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NOBODY'S HERO

A FILM BY
ALAIN GUIRAUDIE



CG CINÉMA presents



NOÉMIE
LVOVSKY

JEAN-CHARLES
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NOBODY'S HERO

A FILM BY
ALAIN GUIRAUDIE

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Clermont-Ferrand, central France. Médéric (35) meets and falls in love with middle-aged sex worker Isadora, who is married. When the city center is the scene of a terrorist attack, Selim, a young, homeless guy, provokes a wave of paranoia by taking refuge in Médéric's building. Sympathizing with Selim, crazy about Isadora, Mederic's life suddenly turns into a mess...



INTERVIEW WITH ALAIN GUIRAUDIE

/ *Nobody's Hero* is your first urban movie, shot entirely in winter and mostly in interiors. Where did the desire to make this movie come from?

After two fairly dark films, I wanted to return to comedy while staying rooted in current events and today's social reality, which is not exactly the most upbeat. My earlier films were based on very definite formal choices. I wanted to make something lighter, combining complexity and the absurdity of our modern way of life. I have always been a great admirer of films like Renoir's *The Rules of the Game* and Almodóvar's *What Have I Done To Deserve This?*—movies in which drama comes from comedy and vice-versa. I also pictured it as vaudeville theatre. I thought it would be interesting to scale down the great debates and hot-button issues of our world to a more modest, day-to-day level, like someone's apartment.

/ Why set the film in the city of Clermont-Ferrand?

Firstly because I like that dark, convivial city. It's the heart of France, a city that embodies, in my eyes, the history and deep roots of France: there is a statue of Vercingetorix on horseback on Place de Jaude. Visually, besides its darkness, the city offers glimpses of the surrounding plateaux and mountains. It's a city in the countryside. Beyond those considerations, I also made the movie in town to key into what's going on in the world. There is a contrast here between old-school and modern France. I usually prefer my films to have a timeless feel, but I wanted this one to be firmly set in the present day. That is more obvious in a city, with its signs, cars, posters all grounding the film in a specific period.

/ The film opens with the encounter between a man, Médéric, and a woman,



Isadora, who is a prostitute. And immediately after, their encounter is foiled or thrown off course by a terrorist attack.

Coitus is interrupted, yes! There is a collision between folks' humdrum lives and the course of history. Beyond the drama, an extended love and sex scene becomes vaudeville comedy. Médéric would like coitus not to be interrupted. A terrorist attack is no reason for life to grind to a halt! And life grinding to a halt won't make any difference anyway. But the incident eventually alters his perception of people and strangers around him. The film plots a course between desire and paranoia.

/ Cinematically, what interested you in the idea of the terrorist attack?

It's a threat and a reality we have been living with for five years. Cinema in France (and elsewhere) has rarely dealt with the precise state of anxiety and suspicion that we are confronted with. I experienced recent terrorist attacks (the Bataclan, Strasbourg, Nice) in a manner similar to that of Médéric, except that I was far away when it happened. Like most people, I experienced them via the television. Médéric is riveted to TV News even though the attack took place five hundred meters from his front door. Cinematically, it produces a meta effect, a screen within a screen, multiple levels of

fiction, between what Médéric sees with his own eyes and what he sees on TV. It's surprising, as if seeing your daily reality, town, street and building on TV lends it greater reality. New technology and the omnipresence of news create that meta effect on the reality of our own lives. These terrorist attacks are conceived as such: they exploit social media, they play on cultural perceptions to break down bonds. Terrorism is a media battle. It scrambles perceptions of other people. In the film, Selim initially pays the price for this. Through him, the attacks impregnate the whole movie.

Arab origin, who finds shelter downstairs in Médéric's building. His arrival provokes commotions in the lives of the other characters. How did you envision him?

