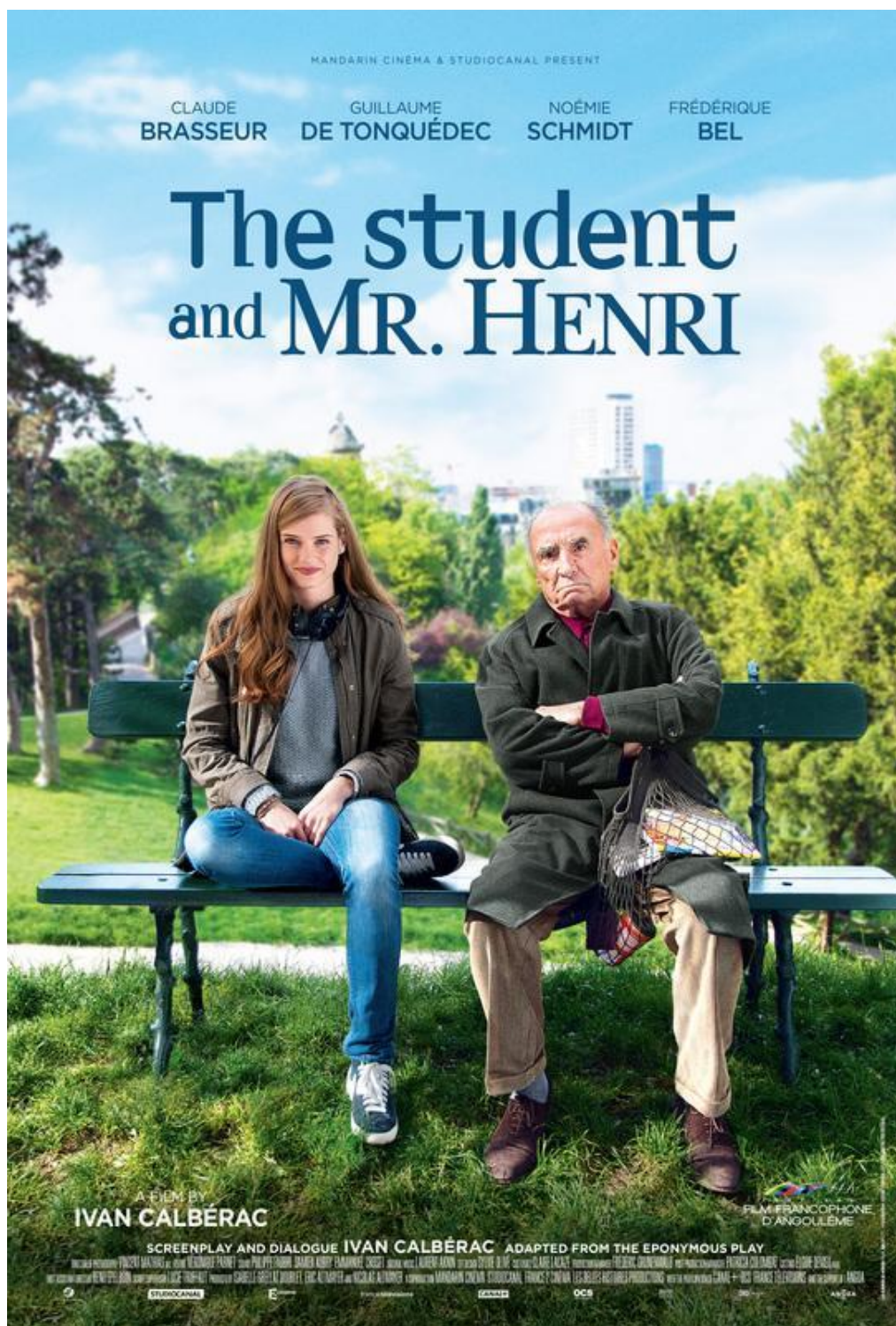


MANDARIN CINEMA & STUDIOCANAL PRESENT



A film by IVAN CALBÉRAC

Adapted from the eponymous play

With Claude Brasseur, Guillaume De Tonquédec, Noemie Schmidt, Frederique Bel

Running time : 1h38

Images and Press materials: www.studiocanal.com

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SYNOPSIS

Mr. Henri (Claude Brasseur), a retired and disgruntled old man, lives contently on his own in his Parisian apartment. However, his unsteady health is making it harder for him to live alone. Against his will, his son Paul (Guillaume de Tonquedec) convinces him to rent out a spare room to Constance (Noémie Schmidt), a young and vivacious student. Far from being charmed by this newcomer, Mr. Henri will use her to create chaos within his family...

