

Pan-Européenne presents

François Cluzet

ONE FOR THE ROAD

(LE DERNIER POUR LA ROUTE)

A film by **Philippe Godeau**
with **Mélanie Thierry, Michel Vuillermoz**

Based on the book by **Hervé Chabaliér**
« Le Dernier Pour la Route » published by Editions Robert Laffont

French release date: September 23, 2009
107 mins.

SYNOPSIS

Hervé is traveling fast down a road headed in only one direction: Self-destruction. He's an alcoholic, and his drinking is wrecking his marriage, family and career. In desperation and still in denial, he checks into a detox clinic, his last-chance saloon.

There, he meets a group of fellow sufferers and one person in particular, a young woman named Magali, who help him to see life other than through the bottom of an empty bottle.

AN INTERVIEW WITH PHILIPPE GODEAU

After working as a producer and then as a distributor, you're now wearing a director's hat. Was it a challenge?

It seemed to happen on its own, but at the same time, it was definitely the best thing I've done since I started working in cinema. I'd never thought of directing a film before. I've always been very happy working in distribution and production. When I bought the rights to the book, it wasn't at all with a view to directing it. I met with several directors to offer them the task of adapting it but I didn't think the approach they wanted to take was right. For the first time, I got involved in the writing process, telling myself we'd offer the script to a director afterwards. I worked with Agnès de Sacy and then when I showed it again to Jaco Van Dormael and a few others, they encouraged me to direct it myself. And now I only have one desire – to make another film.

What did you feel when you read Hervé Chabalier's book?

It's a book that one feels, one which moved me enormously. I read it like a novel – very quickly – and the following morning, I called up to find out about the rights. That had already happened to me when I read *La Mort Intime* by Marie de Hennezel. On the face of it, they aren't books that are obvious choices for adaptation but to me, it was like a revelation. It was obvious.

They often say a director puts a lot of themselves in a first film.

I wouldn't know how to make a film I couldn't relate to. As a producer, I've always been interested in making films that aren't just cinematographic works but which carry a message. That's what I like about movies, that combination of the artistic and something close to society. So of course it's a film that speaks to me. The film is an adaptation of the story of Hervé Chabalier's life, whose book was a success because it's sincere. I therefore tried to be as sincere as he was.

When I showed the film to Hervé, I was both very emotional and very concerned. The fact that he was moved by the film was important to me, even though I didn't make the film for Hervé but rather with the aim of making as many people as possible aware of the subject.

Does the film resemble what you'd imagined when you were writing with Agnès de Sacy?

Yes and no. The truly magical thing when you make a film is when things take on their own life. It's magical when you set a story in place and a scene comes to life, when the actors bring something beyond what you could write or imagine – that's when things take on their own life.

Funnily enough, that's what is most moving and most powerful: When the film no longer really belongs to you.

The film deals with dependence in general – a much wider subject than alcoholism alone. Was that obvious to you when writing?

It's true that the subject of the film is wider than just alcoholism, but I couldn't honestly say that was intentional. Through an example, a character or a group, everyone can see something of themselves, even if one is not obliged to be an alcoholic or to suffer from some dependence or other in order to be sensitive to the experiences of the characters. We can all, at some moment or other in our lives, experience a dependence. I think that above all, the film says that in opening up and in talking, you can deal with these things.

Was your leitmotiv making entertainment from this serious subject?

Absolutely. I love films where you don't get bored. I like the idea that a film can mean that people are a little different when they leave the theater. As a producer, I also like being able to work for two years on a story and with characters who are the opposite to me.

When you were shooting in Aix-les-Bains, the ambiance was extremely friendly. