

ONE NATION ONE KING

(UN PEUPLE ET SON ROI)

A FILM BY
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SYNOPSIS

Paris, 1789. The Bastille has been stormed and a breath of liberty blows through the streets of Paris. Françoise, a young washerwoman, and Basile, a drifter without a family or name, discover the unique exhilaration of love and revolution. Together with their friends and the people of the working-class districts of Paris, they begin to realize dreams of emancipation in a newly formed assembly where they witness, with both hopes and doubts, the creation of a new political system. Within their debates and the fury on the streets, lies the fate of their once sacred king and the birth of a republic.

Freedom has a story.

INTERVIEW WITH PIERRE SCHOELLER

Why tackle the French Revolution today?

The French Revolution was a unique moment in history. Two-hundred-and-fifty years later, its echo is still present in our lives, our societies, and our imagination. So in making this film, we're going towards something other than past history: We're going to discover the men and women whose commitment, hopes, and wounds were of such intensity that they still resonate more than two centuries later.

In *ONE NATION, ONE KING*, I wanted to depict the French Revolution far removed from ideological debate – a revolution on the scale of men, children, and above all women. The female characters play a central role in the narrative. Putting the people from the working neighborhoods of Paris at the center of events is a way give a popular face back to the French Revolution.

I decided to structure the film around the destiny of the king. In 1789, his royal highness was the Father of the Nation, chosen by divine right. In June 1791, he fled, but was recaptured. In September, he was made head of the executive of a constitutional monarchy. In summer 1792, he was removed from office and imprisoned. In the fall, he was tried. In winter, he was sentenced. On 21 January 1793, he was beheaded in the Place de la Revolution. Three intrepid and chaotic years when a whole kingdom was overthrown, and the people won their sovereignty.

The thread of our story is not just the fury of this combat. By plunging into the detail of historical events, I found many examples of bravery and hope, and at times even cheerful moments, or ones of humility, desire, and simple enthusiasm. I wanted to film the fervent mob, in all its human diversity.

I came across men, women, and children shot through with a vital energy that one rarely sees today. They fought, they danced, they sang, they wept for their dead, and they rose the next morning with hope in their hearts. This is a story of heroism, but an ordinary, humble, and intimate heroism. It was the characters themselves who gave me the strength to face the challenges of an epic period costume drama.

The writing and production of *ONE NATION, ONE KING* took up seven years of my life. Now the film is finally completed, I can assure you of one thing: What I discovered in this adventure was not nostalgia, but a sense of the present. Alongside Basile, Françoise, Louis XVI, and Robespierre, I lived through some dramatic and glorious times, and this film is in part the account of these emotions experienced not in the past, but in the present.

How was the script written?

The screenplay took four years to write. The main challenge was to construct the destinies of the principal characters: The pauper Basile, who reconnects with human society; the trajectory of Françoise and Margot, two young washerwomen with an unbreakable bond; and the political engagement of the glass-maker, the Uncle.

What's more, these individual stories continually crossover with wider history. So I had to dramatize the principal historical figures of the French Revolution, including Louis XVI with his fate worthy of a Shakespearian tragedy – a man defeated by history – and the revolutionary leaders, Robespierre, Marat, and Saint-Just. The script sets out to bring them to life, with a personal approach to their place in the great pages of the Revolution.

And lastly, there are the women, men, and children of the people who left their mark on posterity: The famous fruit-seller, Reine Audu; the radical, Varlet; the chocolate-maker, Pauline Léon.

Under attack, the people of Paris had learned to defend themselves. But once betrayed, they had to remind their representatives of their duty.

During the whole writing phase, I made extensive use of archives that can be freely consulted on-line. That meant I could base the story on reliable historical material, accepted by the greatest historians of the French Revolution and the 18th century (the American Timothy Tackett, the Italian Haïm Burstin, and France's Guillaume Mazeau, Sophie Wahnich, and Arlette Farge). I have met with all these esteemed historians and we had some in-depth and documented discussions. I wanted to film the French Revolution from the angle of popular engagement, from that of the city's people.

The purpose of this historic research went well beyond a concern for accuracy. While offering a representation of the great revolutionary ideals, I was seeking to infuse them with life, flesh and blood, and emotions. Love is central to this, as is the role of childhood, and political engagement, between hope and the wounds of combat. During a revolution, everyone is likely to witness a heroic gesture, whether history records it or not.