INTERVIEW WITH IVAN CALBERAC - DIRECTOR & SCREENWRITER

HOW DID THE IDEA FOR THE STUDENT AND MR HENRI COME ABOUT?

There were two things I wanted to do: Put two characters together who are at very different times in their lives, one whose life is just beginning, and the other whose life is drawing to a close; and I also wanted to create a story in which the main character achieves exactly the opposite to what they wanted in the beginning. I like that irony that I often see in everyday life – when you pursue a goal, sometimes you subconsciously end up creating the opposite result. I started to construct a plot from these two ideas, thinking about those themes that have always fascinated me, like family legacy, and mainly the need to get past our internal barriers that are formed through our education to move towards something that truly suits us. I often think about something an Indian North American sage said, along the lines of, "Being free means being free of Mom and Dad, nothing more." The film talks a lot about that, I think.

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE TO EXPLORE THESE THEMES THROUGH COMEDY?

Firstly, because it fits with my personality. Then because comedy offers a way to reconcile with reality. It's the ideal form for exploring tragedy because it invites you to come at it from a different angle. As soon as you can manage to laugh about a problem, it starts to put things into perspective and makes things clearer. [French comic] Coluche said, "Laughing is like windshield wipers – they don't stop the rain, but they help you see clearer". Moreover, to me, THE STUDENT AND MR HENRI is a comedy of characters, centered on dialogue and verbal jousting, and a dramatic comedy. The more the plot progresses, the deeper things get, and the more exposed the characters' wounds become.

WHERE DID THE IDEA FOR THE CHARACTER OF MR HENRI COME FROM?

He is a combination of different people that I have met, passed through the filter of my imagination. Henri is a grumpy old retiree, a mean old man, but one with a real sense of humor. What I like about him is his oratorical skill that he always employs for misanthropically purposes. He's a wounded soul who isn't looking to please anyone, and is the complete opposite of Constance. The character of the student is also constructed through her weaknesses. Behind her radiant smile, she is hiding an abysmal lack of confidence that leads her to repeatedly fail in everything she does. Yet she is never at a loss for words, because in order to create a powerful confrontation, she had to be able to stand up to Henri, and to not be taken for a fool.

HOW DID YOU CONSTRUCT THE OTHER CHARACTERS?

By making sure that they had opposite facets, ambiguities, and contradictions, and that their internal conflicts only emerge gradually. A little like in real life, when one meets someone new. And from a more global point of view, by making them sometimes reflect each other, thus provoking emotions, sometimes realizations, and perhaps some new personal choices.

WHY DID YOU FIRST WRITE IT FOR THE STAGE?

It just happened that way. Perhaps writing it for theater seemed to offer more freedom than writing a screenplay, which can often be fairly technical and sequenced. In the movies, in comedy in general, scenes don't last very long. But with theater, you can take your time. Furthermore, I wanted to have a single set, and that is perfect for theater. But the play was so successful that it was natural to want to turn it into a movie.

HOW DID YOU GO ABOUT ADAPTING IT TO THE CINEMA?

It was the first time I've done such a job, and it made me question myself a great deal. Intuitively, I wanted to breathe some fresh air into the story and bring it out of the apartment. Given that, the biggest constraint wasn't about the unity of the place, it was about time. A play that takes place in the space of one evening doesn't lend itself well to splitting up the plot. But the story of the film version THE STUDENT AND MR HENRI takes place over the space of several months. That allowed us to introduce new locations without it seeming artificial, and to also bring in new characters in order to bring out the different elements of the drama rather than only using the dialogue. But the key element in this adaptation involved drawing out the psychology of the characters. In the play, theatrical conventions allowed my heroes to change their minds quickly without them seeming too capricious. In the screenplay, there was a greater need to get a sense of the thought processes that lead them to make different choices. But the story is 95% the same.

