

SKIRT DAY



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MASCARET FILMS presents

SKIRT DAY

A FILM BY **JEAN-PAUL LILIENFELD**

WITH
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Runtime: 88 minutes - 1:85 aspect ratio - Dolby SR and SRD

SYNOPSIS

One day, a school teacher takes her students hostage.



THE DIRECTOR'S NOTE OF INTENTION

This film is a deviation from my other work. With time, I'm moving closer to myself...

Preoccupied with humanism, I have long believed the inner-city problem was fairly simple to express in the form of an equation using two widely known variables: Poverty + Racism = Rage.

Twenty years ago, that notion prompted me to write my first screenplay. L'OEIL AU BEUR NOIR recounted the difficulties of two young men - one black, one Arab - as they go about looking for an apartment in Paris.

In 2001, that same impetus led me to write and direct HS - HORS SERVICE. The leading role in that film was played by a black man, not because the screenplay called for it, but simply because Dieudonné was such an excellent actor. (Back then, he hadn't yet disclosed his current political views, which I completely take issue with.)

Yet, some people objected. «Why cast a black man? It's absolutely unwarranted.» I loved to reply, «Why not?» But today I see that «the elements of the equation» have only gotten worse and become more complex.

I spent the first 18 years of my life in Créteil. The housing projects, with their social and ethnic diversity, were my day-to-day life. I still go back regularly to visit my mother. I know what it was; I see what it's become. So, in this film, I wanted to talk about what allowed me to get out - school - and the fact that that's no longer an option in today's world.

I wanted to talk about the hardening of positions, the regression of boy-girl relationships. Those paths between the buildings, where young couples who thought they'd be together forever used to kiss, have now become unisex - all-girl or all-boy paths.

All that was triggered in late 2005. I saw everything go up in flames. I heard mothers explain the fact that their kids were so furious they couldn't keep them at home. And, yet, I didn't see a single girl on the street.

I suddenly started to wonder if the girls weren't angry or if they were already under control. That's where it all began.

But I wanted to make a spectacle. A focused spectacle, certainly, but a spectacle first and foremost. Not just one that shows things from the outside, in the darkness, with no way out. But one with a story that grabs us and fills us with emotion or anger. I needed a device...

I hope SKIRT DAY is a story that reminds us that, whatever our political or religious choices, indisputable values do exist that cannot be transgressed. Simplifying nothing, hiding nothing.

In the belief that women, the dual victims of their social and family status, can help bring about a change.

Jean-Paul Lilienfeld



AN INTERVIEW WITH ISABELLE ADJANI

Your positions on current affairs are fairly well known. We know you're against fundamentalism and racism, for Algeria and Darfour, against girls wearing veils in school, against DNA tests for immigration applicants... Yet this is the first time we see these concerns expressed in a film you're starring in. What appealed to you about SKIRT DAY?

Beyond the character of this teacher who totally flips out, I was particularly struck by the film's social accuracy. What is education today? How did we reach this impasse? After all, it is one of the last institutions that still integrates people. How is it possible that it's in such a mess? How can the system be so dysfunctional? How can there be so much misunderstanding? What have we done to these students? What have we done to these teachers? Why and how have we given up on the demands of education? I really liked the fact that the film isn't trying to moralize socially or civically, that it isn't trying to preach to us or to present solutions, but simply - if I may say so - to ask all the questions, to present the audience with the hard reality of things...

How did you become involved in this project?

Thanks to actor-director Smaïn, who I ran into one day. He said, «I just read a great script with a wonderful role for a woman. You've got to read it!» At about the same time, some friends of Jean-Paul Lilienfeld's also spoke to me about it and gave me the script. I accepted the part less than ten minutes after I read it! When I met Jean-Paul, he wanted to make SKIRT DAY as a theatrical feature but was unable to get it financed. Much later, he called me to say, «I've got good news and bad news. The film's been green-lit, but for TV.» I said, «No problem. I said I'd be there for you, if you could get it made. And I'm still there.» Thanks to Arte's involvement with Mascaret Films, we went into production two months later...

The film was shot last May, almost on the quiet, and far from any media hype...

No one knew I was shooting and... that was great! Working like that, without any kind of pressure, was such a relief. We should all be able to allow ourselves that - both the luxury and the modesty of working under such conditions to strip ourselves naked.