What was your relationship like with the actors?

The work with the actors far exceeded my expectations. The set was a packed, with a dozen actors every day, around a hundred extras, and almost as many secondary roles. For this project, I wanted to bring together that young and brilliant generation of talent that has already left its stamp on French cinema. They had the audacity and desire to embody these exceptional figures.

Tell me about the historical approach to the reconstructions?

Along with Denis Freyd, who produced the film through Archipel 35, we decided early on to make this film in costumes and using locations in and around Paris, with a French cast. That was all part of filming the Revolution as a popular epic. We shot a lot in the actual locations and in some that were recreated. The Paris of the 18th century, with its density and profusion, is mainly portrayed through the banks of the Seine and the Place de la Revolution. As far as possible, we used real extras for the crowd and mob scenes. Special effects are used in some key moments, the most emblematic being that of the king's execution.

Great care went into the magnificent costumes created by Anaïs Romand (*Holy Motors, Saint Laurent*). The fabrics, the cottons, silks, and velvets were sought out from all over the world. They were then died, cut, and assembled in Paris. We thus built up a wardrobe of authentic costumes that is very true to the end of the 18th century.

I wanted to film in a simple, serene manner, using natural light based on candles, fires, and torches. We were lucky enough to be able to shoot in the Château of Versailles, in the Cour Carrée of the Louvre Museum, in the Château de Chantilly, and the sublime Marie Antoinette Theater, the first time this venue had been used for filming. This concern for authenticity extended to the Uncle's glass-making workshop. All the scenes of glass production were done using actors, tools from the period, and molten silica at 1,400 degrees centigrade!

A word about the staging of the debates in the National Assembly. There was non-stop revolutionary legislative inventiveness during those three years; it was a hotbed of ideas. In the fall of 1789, the first National Assembly of France left Versailles to set up in Paris. The 800 deputies moved into the former royal riding school, a great vaulted building whose huge windows looked out onto the Tuileries gardens.

We recreated this hall in the Maison d'Éducation de la Légion d'Honneur, with its hundreds of benches, its stage for speakers, and its stands under the stone walls which welcome the general public. That was one of the highpoints of the shoot, hearing those historic words spoken, with the creaking of the wood and the echo of the old stone.

What do you hope the audience will go away with?

I would like the spectator to go away with the feeling they have been through a unique experience, one that only a revolution can inspire – with these visions, great speeches, and laughter in the middle of tears, new births after the mourning, destinies which turns on a phrase, a gunshot...

I also hope the film leaves an impression of vivid clarity, like a never-ending summer, with bursts of sunlight, dazzling, unexpected and un hoped for. But also tormented, feverish nights, with suffering and wounds. That is what life is like during revolution, with its hopes and dazzling conquests. Hope inspired them to fight and win their freedom.

As Adèle Haenel (Françoise) says in the film: *"What do our wounds count for compared to our victories?"*

PIERRE SCHOELLER

Pierre Schœller was born on May 8, 1961, in Paris. After studying modern literature and cinema, he devoted himself to scriptwriting – most notably for Alain Gomis, Jean-Pierre Limosin, and Merzak Allouache. In 2000, he directed the TV movie "ZERO DEFAULT" for Arte on labor conditions. In 2008, he wrote and directed "VERSAILLES", a melodrama shot at the Palace of Versailles. Concerned about filming current events, he followed with "THE EXERCISE OF THE STATE», a political thriller ... Fipresci Prize at Un Certain Regard, 2011 Cannes Film Festival. In 2012, he directed a TV movie "LES ANONYMES" for Canal +. In December 2013, Arte Reportage offered him the opportunity to film a refugee camp in Kurdistan, "LE TEMPS PERDU".

Since 2013, he has been working with Archipel 35 on "ONE NATION ONE KING."

"I wanted to film a people who are active, a people who invent a destiny.

A people who debate, hope, mobilize.

These people build their sovereignty, establish new relations of equality, ordain new rights.

They found a republic.

These people are not an invention of the current times.

They existed. They were born in 1789.

That summer, these people entered a revolution.

Let's hear them. They have things to tell us."