TELL US ABOUT THE CASTING?

To play Mr Henri, I wanted a major French actor who is part of our cinematographic heritage, but who we'd rediscover in this role, that would mark a major comeback. And Claude Brasseur was perfect from both points of view. He has often played the seducer, the charming friend, the ideal father, and the smiling spy. I was very excited to cast him as Henri and to watch him have fun being odious.

Noémie Schmidt gave me no choice, it had to be her. She is an extremely talented actress, both in comedy and emotional scenes, and has the necessary poise to take on such a role at such a young age.

For Paul, I had been thinking about Guillaume de Tonquédec since I started writing the play, but he was too busy to commit at the time. When I started on the movie, it was natural for me to get back to him. I needed an actor who had that "old France" thing going on, but who triggers immediate sympathy and who is at ease in comedy. Guillaume has all that, and he is familiar to us. With his sincerity, he was able to make this suffering man appealing – this slightly drab, average guy who, against all expectations, gradually recovers his vitality and virility.

For Valérie, I wanted an actress who lives in a slightly off-beat world and who has a certain fragility, and who would be capable of transposing that into this daughter-in-law, who is quite a comedic character. I had Frédérique test for the part and she convinced me that she was right for it. The film is also the portrait of a family, so I wanted to create a believable one in which everyone can find something to identify with.

HOW DO YOU DIRECT AN ACTOR LIKE CLAUDE BRASSEUR, WHO HAS BEEN IN THE INDUSTRY FOR ALMOST 60 YEARS, ALONGSIDE A YOUNG DEBUTANT?

With Claude, there wasn't much work to do. He is always spot on. But in order to keep options open for the editing, I suggested variations so that the actors could keep the rhythm going and sustain the intentions of the performance. We worked together to find the right solution and to perfect it. It's a collaborative effort. Sometimes I had to remind Claude that Mr Henri isn't trying to please – quite the contrary. Because even if he fully took on the character, Claude has this charm that comes across on screen. With Noémie, I tried to make the set an emotionally secure place for her. You really expose yourself when acting, and sometimes people forget that, or think of it as banal. And when you're playing your first major movie role, especially at that age, it's a big deal. So I made a real effort to work with her as best I could, to offer her a perspective, be a sounding board, and to encourage her when she had doubts.

HOW DOES THE FINISHED FILM COMPARE TO WHAT YOU ORIGINALLY HAD PLANNED?

It's very close to it in fact. But it is improved, thanks to the actors, to their performances, their charisma, their humor, and also thanks to the work on the lighting and set design, which were handled with great care. Set designer Sylvie Olivé and I were very precise about the choice of props. When you go into Mr Henri's home, it had to be like entering a burrow. The lighting created by director of photography Vincent Mathias also had to add to that. The film is also rich with shots we hadn't planned, that just came along on the day. It's a slow creative process.

DOES THE FILM HAVE A RESONANCE WITH THE REAL WORLD?

Yes. It's about how difficult it is to find a place to live, and in a way, that's the film's social context. It deals with universal themes of filiation, and personal development. And when you see the growing popularity of books that deal with personal development, you realize that this has become a key issue today. In any case for those lucky enough to have survived... How can we be as happy as possible? How can we bring something to the world, while taking our own place in it, by expressing our own unique talent? It's a difficult journey, the path often strewn with awkwardness, but I don't think it's a selfish one.

IVAN CALBERAC - FILMOGRAPHY

2015	THE STUDENT AND MR HENRI
2009	ALTERNATE WEEKS (AND HALF THE VACATION)
2006	ON VA S'AIMER
2002	IRENE
	César Nomination for Best First Film
1997	LE RECEPTIONNISTE (short)
	Grand Prix at the Festival de Clermont Ferrand for Screenplay
1996	LES ANNEES INDIGESTES (short)
1995	TROP DE CHANCE (short)

INTERVIEW WITH **CLAUDE BRASSEUR - ACTOR**

TELL US ABOUT MR HENRI...

He is a man whose main quality is modesty. He has lived alone since his wife died after an accident, for which he feels responsible. He is very sad, as is always the case when somebody loses someone with whom they lived for many years. His suffering and his guilt have turned him into a grouchy, almost misanthropic man.

