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Telluride  
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MOSTRA INTERNAZIONALE  
D'ARTE CINEMATOGRAFICA  
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Venezia 71 – Competition

# THE PRICE OF FAME

## LA RANÇON DE LA GLOIRE

a film by XAVIER BEAUVOIS

starring

BENOIT POELVOORDE

ROSCHDY ZEM

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# SYNOPSIS

On the shores of Lake Geneva lies the small Swiss town of Vevey. It's the end of the 70s.

On his release from prison, Eddy - a 40-year-old Belgian small time crook - is met by his friend Osman. They have made a deal: Osman will let Eddy stay in his shed and in exchange, Eddy will take care of his 7-year-old daughter Samira while her mother is in hospital.

It's the Christmas season, but their shared, grinding poverty has made Eddy quite bitter. Then Charlie Chaplin's death is announced on the television, as well as the true extent of his fabulous wealth. Eddy starts daydreaming... and comes up with a crazy idea: what if he stole the actor's corpse and demanded a ransom from the family?

# INTERVIEW WITH XAVIER BEAUVOIS

## **How did the project (for *The Price of Fame*) begin?**

With Chaplin, quite simply. One day, my wife and I watched *Limelight* (1952) on DVD. That was at least five years ago, before *Of Gods and Men*. We may know Chaplin, but we are always surprised to discover in his films a limitless mine of ideas. When he started, cinema was hardly established, movies lasted two minutes... he made it all up. Chaplin was the first to truly explore the possibilities of cinema. That's why I wanted to include in the film the image showing him with a shovel, digging the foundations of the studio of Associated Artists, the shovel echoing that with which the two protagonists will dig up his coffin... Perhaps it's even by association of ideas, the image of digging the foundations of cinema that made me think of the case of the stolen coffin.

## **Is it a story you knew well?**

No, I only knew of it very vaguely. My wife, Marie-Julie Maille - who edited *The Price of Fame* as well as *Of Gods and Men* - had never heard of it. At first she thought I was kidding, that it was a hoax. Some quick Internet research confirmed otherwise. Chaplin died on Christmas day 1977, in his mansion in Vevey, Switzerland. Three months after his burial, two poor immigrants, one Polish, the other Bulgarian - two little tramps ('*charlots*' in French) the prosecutor would say during the trial - had the idea of stealing his coffin and demanding a ransom from the family... I said to myself : *voilà* a movie!

## **Have Chaplin and his films always been important to you?**

Of course. When you're young, there are heroes who make you dream, who send you on a journey: Fantômas, Tarzan... But when you discover Chaplin, it's immediately obvious that you are confronting a master. That's what I wanted the film to show: Chaplin's genius as an actor and director. There is a moment from *City Lights* (1931). There is also an extract from *The Cure* (1917). The idea was given to me by Jean Douchet. What I liked was that Chaplin exhibits his body, his legs, his torso. You see him complete. He witnesses a rough massage by the edge of a swimming pool. He doesn't do anything: no grimaces, no gestures... He watches, that's all. It's a lesson in cinema. I would even say a lesson in modern cinema.

## **What was the first step, once you had decided to make a film from this incredible crime story?**

At first it was necessary to dig deeper. I wanted to know the whole story. I called my friend Jean-Eric Troubat, who works in the police and who had participated in the writing of *The Young Lieutenant* (2005). Thanks to him, I was able to make contact with the Swiss police. They told me that they couldn't help us without the agreement of the Chaplin family. I turned to them next, through the intermediary of a foundation. The reply was immediate and positive, with no conditions. The success of *Of Gods and Men* doubtless made things easier... I had full access to the archives. I was able to read the correspondence between the robbers and Oona Chaplin, the director's last wife, and even to see the place where he was reburied.

<sup>1</sup> *Charlot* in French is Charlie Chaplin's nickname but is also a pejorative for a good-for-nothing.

### **What was your attitude towards the adaptation?**

Very quickly it became clear to Etienne Comar - with whom I co-wrote *Of Gods and Men* - and me that the film had to go beyond the crime story genre. The plan conceived by these two men is so outlandish that we can't even really be angry with them. It was in thinking about this that I began to see the story in a different light, that of a humorous tale. I thought that for Eddy and Osman, stealing this coffin could be the equivalent of finding Aladdin's lamp. Once unearthed, the genie Chaplin comes out of its bottle. That's the significance of the aerial shot that follows the cemetery scene: the all powerful, benevolent spirit of Chaplin floats above his own body. At one point, the butler says: "Monsieur is back center-stage." He is happy because, since the departure of his boss, nothing much happens... Chaplin feels no anger toward his robbers; on the contrary he is grateful because they allow him to make a come-back! Therefore he grants them one wish each. Eddy is fifty years old, he is unemployed, he hasn't made anything of his life, and all of a sudden he is put on stage and applauded. As for Osman, he finds a way to pay for his wife's operation.