He's the homeless guy that nobody knows how to deal with. After reporting him to the police, Médéric winds up letting him crash at his place. A homeless guy in the building pisses him off but he has a humanitarian urge. In his dealings with Selim, he veers between guilt, moral duty, empathy and, most likely, desire for an unfamiliar being as well. Being of Arab origin, Selim is also the victim of heightened suspicions after the attack. He himself has feelings that swing between defiance and desire. I wanted the

/ Selim is the young, homeless guy of





film to maintain depths of complexity in the characters and in their relationships to others. I played on clichés a lot, accentuating them at times, contradicting them at others, to counter any convictions the audience might have. It's a playful and unsettling movie.

/ The film touches on the fear of foreigners—in this case, Arabs—of whom Selim is the incarnation.

I imagine that everybody of Arab origin in France had similar experiences to Selim's after the terrorist attacks. At the time, I heard people speaking about Islam in a curious way, even suggesting that Islam was inherently violent. Muslims became the ultimate «other.» In Western societies, the Muslim is now perceived as a potential danger. Recently, I have also been hearing people talk about the Christian west and Arab east being on a collision course due to the «clash of civilizations.» I find the idea of a clash of civilizations very pernicious. The class struggle is glossed over once more, while our differences are exploited in order to erase everything that unites us and constitutes a threat to the established order. Naturally, I stand with an exploited Muslim Arab rather than with an exploitative white atheist. But the fear instilled by the attacks is all the more toxic for being irrational. The film takes that idea into account, and even a relatively open-minded and intelligent urbanite like Médéric allows himself to

be overwhelmed by that fear of the other. Beyond the paranoia, the film also plays on representations and clichés of Arabs, who are also erotic beings, fantasy figures in both homosexual and heterosexual literature, which is a throwback to the colonial period. It was good to take on a young Arab who is tossed around by events but eventually proves more assertive than initially seemed likely. After being seen as a threat, then as an object of desire, at the very end, he turns out to be full of desire. To my mind, Selim and Charlène embody marginalized youth who are nonetheless very alive and active in French society. They are modern France.

/ There is also what Isadora says in one of the movie's most beautiful scenes, putting her finger on the distress of young people who want to die and blow themselves up.

Besides talk of the dangers of Islam, each attack provokes a raft of comments about so-called Islamo-leftism. People have been seen to attack intellectuals who try to explain the process, the trajectory that leads young people (of Arab origin or otherwise) to jihadism. Former prime minister Manuel Valls's quote about «explaining being an attempt to excuse» stands out. I don't see, however, how it is possible to do anything other than start by trying to understand. For me, it's a real issue that young people kill their fellow citizens and even blow themselves up

in Allah's name. And I am aware that this is not just an issue for Muslims, but also for me and us. It speaks to a failure of social policy. A political failure, period. And a systemic blind alley. It also speaks to a great existential crisis in our societies.

/ The film opens with an encounter between a man in his thirties and 55-year-old Isadora, who is a prostitute. The man, Médéric, is anti-prostitution and wants to «do it for free.» What interested you in prostitution and the character of Isadora?

Isadora is the female equivalent of Selim. The young Muslim and the aging prostitute: two pariahs. A prostitute is an objectified woman, who can be bought so you can do what you want with her. Médéric announces early on that he is anti-prostitution, against the idea of buying another person's body, and that is a viewpoint I share. I do not reject a woman's (or man's) freedom to prostitute themselves, but in actual fact people who have recourse to prostitutions encountered sexual assault in childhood or, at the very least, are always people in need, people with no other choice available to them. In this case, the prostitute is also over fifty, agrees to make love with a stranger for free, and is so expressive in orgasm that Médéric wonders if she is not faking it. Actually, the roles are reversed. Very soon, Isadora is using Médéric as a sex-toy, thinking only of

her own orgasm. She even winds up asking him for money. I really enjoyed dreaming up the life of a prostitute, between cliché and what I imagine is possible—a prostitute who likes sex with a husband who is not bothered by how she earns a living. But it's a long time since I saw a white prostitute on the streets. It almost seems to be a profession reserved for Africans and women from Eastern Europe or Asia.

/ Was Noémie Lvovsky the obvious choice for you?