Henri's son Paul forces him to rent out a room to a student. And that's how Henri meets Constance. In the beginning, he doesn't want her there; it's as if Constance is violating his home. Moreover, Henri feels that the people around him are harming his wife's memory. For example, he doesn't want Constance to touch the piano, which belonged to his wife.

NOEMIE SCHMIDT SAID THAT YOU IDENTIFIED WITH THE CHARACTER...

I did. Soon, I will have been married for 50 years. My wife and I are inseparable and I can only imagine how much pain I'd feel if I lost her. And like Henri, I don't like sharing my feelings. I prefer that people can sense I love them. I am modest and shy. That's one of the reasons I became an actor. In a film or on stage, I can say, "I love you" to a woman, something that I am incapable of in real life. I don't care because it's not me – it's my character who says it. There's a screen, a detachment there. That is also why it's fun to play a bastard. As long as the film does not defend his point of view.

WHAT DID YOU LIKE ABOUT THE FILM?

It's a very good comedy and it examines a theme that is very dear to my heart: modesty. That's one of the elements of the drama that interested me the most. Words are important in literature, but in the dramatic arts, they mainly serve to hide what you're thinking. The important thing is to grasp the emotion hiding behind the dialogue and to interpret that. Henri's character illustrates this perfectly.

HOW DID YOU GET TO GRIPS WITH YOUR CHARACTER?

When I am offered a role, it's as if I'm being introduced to someone. I imagine asking him questions: What business are you in? Do you enjoy the arts? Do you have money? Then I consider what he is wearing: Is he elegant and mindful of his appearance or not? Then before the shoot, I start working on the chronology. For each of my scenes, I note down what has previously happened to him. Otherwise I end up on set, and we shoot scene 1, scene 12, scene 3, and I act the last one like the first, whereas my character is supposed to have evolved. Acting in the theater is simplified by the fact that you perform in order and only have to concentrate for two hours. In the movies, it is a less intense task, but on that is spread over eight hours. You can't lose focus just because the crew is changing the shot and the lighting in the middle of the scene. Working in theater is easier than cinema. Some intellectuals might tell you different, but that's nonsense!

WHAT WAS IVAN CALBERAC LIKE AS A DIRECTOR?

He made a lot of suggestions. I actually thought, "Oh, the bugger, that's a really good idea. Why didn't I think of that?" Ivan has a lot of ideas but an actor isn't just there to obey. In reality, it's an exchange. On set, you are simply finalizing the details because the majority of discussions happen before you start shooting. Moreover, from the moment the director and I are in agreement over the character, I arrive on set with my script in one hand and *L'Equipe* (Sports Newspaper) in the other!

WHAT DO YOU LIKE ABOUT WORKING IN A TEAM?

I like the collaboration, the exchange. Just like in sport, I have never liked individual disciplines. I have the same respect for the crew as I have for the director, because I have a complete disregard for social hierarchy. On set, I need the electrician just as much as he needs me. The only people who cannot be replaced are the actors, but only for the sake of continuity. And because of that, actors sometimes feel very important, despite being no more important than my butt!

YOUR CO-STARS UNDERLINE THE FACT THAT YOU HAVE A LOT OF FUN WHEN YOU'RE WORKING...

That's very true! When I do this job, I feel like how I used to feel at school, but not in class, which I hated. Fortunately, we got breaks! We played cops and robbers back then, and I'm still doing it today. One day, I'm the good guy, and the next, I'm the baddie. Right now, I'm touring with a play, *LA COLERE DU TIGRE*, and I'm playing Clemenceau. I wear a big moustache, I get to dress up, and I'm still having fun. What is performing about, anyway? It's playing. It's an occupation that one has to do seriously, but without taking it seriously.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE WORKING WITH FREDERIQUE BEL AND GUILLAUME DE TONQUEDEC?

I already worked with Frédérique on *CAMPING* by Fabien Onteniente. She's extremely professional. But this was the first time I'd worked with Guillaume de Tonquédec. In a split second, I felt like he was my son. I have a lot of affinities with actors who come from a theater background. And Guillaume is an extremely generous performer.

WHAT ABOUT NOEMIE SCHMIDT?