### **Did it really happen like this?**

No. It's all made up. There was no sick wife. I created an urgency that did not exist in the true story.

### **What was the real situation of the two robbers?**

One was craftier than the other, who wasn't even aware of the real amount of the ransom demanded. Later, his wife excused herself to Mme Chaplin, who wanted to forgive. I feel uneasy speaking about them because they have succeeded in being forgotten. I don't want my film to draw attention to them. On the other hand, I can say that both of them had fled Communism. Which is funny because Chaplin had fled the United States for the opposite reason, because he was suspected of being a communist.

### **In the film, the Chaplin family faces the events serenely.**

In truth, they were rather tense. The affair dragged on and on and the robbers threatened to shoot at Chaplin's children... who, for their own part, were only too proud to go to school accompanied by their bodyguards!

### **In the end, what does *The Price of Fame* keep from the original story?**

When it came time to tackle the writing, I didn't want to dive back into the dossier. I worked only from memory. There always comes a moment when you have to forget all that you know. It is therefore in the end less about the facts than places or details that found their place in the film. The trial for example: the courtroom that you see is the one in which the duo was tried. Equally, I kept certain extracts of the defense's plea, the long citation of *Hamlet* by the prosecutor, the surprising - and correct! - use of the word "*charlot*"... And moreover I filmed in Chaplin's actual mansion. Can you imagine? It was magical... Chaplin moved there in the middle of the 1950s and lived there until his death. For years there have been plans to turn it into a museum. Luckily for me, complications delayed the project. Everything is therefore just as it was: the library, the piano, the bedroom...

### **Is the cemetery in the film also where Chaplin is buried?**

Yes. We filmed twelve meters from his tomb! I sometimes had the impression that I was being watched, I was tempted to turn around... The tomb is very simple. It is just inscribed "Charlie Chaplin." Without even a "Sir." His mansion too, while immense, has nothing ostentatious about it.

### **What were the difficulties and problems related to reconstituting the end of 1970s?**

The principal issue was to avoid assaulting the spectator with too ostentatious a desire for precision. It's a period that I lived through: I didn't want to see too much "cinema." Of course everything had to be perfect: the cars, the clothes, the trucks... But this perfection had to be discrete enough to give the illusion to the spectator that the story, even if it is not taking place today, is happening now, in a way. In particular I wanted Eddy and Osman to be dressed in such a way that no one would turn a hair if they passed by, today. It was a delicate balance to find: how to reconstitute without doing too much...

### **It's the first time that you've made a period movie. And the first comedy.**

I had wanted to for a long time. I knew it was harder to make someone laugh than to make them cry. It takes courage, you must dare to take risks. There has always been humor in my films, but it was a "normal" humor. It was the humor belonging to the characters, that which anybody dares in any situation, especially when the situation is serious, in order to take a little distance. For *The Price of Fame* it was necessary to find the humor of the film and not be satisfied with touches of humor in the film.

### **Roschdy Zem plays Osman, the naïve one, and Benoît Poelvoorde plays Eddy, the crafty one. The former acted in *Don't Forget You're Going to Die* (1995) and *The Young Lieutenant* (2005), while *The Price of Fame* marks your first collaboration with the second. Where did the idea come from to cast them together?**

They are two great and very different actors: Roschdy is like a chauffeur-driven Rolls and Benoît is like a Porsche turbo... Roschdy is very calm. He begins to think far in advance. His character exists before the first turn of the crank. On set, Roschdy was Osman. Whatever happens, as long as I don't say "cut," there is no Roschdy Zem, just his character, ready to react to the least unforeseen event. And when it's finished he leaves his character in the dressing room, to use an expression he likes.

I needed an exceptional actor to interpret Eddy. I immediately thought of Benoît Poelvoorde. I didn't know him personally. I sent him the screenplay. Two days later he was at my house, in Normandy, and we discussed the film... This kind of engagement is fundamental to me. I couldn't have imagined that we would get along so well. We really found each other. We share numerous passions, and perhaps a little madness. Our backgrounds are similar too. Today, I consider him like a brother.

It's enough to ask Benoît to turn a situation into a gag and he does it. Like in the scene in the telephone booth, where he pinches his nose. The same scene and the same text, without Benoît's comic work wouldn't be funny. Benoît manages

to embody all Eddy's moods. If we looked at each frame from *The Price of Fame*, we wouldn't find two where he has the same expression. Benoît allows me to expand the limits of a film. On my side, I make fairly long shots to give the actors space.

### **Is it important to you to give a place to the unexpected?**

Of course. Even if the screenplay is perfect, filming serves to destroy it, to go somewhere else. Try as we might to imagine scenes in the finest detail, reality is always more complex, also more intelligent. Once things are in place, the energy is such that it puts everything in question. You then realize that scenes no longer function. I had for example intended to illustrate the fantasies of Eddy and Osman imagining their life after getting the ransom. Eddy imagined himself reading, wearing a bathrobe, in a palace, with servants playing the piano just for him. Osman saw himself in a magnificent house with his wife and daughter. I had thought of a similar scene in *Dodes'ka-den* (1970) by Kurosawa. On the day of shooting, these scenes lost all sense to me... I spoke to Benoît about it. "*Why wouldn't they listen to music?*" he said. That seemed a good idea to me: instead of illustrating the fantasies of Eddy and Osman, suggest them by music. We flipped through his iPod and came upon *Zoo Be Zoo Be Zoo*. I suggested that he improvise the scene starting from that song. During the first two takes, Roschdy didn't want to dance. When he stood up at the end of the third take, I thought he was going to leave! But no, he started to dance... Those are the moments I like best, more than the writing, more than the editing: where the actor makes a gift of an unexpected action or gesture.

### **How did you find Seli Gmach, who plays Osman's daughter?**

The casting director posted an announcement on the Internet and organized auditions that I then watched. Seli's was the fourth. She told us that she was originally from Tunisia, that she had been adopted by a French family and that she lived in a tiny village with three houses, two hours from Dijon. She was so extraordinary that I didn't go any further. I decided to go and see her at her home. Roschdy insisted on coming along with me. We did a few takes in her parents' kitchen. On set, after two hours, Seli had the self-assurance of Catherine Deneuve! She immediately understood that, rather than go off by herself and practise her lines in a corner, it was important to discuss with Poelvoorde and Roschdy, to have fun with them... She knew where and how to stand.

### **And Peter Coyote, for the role of the butler, Crooker?**

Bridgette Moidon had prepared a thick dossier for me. The first name I came upon was Peter Coyote and immediately I thought: an excellent idea! It was my first experience with an American star. He is an irreproachable professional, with great talent and great kindness.

**In addition to comedy, the singularity of *The Price of Fame* compared to your previous films is the presence of a second parallel story: on the one hand you relate the theft of Chaplin's coffin, on the other, Eddy's initiation into the circus. Were both these stories there from the start?**

It seemed evident straight away: Charlie Chaplin and the circus. Chaplin often went to the circus, in Switzerland, just as a spectator. When he entered, everyone stood up to salute him and pay him homage. He was accustomed to sit in the first row. At the end of the show, a clown would come and offer him a bundle of straw, a symbol of prosperity, and Chaplin would leave for home, with his bundle of straw...

It was while thinking of that that I decided to refocus the story on the character and destiny of Eddy. At the beginning, when he gets out of prison, the guard says something fundamental: "*C'mon, time to stop playing the clown now.*" For that scene I had a double door installed so that the prison interior seemed totally dark. The last shot corresponds to the beginning. Eddy has become a real clown, we see him from behind, entering a cone of blinding light. Caroline Champetier rented every kind of light she could find in Switzerland... How someone passes from a black hole to the stage lights: that's the story I wanted to tell with this film.

**The desecration of a coffin is transformed by magic into an homage to the memory of its occupant.**

Of course. There is that magic trick. But it is less unreal than you might believe. At heart it's nothing more than the world of performance... Yet, I didn't want to speak directly about cinema, I didn't want Eddy to become an actor, for example, even if the film speaks of cinema through Chaplin. With the circus, it is still what I'm talking about - and about myself too, in a certain way, as you do each time you make a film. In *The Young Lieutenant*, I was quite fond of each character: the father, the asshole, the young lieutenant... I don't say that it must be conscious, by the way. But I see a bit of myself in the character of Eddy. For a long time, I was reproached for clowning around, as they say. Today, I have the impression that I'm still clowning, yet I'm applauded for it. The circus saves Eddy and the cinema saved me. Without the cinema, I don't know where I would be today. And I'm not the only one in that position.

In *The Price of Fame*, the circus symbolizes the power of cinema, which is the power of any art: to offer a person the means to elevate themselves. The cinema and the circus give access to a world without limits other than those of the imagination... You sit down, and suddenly you are projected into the middle of the jungle with Tarzan and wild animals... It's sublime! It is also ephemeral. The circus arrives when it wants; it transforms the town, and then goes away. In my film too it turns up unexpectedly. It is necessary that the spectator be thrown off balance by that irruption, that he asks himself what's happening and where the affair of the coffin is going... even that he has the impression that I have forgotten that story a bit along the way.

**Do you also like the character of Osman?**

Of course I do. And fortunately so! In a way that's the discourse of the film, to express the tenderness that I feel for these two characters.

**At a certain moment, Eddy is seated on a bench at the edge of a lake. All of a sudden, a monkey appears. It's a fairly Chaplinesque scene.**

Is he taking the monkey back to the circus? Or is the monkey taking him there? We don't know. Let's say that chance has taken things in hand. I don't know how I had that idea but I had to stick to it because it's not easy to bring a monkey into Switzerland! It was a female, Tibie. She worked in a circus that had burned down. When we met, I took her in my arms - or maybe it was she who took me into hers. I felt something unique: it is not an animal, it's a sister... Tibie showed me all her teeth: very impressive! Monkeys are incredibly strong. You must remain calm and speak softly in their presence which, on a film set, is not easy.

**How were the circus scenes filmed?**

I called on a real circus, very popular in Switzerland, the Cirque Nock. The most difficult part was finding equipment from the period. Luckily, the Cirque Nock had kept its old material: cages, barriers, trucks, the dressing rooms. It was Eugene, one of Chaplin's sons, who put me in touch with them. He had been their manager. I found him so charming that I wrote a role just for him.

**The scene in the circus where Poelvoorde fights in slow motion with another clown must have demanded an enormous amount of rehearsal.**

Benoît never rehearsed! I understood that it wouldn't be easy for him to play a clown. He didn't want to hear it. When I saw the act at the Cirque Nock, where the clowns play gangsters dressed in suits, without red noses or spotted pants, I said to myself not only was it perfect for the film, but that it would reassure Benoît. I sent him a video. He didn't want to see it. On the scheduled day, the clowns did the act in front of him. He looked at me and said: "Right!" And we shot the scene. I don't know how he did it!

**Could you say a word about your collaboration with Caroline Champetier, who has been the director of photography of all your films since *Don't Forget You're Going to Die*?**

Caroline pushes everyone 150%. If I change plans at the last minute, she finds the solution without hesitation. I have to say that no situation can overwhelm her, even a blizzard, as we had at the end of *Of Gods and Men*. She is a rock. And I love to watch her work.

**Contrary to your earlier films, music is very present in *The Price of Fame*.**

Certain films demand it, others don't. *The Young Lieutenant* didn't need it. In *Of Gods and Men*, I added it after understanding the role it played in the life of the monks. I always knew that *The Price of Fame* would need a lot of it. You don't want to evoke the ghost of Chaplin without music. It played such an important part in his films... *The Price of Fame* is a film about cinema. The music is necessary to un hinge the crime story and move the spectator toward wonder. It was from that perspective that I thought, obviously, of Michel Legrand, to whom I have listened over and over again at home for years. My daughter is two years old and she knows all the songs from *Donkey Skin* by heart. I called him, he saw the film and invited us to his house. We polished the edit with him. Then we started over from the beginning, scene by scene - Michel playing piano and recording his ideas as we went along. Once the film was finished, we went over it again, putting always questioning what we had. Then I let him work on the orchestration alone.

**Music covers certain dialogues, when Eddy explains to Osman his plan, under the rain, beginning with that great reply: “We’re going to ask for money from a friend.”**

That was Michel’s idea. It allowed me to show something Chaplinesque: silent cinema with music. I said to Michel that for the beginning of the scene I needed a moving melody, like a serpent that winds around the two characters. I gave the example of the snake that whispers in Mowgli’s ear in *The Jungle Book*... He found it straight away.