I really liked Noémie's performances in her earlier films and, for Isadora, I wasn't looking for a young romantic lead. I was looking for a woman in her fifties, with the body that goes with her age. It's not a role for the faint of heart, and Noémie agreed to play along. I was also looking for an actress who would play Isadora as strong and determined opposite her violent husband. My only fear was that Noémie might be a little bit cerebral for the part, and the Isadora I had imagined would lose her candor. She worked on that, on playing Isadora without ulterior motives. An upfront, what-you-see-is-what-you-get Isadora.

/ This idea was already there in *Stranger by the Lake*: sometimes we are drawn to what kills us or hurts us. Desire is complex. And Isadora's desire, or her pleasure, is to stay with Gérard.



The film tells the story of a prostitute attempting to break free, experiencing a kind of enchanted interlude, so we hope she'll leave her violent husband and quit working. But no, she goes back to her husband. Partly because it's hard to start over in your mid-fifties and also because there are issues with Médéric. Basically, Isadora has her husband under her skin. It's no coincidence that she's been with him for thirty years. And then there is the dramatic aspect of the movie: it's also a good thing to go against audience expectations, and my own expectations. It's more interesting to wonder why things don't pan out as you'd like, even if there's every reason to want them to, rather than smugly enjoying a resolution closer to the one you would have chosen.

/ The first and very long sex scene in the movie, shot in a hotel room, reverses the dynamic between Médéric and Isadora.

In that scene, and in many other situations in the movie, we switch things around. The love scene begins in a fairly slow, solemn fashion and veers toward comedy. Isadora climaxes so exuberantly that it's easy to buy into the cliché of her faking orgasm to satisfy the guy. Later, we'll see that it is how she comes. In the first scene, the length also had its importance. Sex scenes in films are often slapdash, as if it's mandatory, but we can skip through it with jumpcuts and a nod and a wink, like «yeah, we all know what happens here.» In those scenes (more than others), I question my gaze on the actors, I wonder about the perspective, and what is

shown or not. The tricky part of showing a sex act is that either you call on the memories of those involved, or clichés. I think there is a homosexual way of shooting heterosexual love scenes, which is present throughout the history of cinema and is quite interesting, most likely because it is less polarized.

/ How does it create a difference?

In *Stranger by the Lake*, I dug into personal experience. Even if it is very idealized, I really took on the depiction of sex and its authenticity. Here, I am more on the outside, feeling at times a lot like Médéric. And then Isadora. I am more playful, toying with the

clichés. Actually, my real straight sex scenes are often comedic, while the gay scenes are more serious. It was way harder for me to film gay sex scenes than straight ones.

/ Let's talk about Médéric. Who is he? How did you cast him?

I was looking for an everyday, modern, young man. To begin with, I thought the description applied to every thirtysomething actor in Paris. In fact, we had to see a lot of them before finding the right one. You soon realize that an everyday person doesn't really exist and when you find someone verging on that, he is not very interesting. As often

happens, I found the opposite of what I was looking for. Jean-Charles Clichet is not exactly everyday, nor so very young, and hardly conforms to standards for the modern male.

/ What is also funny about Médéric is that he is so «average.» Nothing really stands out about him.

I like the singularity in the everyday. Because I find it very singular. I like characters who stand for a strand of society but who are singular. In my recent movies, I have often struggled with the casting. When you are looking for factory workers, farmers, bakers or working-class characters, or just people who look like they live in the regions, it's a bind. Actors often look like hipsters, and even when they aren't hipsters, they try to look like one, maybe because they think it will open more doors. It's kind of sad. So this time, I thought we were dealing with our core market. Every actor could be Médéric. But no! I saw lots of them. I had to find the absolutely singular guy, and there is real singularity in Jean-Charles. Charm. As soon as I met him, he was the obvious choice.

/ There are different registers of language cohabiting in the movie. Dora Tillier embodies Macron's «start-up nation.» Her character is also very invasive, constantly trying to break down the boundaries between the private and the professional.