Ivan made a very good casting decision there. Noémie is charming, without being like a Barbie doll. She doesn't make a big deal about being sexy. I tried to put her at ease, especially as I found her very talented. I told her, if you need any tips, just ask. Otherwise, I just left her to it. I have to say that I was in a similar position myself with Jean Gabin. We were shooting RUE DES PRAIRIES by Denys De La Patellière when I was 23. Gabin played a widower raising three kids on his own. On set, he made sure we were always close by. Sometimes he'd say to us, "You see the grip over there in the yellow T-shirt? He's a lazy so-and-so. And that sparks over there, he's a real grafter." I realized during the shoot that the younger crew members behaved with me like I did with Gabin back then. And I suddenly realized I'd gotten really old! They're all looking out for grandpa!

THE FILM DEALS WITH LOTS OF FAMILY ISSUES INCLUDING THE NOTION OF SUCCESSION. DID YOU ENCOURAGE YOUR SON ALEXANDRE TO BECOME AN ACTOR?

No, I left him to his own choices. I just knew that whether he became an actor, a carpenter, or an architect, I'd do anything I could to help him. But there have been actors in my family since 1820, but my grandson isn't interested. The tradition is stopping here. But the family won't, and that's the main thing.

AFTER SUCH A WONDERFUL CAREER, WHAT ARE YOUR EXPECTATIONS NOW?

When I sit at the terrace of the restaurant below my apartment, passers-by sometimes stop just to thank me. Keeping everything in proportion, it's a bit like a patient calling up his doctor to say, "Thanks, Doc, you cured me." And I think, "Here's someone who forgot all his crap for 90 minutes while he watched me act." And that's what gives me pleasure. I'm expecting nothing apart from one little wish – to be part of tomorrow's memories.

IN HIS FINAL MONOLOGUE, MR HENRI TALKS ABOUT FAILURES AND SUCCESSES. WHAT DO THOSE NOTIONS MEAN TO YOU?

Failure doesn't matter among family. In professional terms, nobody cares. It is no more important than triumph. I was lucky enough to win some wonderful awards – two Césars – and you can be proud of that. For 20 minutes, you're the King of Paris. But as soon as you're out in the street, it's over. Failure, success... It's fleeting. Neither last.

INTERVIEW WITH NOEMIE SCHMIDT - ACTRESS

WHAT APPEALED TO YOU ABOUT THE STORY?

On the one hand, the character of Constance. She's provincial, a little bit of a lost soul, and she's resilient. She's also impertinent, funny, and lighthearted, with a sense of repartee and an enviable fighting spirit. She takes a lot of knocks, but never gives up. It's in her nature. I laughed a lot when I read the script. Ivan Calbérac has a very touching way of sketching out his characters. You can feel how much he loves them and empathizes with them. And they can all surprise you at any time.

WHAT MADE THE CHARACTER OF CONSTANCE INTERESTING TO PLAY?

The scope of performance the role offered, with scenes of seduction, emotion, and comedy. The challenge is to get it spot on in each register. Moreover, with the deal offered by Mr Henri, Constance has a role to play. The idea of comically performing a comedy performance was particularly appealing.

WHAT CHARACTER TRAITS APPEAL TO YOU MOST IN THE PARTS YOU CONSIDER?

Fragility! Even if the characters seem strong, it's their weaknesses that interest me. Because beyond first impressions, it's weakness that makes the truth of a character. Constance is 20 and at that age, you're seeking, you're vulnerable. Behind her impertinence, there is some major insecurity. She lacks confidence in herself. And the relationship she had with her father, a harsh, brusque man, left its scars. So she has an odd relationship with men and struggles to create something lasting.

HOW DID YOU PREPARE FOR YOUR ROLE?

I usually try to get inside my character's universe and work out what they are experiencing, what they like and what they don't. But it's sometimes the detail, like a kind of rhythm, or a way of moving, that helps one get to grips with a role. I talked a lot to Claude Brasseur about the relationship between our respective characters. And with Ivan, I tried to understand the subtext. Dialogue often masks the truth. Some actors operate mainly on instinct, but I need to know the sentiment behind a line. What my character is trying to hide or get across when they express themselves is key to me.

THIS WAS YOUR FIRST COMEDY. WHAT MAKES IT SUCH A UNIQUE GENRE?