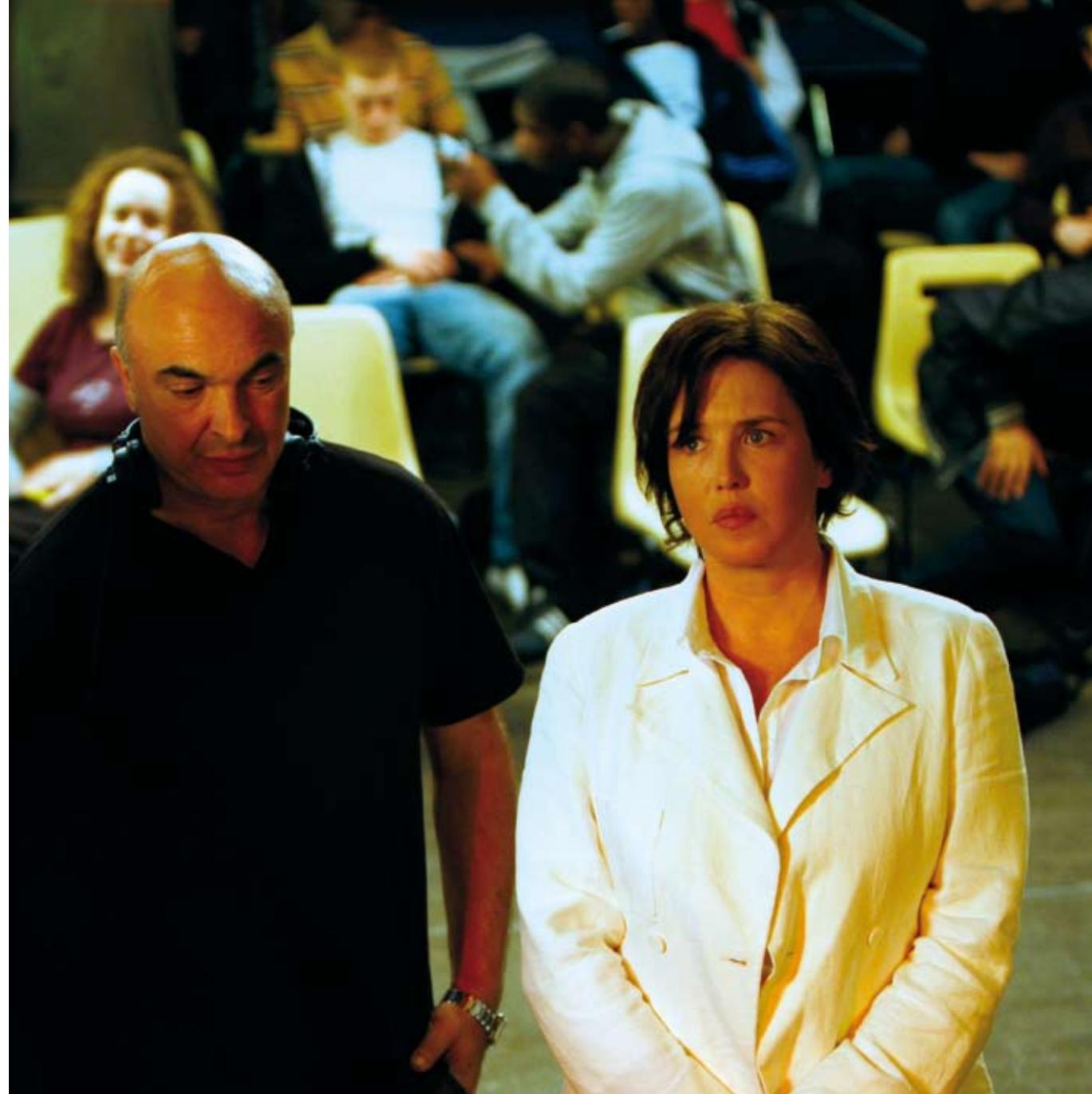
There are other actors working around you, like Jackie Berroyer and Denis Podalydès, but almost all of your scenes are with a group of teenagers who've never made a film before...

The most important thing was to create an authenticity in the relationships between that teacher and her students. That's essential for the film's credibility, for its accuracy of tone. They had rehearsed for two months and knew their lines. I only met them on the first day of shooting and... they immediately called me «Madam»! Because I took a stance in front of them, not as an actress, but as a French teacher. I don't think most of them knew who I was. Maybe their parents knew or they'd seen one of my films on TV... In the end, that was good. We plunged into the work and nothing else. I never tried to approach them other than by way of the work we had to do together. I didn't spend two minutes trying to win them over. Not even one! That was essential to me. That was the least I could give them in exchange for their engagement, which was total and certainly not that easy... You can imagine all the buried, repressed feelings, sensations, complexities that were at play for those boys and those girls. They're so defensive, yet so tender. At the same time, they look you right in the eye. They know what we're talking about. You have to, as they say, «sound real.» In one scene, I say, «School's the only thing that can help you to get out.» They listened to me, but it was like, «You'd better tell us something that sounds true! It's gotta be true, otherwise we're gonna act like we're not listening to you, if you don't grab our interest!» That's very clear. They really vibrate authenticity and truth. They also had their way of expressing whether what I did in the scene touched them, reached them, persuaded them. There was a mutual respect between us. And that's what meant most to them - respect.