Yes, Florence is a very modern young woman, your typical Macronian start-upper. She could also work in film. Always buzzing, ultra-dynamic, with no separation between work and her private life. Even from a societal standpoint, she is on point. When Médéric says he's gay to apologize for not wanting her, she answers, «As if that should stop you from sleeping with me?» Initially, Florence represented Médéric's professional environment, the world of digital PR and consulting, which I basically know nothing about. She is also the hot young woman that everybody considers desirable, and whom Médéric rejects. She was therefore a purely comedic character. In the end, she became more than that, touching even. And Doria is largely responsible for the character's evolution. I saw her for the first time in Benoit Fougard's film *Yves*, in which she was truly awesome. I immediately pictured her as Florence.





/ The film ends on Charlène running. Is she the promise of a collective surge?

Charlène is the young woman from an «ethnic minority» as they say nowadays. She represents a section of youth who want to get ahead, who dream of holding down a job and growing up to make their own rules. When we were casting, I had the idea of looking for a young black actress, like Selim's little sister. Even though it stems from our colonial past, we are a multicultural nation. In this film, in which I try to depict modern France in a few characters, we needed a Charlène. As for the end, seeing the four of them go back inside the building

after finding a funny kind of equilibrium is a kind of happy ending, as well as a letdown. Nothing is settled. There is promise but it's all a bit loose, too conformist. We're hungry for more until Charlène's return reshuffles the pack and cranks it all up again. And the young woman running toward the camera is an opening on new possibilities. ■

PARIS, JANUARY 2022





CAST

Médéric **Jean-Charles Clichet** • Isadora **Noémie Lvovsky** • Selim **Iliès Kadri** • Mr. Coq **Michel Masiero** • Florence **Doria Tillier** • Gérard **Renaud Rutten** • Mr. El Alaoui **Philippe Fretun** • Mrs. El Alaoui **Farida Rahouadj** • Charlène **Miveck Packa** • Mr. Renard **Yves-Robert Viala** • Mr. Petit **Patrick Ligardes**

CREW

Directed by **Alain Guiraudie** • Written by **Alain Guiraudie** with the collaboration of **Laurent Lunetta** • Cinematography **Hélène Louvart** • Editing **Jean-Christophe Hym** • Sound **Philippe Grivel** • Set design **Emmanuelle Duplay** • Costumes **Khadija Zeggai** • Make up **Natali Tabareau-Vieville** • Casting **Coralie Amédéo** • Mixing **Nathalie Vidal** • Music **Xavier Boussiron** • Special Effects **Nora Berecoechea, Umédia** • 1st Assistant director **Guillaume Plumejeau** • Script Advisor **Laurent Lunetta** • Unit Manager **Raphaël Launay** • Production Manager **Damien Saussol** • Post-production Manager **Delphine Passant** • Produced by **par Charles Gillibert** • In Coproduction with **Arte France Cinéma, Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes Cinéma, Umédia** • With the participation of **Films du Losange, Arte France, OCS** • In association with **Cinémage 15, Ufund** • With the support of **Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée, the Région Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes Cinéma**, in partnership with **CNC, the Région Île-de-France, the Procirep-Angoa** • French Distribution and International Sales **Les Films du Losange**

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FILMOGRAPHIES

NOÉMIE LVOVSKY

(Selective filmography)

2020 - **Working Girls** by Frédéric Fonteyne, Anne Paulicevich • 2019 - **How To Be a Good Wife** by Martin Provost • **Invisibles** by Louis-Julien Petit • 2017 - **Tomorrow and Thereafter** by Noémie Lvovsky • **Based On a True Story** by Roman Polanski • 2016 - **Chocolat** by Roschdy Zem • 2015 - **Summertime** by Catherine Corsini • 2014 - **Jacky in the Kingdom of Women** by Riad Sattouf • **The Days Come** by Romain Goupil • 2014 - **Granny's Funeral** by Bruno Podalydès • 2011 - **Camille Rewinds** by Noémie Lvovsky • **17 Girls** by Muriel and Delphine Coulin • **House of Tolerance** by Bertrand Bonello • **Farewell My Queen** by Benoit Jacquot • 2010 - **Copacabana** by Marc Fitoussi • 2009 - **The French Kissers** by Riad Sattouf • 2008 - **A Simple Heart** by Marion Laine • 2006 - **Actress** by Valéria Bruni Tedeschi • **Let's Dance** by Noémie Lvovsky • 2004 - **Kings and Queen** by Arnaud Desplechin • 2002 - **Feelings** by Noémie Lvovsky • 1999 - **Life Is For Loving** by Noémie Lvovsky • 1997 - **Little Girls** by Noémie Lvovsky