The rhythm! That's the most important thing. This was probably the most difficult one to do because it was a first, and there's no recipe. Each scene has a rhythm and you have to find what works best.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE WORKING WITH CLAUDE BRASSEUR?

You learn so much from watching him act. He has these changes in tone that are both abrupt and carefully steered. He can be funny and touching in the same scene. He has a lot of fun doing it. And he encouraged me to have fun with him. He is very protective. Between two scenes, when the actors often shut themselves up in their dressing rooms, he'd invite me into his. He'd tell me about cinema, theater, about how tough this business is, and what fascinates him about it. Like everyone, I've seen Claude Brasseur in films like *AN ELEPHANT CAN BE EXTREMELY DECEPTIVE* and *THE PARTY...* It's great to see that he still has that energy, that youth, that bonhomie. Sometimes, he's like this big kid. In fact, he's a really charming charmer.

WHAT DOES THIS FILM MEAN TO YOU?

It was a huge opportunity to have a lead role, and to explore that. In the beginning, I didn't realize how much energy it requires to go on set every day, how much changing your emotional state can wear you out, because all day, people are watching and judging you. You need to know how to revitalize yourself, how to boost your confidence, how to listen, and how to reassess yourself. The shoot was a place of hard work, reflection, and internal turmoil.

I think comedy is interesting when it's not enough to provoke laughter for laughter's sake – when it has meaning, and when the comedy serves the story. In this case, it was about emancipation, the means of shrugging off what our parents think is right for us, at any age. Paul's character, for example, is in his 40s, but he's not emancipated. Henri, his father, cannot let go. And Constance is the same. The film describes the suffering that parents sometimes inflict upon their children, and the joy you can experience when you find your way and you believe in yourself.

HOW DO YOU VIEW THE NOTIONS OF FAILURE AND SUCCESS?

When I was 13, I knew I wanted to be an actress. To me, success was having the opportunity to act. And like anybody, I'm a little afraid of failure. But when I find myself confronted by it, I tell myself it's because I've still got things to learn. That's also why I wanted to be an actress. Because being an actress means facing up to the impossible: Playing at being someone else and doing it completely sincerely. I know that failure can provide an opportunity to bounce back, just like Constance discovers.

DO YOU SHARE ANY OTHER CHARACTER TRAITS WITH CONSTANCE?

Other than her energy, a certain tendency to sometimes miss the point!

INTERVIEW WITH **GUILLAUME DE TONQUEDEC – ACTOR**

WHAT KIND OF MAN IS PAUL?

He's a little bland. Paul lost his mother at a young age, and was raised under the thumb of an overbearing, insensitive father, who relentlessly clipped Paul's wings. As such, he's something of a pressure cooker, but despite seeming ready to explode at any second, Paul keeps a lid on it.

WHAT KIND OF RELATIONSHIP DOES HE HAVE WITH HIS FATHER, HENRI?

Nothing is ever right. Just as his father wanted, Paul took over from his job as an accountant, but Henri still isn't satisfied. He tries to destabilize him by introducing him to a young female student, but what is intended to destabilize him ends up as a rite of passage for Paul. It's a real life lesson, and one that makes him grow up.

AND WHAT ABOUT HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH VALERIE?

They married young and love each other deeply, but their relationship lacks any spark or fantasy. In emotional terms, it is unfulfilled. It's a traditional, ordinary relationship, somewhat faded, but touching nonetheless. It's an enmeshed and exclusive relationship which makes them a strong couple but at the same time, somewhat ridiculous.

WHAT MADE PAUL AN INTERESTING CHARACTER TO PLAY?

The fact that he's somewhat unfulfilled, and is just waiting to flourish. He's kind of pale, like he hasn't had enough sunlight. Paul is one of those unaccomplished people you often meet. We all know people who don't take any risks, and don't experiment with what they would really like to experience. Guys like Paul amaze me. I find them touching in the way they just get through life as best they can.

WHAT DO YOU HAVE IN COMMON WITH HIM?

A certain calmness. And I used to be very shy so I can understand that fear of what other people think of you. Even today, in certain situations, I'm still intimidated. And I physically curl up into myself with that desire to make myself invisible while I evaluate the person I'm dealing with in order to work out what I have to do. But I always straighten up in the end, so I am making progress!

