *A Secret* as well as several films directed by Guillaume Canet (*Tell No One, Little White Lies*). In 2013, he appeared in Joel Hopkins' comedy *The Love Punch* alongside Emma Thompson and Pierce Brosnan. The same year, he starred in *Birdsong* along Eddie Redmayne for the BBC.

In January 2012, he joined the Comédie-Française and since then regularly appears in classical plays and contemporary creations. In 2016, he was chosen as the host of the opening and closing ceremonies of the 69th Cannes Film Festival. The same year, he was praised for his portrayal of Patrick in Paul Verhoeven's *Elle* in which he starred alongside Isabelle Huppert and which earned him a César nomination for Best Supporting role. In 2017, he is nominated for a César for his work in Albert Dupontel's war drama *See You Up There*.

Laurent Lafitte is also starring in Pierre Shoeller's *Un Peuple et Son Roi*, presented in Venice Out of Competition.

Emmanuelle Bercot

born in 1967 in Paris, is a French actress, scriptwriter and director. After her bachelor's degree, she joined the Serge Alzetta's Ecole Supérieure de danse and then L'Ecole du Spectacle in which she discovered theater. She graduated from La Fémis where she made in 1997 the documentary *True Romanès*. Two years later, she obtained the Jury Prize at Cannes for her first short film *The Vacations*.

Simultaneously, she develops her acting career under the direction of Claude Miller, Bertrand Tavernier and Claude Lelouch. In 2011, she co-wrote *Poliss* with Maïwenn, in which she also plays a member of the juvenile delinquency division. They are both nominated for the César for Best Original Screenplay.

In 2012, she directed Catherine Deneuve in the film *On my way* and also in 2014 on the set of *Standing Tall*. The film is presented at the opening of the Cannes Film Festival. At the same festival, Emmanuelle Bercot receives the Best Actress Award for her performance in *My King* by Maïwenn in which she plays opposite Vincent Cassel, a woman living a passionate and heartbreaking love story. She goes back behind the camera in 2015 for *150 Milligrams*. She plays alongside Golshifteh Farahani in *Girls of the Sun*, selected in the Official Competition at the Cannes Film Festival 2018.



CREW

Director
Screenplay, Adaptation

Director of Photography
Editing
Sound

Production Designer
Costume Designer
1st Assistant Director
Production Manager
Postproduction Manager
Original Music

Sébastien MARNIER
Sébastien MARNIER
Élise GRIFFON
Romain CARCANADE
Isabelle MANQUILLET
Benjamin LAURENT
Emmanuel CROSET
Guillaume DEVIERY
Marité COUTARD
Sébastien MATUCHET
Isabelle TILLOU
Xénia SULYMA
Zombie Zombie

Based on the original novel "L'heure de la sortie" by Christophe DUFFOSÉ
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