JEAN-CHARLES CLICHET

2021 - **Presidents** by Anne Fontaine • **Anaïs in Love** by Charline Bourgeois-Taquet • 2019 - **Ibrahim** by Samir Guesmi • **Ulysse & Mona** by Sébastien Betbeder • **Snowlidays** by Joséphine de Meaux • **Our Happy Holiday** by Patrick Cassir • 2018 - **One Nation, One King** by Pierre Schoeller • 2017 - **Simon & Théodore** by Mikael Buch • **K.O** by Fabrice Gobert • 2016 - **The Apple of My Eye** by Axelle Ropert • **Sophie's Misfortunes** by Christophe Honoré • **Things to Come** by Mia Hansen-Love • 2015 - **You'll Never Walk Alone** by Charlotte de Turckheim • 2014 - **Counter Brief** by Jean-Michel Ribes • **It's Complicated** by Manu Payet and Rodolphe Lauga • **Paris Follies** by Marc Fitoussi • 2013 - **Just a Sigh** by Jérôme Bonnell • **Grand départ** by Nicolas Mercier • 2011 **Beloved** by Christophe Honoré • **A Burning Hot Summer** by Philippe Garrel

DORIA TILLIER

2021 - **L'Origine du Mal** by Sébastien Marnier • 2020 - **Presidents** by Anne Fontaine • **Canailles** by Christophe Offenstein • 2018 - **Yves** by Benoît Forgeard • **La Belle Epoque** by Nicolas Bedos (Cesar Nomination 2020 for Best Actress) • 2017 - **Nothing to Hide** by Fred Cavayé • 2016 - **Mr & Mrs Adelman** by Nicolas Bedos • 2008 - **Bloody Flowers** by Julien Richard Thomson

ILIÈS KADRI

Nobody's Hero by Alain Guiraudie is his first part in a feature film.

RENAUD RUTTEN

2021 - **Les Gentils** by Olivier Ringer • 2016 - **Let The Girls Play** by Julien Hallard • 2015 - **Max & Leon** by Jonathan Barre • 2013 - **Goal of the dead** by Benjamin Rocher and Thierry Poiraud • **Scouting for Zebras** by Benoît Mariage • 2012 - **A Song for Mama** by Joël Franka • **The Love Clinic** by Artus de Penguern • 2011 - **Mythos** by Denis Thybaud • **Bullhead** by Michaël R. Roskam • 2009 - **Little Nicolas** by Laurent Tirard • 2008 - **Une chaîne pour deux** by Frédéric Ledoux • **Eldorado** by Bouli Lanners • 2005 - **Dikkenek** by Olivier Van Hoofstadt • 2004 - **The Ax** by Costa-Gavras

ALAIN GUIRAUDIE

LONG FEATURE FILMS

- 2021 - **Nobody' Hero**
- 2016 - **Staying Vertical**
- 2013 - **Stranger by The Lake**
- 2009 - **The King of Escape**
- 2005 - **Time Has Come**
- 2003 - **No Rest for the Braves**

MEDIUM FEATURE

- 2001 - **That Old Dream that Moves**
- 2000 - **Sunshine for the Scoundrels**

SHORT FILMS

- 1997 - **La Force des choses**
- 1994 - **Tout droit jusqu'au matin**
- 1990 - **Les héros sont immortels**