WHAT APPEALED YOU TO THE STORY OF THE STUDENT AND MR HENRI?

The fact that it deals with human relationships and the difficulty of saying, "I love you". That's the case for all the characters, for Constance, and for Paul with both his wife and his father. But Constance is fresh and spontaneous, and her arrival changes everything.

HOW DO YOU ENSURE AUTHENTICITY IN YOUR PERFORMANCE?

You try to not plan too much so that you can be surprised by the other members of the cast. The tricky thing is allowing yourself to let you go, whilst actively listening. Because it's only by being attentive to what your acting partner is doing that you can find a place where you can be surprised. That said, when you work with such great actors, as was the case on this film, the performance happens all on its own. You just go with the flow.

WHAT WAS YOUR REACTION WHEN YOU FOUND OUT YOU'D BE WORKING WITH CLAUDE BRASSEUR?

I was so happy! Like lots of people no doubt, I feel like Claude Brasseur is part of my family. We all remember films he was in. Plus, he comes from a theater background. To me, coming from there myself, he's a kind of role model. So to play his son in a film was a real stroke of luck. When we began shooting, I very quickly saw that we spoke the same language. I was worried that Claude would have too much of an overbearing personality. But in reality, he is really reassuring. He has this great humanity, he's totally accessible. And you really perform with him, just like in the theater. When you're on stage, whether you're speaking or not, you have to keep performing. Because you never know where the audience is going to be looking. And Claude is constantly performing, whether he is in the shot or not. He is engaged. He's all about sharing.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE TO WORK WITH FREDERIQUE BEL?

In one episode of the TV comedy series FAIS PAS CI, FAIS PAS ÇA (DON'T DO THIS, DON'T DO THAT), my character wakes up in a trashcan early one morning and wonders if he had a thing with her. I was happy when I knew Frédérique was playing my wife. She's crazy and I love her craziness. When she's acting, she feels her way, she explores, and then suddenly, she finds it. She's unique like that.

AND NOEMIE SCHMIDT?

She is of that young generation which drives me crazy! [laughs] She is always absolutely spot-on, and has energy to spare. She goes for it and makes suggestions. Working with her is invigorating. Like theater actors, she puts her work first. I hope she never changes.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE IVAN CALBERAC'S DIRECTING STYLE?

Firstly, I'd like to pay tribute to his talent as a writer. The situations, the characters, and the dialogue are very well written. As for the way he directs, Ivan is very precise, but at the same time, he's not afraid of changing his mind. That's pretty exceptional.

WHAT WAS THE TOUGHEST SCENE TO SHOOT?

The final one. I have a monologue and I thought it would be a voiceover over shots we'd already filmed. But on the day, I found out it was going to be filmed as a single take. I panicked a little and did some emergency preparation of the text. But it was that panic that ended up bringing the emotion to the scene.

THE FILM EXAMINES THE NOTION OF ACCOMPLISHMENT AMONG OTHERS. WHAT'S YOUR VIEW OF THAT?

Often, it can be about a very small thing. For Paul, he just needed his dad to place his hand on his shoulder and tell him, "Go for it", in order to change his life. A few little words of encouragement can make the difference between a life that is lacking and a life that fulfils. When people come out of the movie theater after watching *THE STUDENT AND MR HENRI*, you want them to say, "I love you" to the people who count, and to shake up the destiny of those who are letting life pass them by.

INTERVIEW WITH FREDERIQUE BEL – ACTRESS

WHO IS VALERIE?

She's a woman who has never really found her place, neither in society, nor with her husband's family. She married Paul young; he's the only man in her life and she depends on him financially. She's a little old-fashioned, verging on being something of a Bible-thumper, whereas I tend to be more of a punk in my head!

HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED WITH THE PROJECT?

Ivan Calbérac asked me to test for the part. At first, I was surprised, and then I was delighted because the character is so different to my own. I constructed a character who is Olive Oyl meets the character of Thérèse, played by Anémone, in SANTA CLAUS IS A STINKER. I wore this sad blouse, a long skirt, dreadful flat shoes, and a blond wig. It's kind of a convention of mine – I play a borderline character and I give her blond hair. I think that brings a certain candor to a character.

