

PHILIPPE LIÉGEOIS PRESENTS

ADÈLE HAENEL MARC BARBÉ FRANÇOIS FEHNER MARION BOUVAREL INÈS FEHNER LOLA DUEÑAS



OOGRES

A FILM BY LÉA FEHNER



SYNOPSIS They travel from town to town, carrying their circus tent with them, their show packed in their bags. They bring fantasy and disorder into our lives. They are ogres, giants. They have eaten up men, women, children, hours of theater and miles of road. Proudly eccentrics, they live like a tribe, mixing family, work, love and friendship, without holding anything back. But the return of an old flame and the imminent arrival of a baby reopen wounds that they thought had healed. No matter, the ogres would always rather bite than admit they are wounded.

So let the party begin!

LÉA FEHNER INTERVIEW

HOW DID YOU COME UP WITH THE IDEA OF THIS FILM PROJECT?

I grew up in the environment depicted in the film, in a touring theatre company.

In the 1990s, my parents embarked on an adventure with dozens of trailers, a circus tent, a colourful and eccentric troupe, and together they criss-crossed France to stage performances.

Strangely, when I grew up and decided to become a storyteller as well, I think I chose to leave this environment because I was scared stiff. Scared of parading on empty streets in the freezing cold, scared of the camps where children are aware of everybody's dirty secrets and grow up amid screams, boards and drunks. Not to mention people always prying into others' business, being broke all the time and pretending you don't care, getting frustrated when somebody does better than you...

Yet lately, I completely changed my mind. Where I used to see struggles I saw courage, I longed for such a close connexion with the audience. I now saw the excesses as part of the fun, part of life.

After my first feature, I felt the urge to film this energy, to make a joyful and bright film, yet not devoid of insolence and harshness. I decided to film those men and women who keep breaking the frontier between theatre and life to live a little bit stronger, a little bit faster.

OGRES... QUITE A SUITABLE NAME INDEED FOR YOUR CHARACTERS!

This title was like a backbone for us throughout the writing process, always reminding us not to choose the easy way out, and not to fall for our characters' vitality. We wanted to show a strong and powerful appetite for life, but without hiding the monstrous or violent element in it.



In a way, speaking about ogres is also realizing that the idea of outrageousness applies to touring theatre as much as to family privacy : how some members take up all the space, how love can be all-consuming...

IT IS TRUE THAT BEYOND THE SINGULAR WORLD OF A TOURING THEATRE COMPANY, THE FILM DEALS ABOVE ALL ELSE WITH A GROUP OF PEOPLE, WITH FAMILY.

Absolutely. There all the generations intermix. The children make up a wild and free pack, young adults struggle with their longing for responsibility. Not to mention the unreliable fathers who take up all the space, and the mothers who are in turns sublime or submissive... They love each other yet they hurt each other. Maybe there lies the great beauty and the great pain of the families: they love each other yet they cannot help going about it the wrong way. So the film deals with it, but not only through blood ties. Because here family is the one you choose for yourself, the one you meet, the one you work with. The spirit of the troupe is based on an utopia of community that exceeds the family unit, and addresses the issue of love in a broader sense.

DID YOU KNOW RIGHT FROM THE START THAT YOUR PARENTS AND YOUR SISTER WOULD ACT IN THE FILM?

No, it is really the culmination of a whole process. When I was writing the script, I asked them to improvise about it and the three of them opened up with an intensity that startled me. They were generous without being indecent. Feverish without verging on psychodrama. I slowly realized that I had no choice but to play with fire. It was at once the most coherent and the craziest thing to do.

WHY CRAZY?

Because it put living, fragile relationships into jeopardy. Because it put my father in the position of being directed

by his own daughter. Because I ventured to write about a story that was still writing itself. Because suddenly I run the risk that something intimate might prevent me from feeling entitled to go too far. But I think I needed the discomfort of reality mixing with fiction for this film.

YOUR SON ALSO PLAYS IN THE FILM?

Indeed. It's no easy task to have a profession that is also an all-consuming passion when you have children. So what is the solution? To me, maybe it involved taking my own family on board. And making cinema as a tribe, with my family but also with people I love who came to join the "troupe". It was a wild bet to mix everything in order not to give up anything. But it was also a huge pleasure. And I hope it reflects on the film's energy.

HOW DID YOU APPROACH THE DIRECTION OF SUCH A GROUP?

Both my producer and I really wished to devise a specific shooting method as a bridge between the experience of touring theatre and that of cinema. It was about making the cinematic practice a more collective effort, with less of a hierarchy ; we wanted the group experience to be involved in the filmmaking process. We therefore chose to devote ample time for rehearsals and to have all the actors with us all the time during the shooting.

Yet rehearsals in cinema are inevitably an issue: we are afraid of revealing too many things, of losing the fire of the moment, whilst we envy the process of rehearsals they have in theatre because that allows for a real intimacy among actors. I therefore always waver between these two options but with this one film, I had a perfect object in the sense that performance scenes did justify these rehearsals. Actors got together to rehearse the songs, the dances, things where everyone needs to be in tune. With these practises, masks are shed, people loosen up and real group dynamics set in.