***The Price of Fame* is a title with a double meaning which summarizes well the mix of irreverence and piety which is at the heart of all your film, and which each renders a bit more manifest, as if each clarified that articulation of outrage and the sacred which seems to sum up your vision of art.**

In Eddy’s story, there is something magical which touches me. My own personal genie was Jean Douchet. I don’t know what I would have done if I had not been lucky enough to meet him. I believe indeed that I always return to that question: salvation and mourning, to be saved by art... I believe that art elevates. Beauty has a sacred dimension. But you do not necessarily find beauty in that which is beautiful.

*Interview by Emmanuel Burdeau.*

*Translated from French by David Malek.*

# DIRECTOR BIOGRAPHY

Born in northern France in 1967, Xavier Beauvois moved to Paris at the first opportunity, determined to become a filmmaker. After encounters with revered critics Jean Douchet and Serge Daney, he found work as an assistant with André Téchiné and Mañuel de Oliveira. At the age of 23, Beauvois wrote, directed and starred in his acclaimed debut picture, "North" (1990), which was nominated for a César for Best First Film. He followed with "Don't Forget You're Going To Die" (1995), which won the Jury Prize at Cannes and the prestigious Jean Vigo Award. Further to a couple of selections to the Venice Film Festival with "According to Matthieu" (2000) and "The Young Lieutenant" (2005), Xavier Beauvois found international acclaim with "Of Gods and Men" (2010), which premiered at the 2010 Cannes Film Festival where it won the Jury Grand Prize. "Of Gods and Men" became a critical and commercial success worldwide, and won the César Academy Award for Best Film.

# SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

- 1992 **North (Nord)**
- 1995 **Don't Forget You're Going to Die (N'oublie pas que tu vas mourir)**  
*Jury Prize, Cannes Film Festival*  
*Prix Jean Vigo*
- 2000 **According to Matthieu (Selon Matthieu)**  
*Official Selection, Venice Film Festival*
- 2005 **The Young Lieutenant (Le Petit lieutenant)**  
*Official Selection "Venice Days", Venice Film Festival*
- 2010 **Of Gods and Men (Des hommes et des dieux)**  
*Grand Prize of the Jury, Cannes Film Festival*  
*Best Film, Césars 2011*
- 2014 **The Price of Fame (la Rançon de la gloire)**  
*Official Selection, In Competition,*  
*Venice Film Festival*

# CAST

Eddy Ricaart	Benoît Poelvoorde
Osman Bricha	Roschdy Zem
Samira	Seli Gmach
Rosa	Chiara Mastroianni
Noor	Nadine Labaki
John Crooker	Peter Coyote
Inspector Malataverne	Xavier Maly
Young Inspector	Arthur Beauvois
Miss Chaplin	Dolores Chaplin
Circus Manager	Eugène Chaplin
Mr. Loyal	Xavier Beauvois
Team Mate	Adel Bencherif
Dr. Sorlat	Olivier Rabourdin
Medical Secretary	Marilyne Canto
Prosecutor	Philippe Laudénbach
The Lawyer	Louis-Do De Lencquesaing
The Banker	Vincent Aubert

# CREW

Directed by Xavier Beauvois  
Screenplay Xavier Beauvois  
Étienne Comar  
Original Music Michel Legrand  
DP Caroline Champetier, AFC  
Production Designer Yann Mégard  
Editor Marie-Julie Maille  
Sound Jean-Jacques Ferran  
Eric Bonnard  
Loïc Prian  
Continuity Agathe Grau  
Casting Brigitte Moidon  
Costume Designer Françoise Nicolet  
Make-up Catherine Bruchon  
1<sup>st</sup> Assistant Director Guillaume Bonnier  
Production Managers Thibault Mattei  
Gaspard Hirschi  
Line Producer Martine Cassinelli  
Coproduction Why Not Productions  
Rita Productions  
Les Films du Fleuve  
Arches Films  
France 3 Cinéma  
RTS Radio Television Suisse  
RTBF Television Belge  
With the participation of Canal +  
Ciné +  
France Télévisions  
With the support of Eurimages  
Centre National du Cinéma  
L'Office Fédéral de la Culture  
Cinéforum  
Loterie Romande  
Centre Du Cinéma de la  
Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles



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wild bunch

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