WHAT APPEALED TO YOU ABOUT THE CHARACTER OF VALERIE?

I liked her off-beat side, her zaniness. She's a little crazy but she's appealing because she doesn't feel she's good enough and she's afraid of her husband. Sometimes, you almost have to create your own character, but this one was already carefully composed. It was like putting on a comfy pair of slippers!

YOU'RE CERTAINLY NOT TYPECAST, ESPECIALLY IN TERMS OF YOUR CHARACTER'S LOOK...

They really spoiled me with all those stuffy posh old lady outfits, didn't they? Usually, I try to keep a couple of outfits from a shoot, but from this one, I only kept a pair of panties! When I came off set, it took me an hour to get back to looking like normal. I just went with it – you have to forget yourself and laugh at yourself instead.

HOW DID YOU PREPARE FOR THE ROLE?

First of all, I had to tone her down a little. In the theater, you can really go overboard on the craziness, but in the movies, the camera captures everything so you have to bring it down by a factor of 10. But if you cut something, you have to replace it with something else, and here, I opted for fragility. When you rehearse in your bathroom, you come up with little tricks, but in front of the camera, often they don't work. All it takes is your acting partner to change something and your trick falls flat. Acting is also the art of forgetting what you had focused on in order to invest in the here-and-now.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE WORKING WITH THE OTHER ACTORS?

When you prepare for a role, you focus on your own character, so from my perspective, this film was a comedy. I had forgotten the dramatic tension of the last scene. But at the first reading with the other actors, Claude Brasseur's monologue just moved me. I started crying behind my glasses. In actual fact, I was already in character. That said, Claude really loves to play the fool. And the same goes for working with Guillaume, who I'd already had a lot of fun with on the TV comedy series FAIS PAS CI, FAIS PAS ÇA (DON'T DO THIS, DON'T DO THAT). As for Noémie, she is fresh, sincere, and spontaneous – perfect for her role.

DO YOU HAVE ANYTHING IN COMMON WITH VALERIE?

I always look for where my role and my own character intersect. That's where the vulnerability lies, but I don't reveal it very often. I rarely have to reveal it because I'm mainly offered strong, sexy, or totally cartoonish parts. Some directors confuse femininity with sexuality. Valérie isn't sexual. It's a part that other actresses might have turned down. I mean, she isn't glamorous, but I saw it as an opportunity. I'd like to thank Ivan for desexualizing me.

HOW DID THE SHOOT GO?

There are some films that break you, and others that repair you. In this case, nobody was out to judge or crush anyone else. With a character like Valérie, it would have been difficult to get it right if my acting partners hadn't given me the necessary space.

WHAT DID YOU LIKE BEST ABOUT WORKING WITH IVAN?

The challenge was to play this excessive character while making her sincere. I like exploring in my roles, and Ivan lets you do that. He doesn't get mad if you don't find the right tone from the outset. And I found that very touching.

CAST

Henri	Claude Brasseur
Paul	Guillaume de Tonquédec
Constance	Noémie Schmidt
Valérie	Frédérique Bel
Mathieu	Thomas Soliveres
Constance's mother	Valérie Keruzoré
Constance's brother	Antoine Glémain
Arthur	Grégori Baquet
Driving school examiner	Anne Loiret
DJ	Nicolas Guillot
Paul's assistant	Paula Brunet Sancho
Customer at the market	Agnès Pichois
Nightclub hostess	Céline Esperin
Real-estate agent	Guillaume Watrinet

With the participation of Stephan Wojtowicz and Pierre Cassignard

CREW

Director	Ivan Calbérac
Screenplay	Ivan Calbérac
Photography	Vincent Mathias / AFC
Editing	Véronique Parnet
Original music	Laurent Aknin
Sound	Philippe Fabbri Damien Aubry Emmanuel Croset
Costumes	Claire Lacaze
Sets	Sylvie Olivé
Casting	Elodie Demey / Arda
First assistant director	Reno Epelboin
Script supervisor	Lucie Truffaut
Production manager	Frédéric Grunenwald
Post-production manager	Patricia Colombat
Produced by	Isabelle Grellat Doublet Eric Altmayer Nicolas Altmayer
Interviews	Manuella Kongolo
Translation	Anna McQueen