THE EVER-PRESENT GROUP REINFORCES THE IMPACT OF THE FEW REALLY INTIMATE SCENES, DON'T YOU THINK ?

Yes, indeed, we shift from boisterousness to sweetness. To shoot these scenes was very unsettling – we were together all the time! – and what they stress is that there is a wealth of things in us which escape the group's grasp. Throughout the film for instance, Mr Déloyal [a kind of “Master of Unceremony”, Monsieur Loyal being the ringmaster's name in French circus companies] (played by Marc Barbé) behaves in a provocative way in order to make his wound not too gaping in the eyes of others. But during the night when he comes to see Mary, his ex-wife, he suddenly feels the need to talk to her outside the group, in order to express these very simple words which are covered by the pandemonium : “I'm afraid, I don't know whether I want to have a child”. Ultimately there is a sort of reserve behind such profusion.

THE COMPANY PERFORMS A CHEKHOV PLAY...WHY HIM ?

Primarily because the plays my characters have picked are farces. It actually says a lot: the touring theatre community really wishes to reduce the intimidating space between the literary work and the audience. So here, with the cabaret format and those texts, it's as though there was a joyful invitation to discover this huge author, without being daunted by him.

And what I'm particularly fond of about Chekhov is that he talks about community. The characters boost each other, they move on together, they display what separates them. There is no hero single-handedly challenging other men or the Gods. It's all about every day life, work, people who feel alienated, sad, irresolute, passionate. Each character strives to find room for freedom within a group, and is either boosted by the group or broken by it.

For many, Chekhov is like a little music that is intimate and somewhat bittersweet. As for myself, what I find in it is, on the contrary, a lot of fresh air, a huge violence but also a remarkable tenderness. A mad love of his characters. A love of their violence, their stupidity, their beauty, their excesses or their fears. For me this love is like an ethical code, a work principle: it's about inviting to love others whilst remaining ruthlessly clear-sighted. This is the challenge of cinema I would like to fulfill.

CHEKHOV, THE CIRCUS TENT, THE COMPANY, ALL THAT UNIVERSE... ISN'T THERE IN ALL THIS, FOR YOU, A KIND OF NOSTALGIA?

Absolutely not. These men and women are beings of the here and now, fully committed to the present, be it physically, emotionally, intellectually. The end of a world doesn't exist for them. Children will still be born, old lovers will still love each other, the circus tent will still be raised under other climes. Because this is also what touring theatre is about: to seek to share rather than to shine, to seek human contact rather than strive for excellence. Of course these are people that are struggling, in a society where the values thrust upon us are success, perfection, order, withdrawal. But to me to struggle, with all your being, against the triumphant return of these values is certainly not to be nostalgic, on the contrary it is a present fight. Mind you, when I'm saying this, it all sounds frighteningly serious. In fact, if there is a struggle, it is through laughter, without taking ourselves seriously. Because their utopia is not viable, ultimately they are bound to hit the brick wall. So, true, it is not viable, but their adventure is fraught with life.

Interview by Claire Vassé



CAST

FRANÇOIS **François FEHNER**
MARION **Marion BOUVAREL**
MR.DÉLOYAL **Marc BARBÉ**
MONA **Adèle HAENEL**
INÈS **Inès FEHNER**
LOLA **Lola DUEÑAS**
CHIGNOL **Philippe CATAIX**
MIREILLE **Christelle LEHALLIER**
DE CHAUNAC **Thierry de CHAUNAC**
KRISTA **Nathalie HAUWELLE**
PIERROT **Jérôme BOUVET**
LE JEUNE **Simon POULAIN**
JOSS **Ibrahima BAH**
DAPHNÉ **Daphné DUMONS**
RÉGIS **Florian LABRIET**

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CREW

Screenplay **Léa FEHNER, Catherine PAILLÉ
and Brigitte SY**

Editing **Julien CHIGOT**

Cinematography **Julien POUPARD AFC**

Sound **Julien SICART**

Sound Editing **Pierre BARIAUD**

Mixing **Olivier GOINARD**

Original Soundtrack **Philippe CATAIX**

Production Design **Pascale CONSIGNY**

Costumes **Caroline DELANNOY
and Sylvie HEGUIAPHAL**

Line Producer **Luc MARTINAGE**

First AD **Hadrien BICHET**

Produced by **BUS Films - Philippe LIÉGEOIS**

In co-production by **FRANCE 3 CINÉMA**

In association with **PYRAMIDE and INDÉFILMS 3**

With the participation of **CANAL+, FRANCE TÉLÉVISIONS
and CENTRE NATIONAL DU CINÉMA
ET DE L'IMAGE ANIMÉE**

**AQUITAINE, LANGUEDOC-ROUSSILLON
and MIDI PYRÉNÉES**
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PYRAMIDE

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