When you were a teenager in Gennevilliers, did you ever imagine that, 30 years later, we might actually, and with a straight face, declare a «skirt day» as your character does, to protect girls from being harassed by their classmates?

Certainly not! It feels like such an incredible regression! It's wild. Unfortunately, maybe that's the measure of all our post-colonial consequences. Today, teenagers in the inner-cities don't always know who they are or where they came from. They're looking for their roots - roots that are painstakingly devalued around them... Obviously, they're trying to find them again, trying to get back to the source, even if it's in a radical way.

Interview by Jean-Pierre Lavoignat



THE STUDENTS

Mehmet / Khalid Berkouz

His face swollen as he walks into class on the day in question, Mehmet is just one victim of Mouss, the class bully. But he prefers to keep silent, fearing retaliation against him and his family...

Farida / Sarah Douali

Despite a few moody outbursts, Farida simply wears a sullen expression and keeps her mouth shut. It's her classmate, Nawel, who guesses the unspeakable tragedy she's recently been through...

Nawel / Sonia Amori

Sensitive yet rebellious, Nawel tries to resist the code of silence and macho law that prevails in the middle school. Just a few years earlier, she bore witness to an Islamic raid in her parents' Algerian village. So just one drop of water...

Sébastien / Kévin Azaïs

Sébastien serves as accomplice and sidekick to Mouss, the class bully. He leaps to his aid at a moment's notice - less out of conviction than because he thinks that's the best way to take advantage of the system. But fortune only smiles on the bold...

Farid / Karim Zakraoui

Demanding «respect» to justify his behavior on every possible occasion, Farid refuses to remove his cap in class. Until...

Adiy / Fily Doumbia

Discreet, rather good boy, Adiy witnesses the events without really taking part in them. He has only one hope - to finally be freed from this madhouse. And besides...

Akim / Hassan Mezhoud

Nicknamed «Imam,» due to his quiet, straightforward and comparatively mature faith, Akim demonstrates an acute sense of justice and doesn't approve of the kind of Islam that those who haven't studied it demand. But still waters...

Mouss / Yann Ebongé

It's in Mouss' bag that Sonia Bergerac stumbles upon the weapon that instigates the tragedy. He's an expert at bullying his classmates. Up until now, no one's dared to stand up to him. And then...

CAST

Sonia Bergerac

Labouret

Bechet

The Principal

The Minister

Mehmet

Mouss

Nawel

Sébastien

Farida

Akim

Farid

Adiy

Jérôme

Khadija

Cécile

François

Julien

Frédéric

Isabelle Adjani

Denis Podalydès

Yann Collette

Jackie Berroyer

Nathalie Besançon

Khalid Berkouz

Yann Ebongé

Sonia Amori

Kévin Azaïs

Sarah Douali

Hassan Mezhoud

Karim Zakraoui

Fily Doumbia

Salim Boughidene

Mélèze Bouzid

Anne Girouard

Stéphan Guerin-Tillie

Olivier Brocheriou

Marc Citti

CREDITS

Writer/Director

Producer

Director of Photography

Casting Director

Production Manager

Costume Designers

Production Designer

Editor

Sound Editor

Sound Recordist

Sound Rerecording Mixer

Script Supervisor

First Assistant Director

Jean-Paul Lillienfeld

Bénédicte Lesage & Ariel Askénazi

Pascal Rabaud

Cendrine Lapuyade

Pierre Dufour

Chattoune, Agnès Beziers, Julien Reignoux

Olivier Jacquet

Aurique Delannoy

Hélène Ducret

Philippe Richard

Emmanuel Croset

Carole Kornman

Leslie Tabuteau

Produced by

In coproduction with

Production development associate

With the support of

In partnership with the

With the participation of

13^{ème} RUE

Mascaret Films

ARTE France, Fontana & RTBF (Belgian television)

Junior Productions

the Région Ile de France

Centre National de la Cinématographie (CNC)

CARRIMAGES 4, Télévision Suisse Romande &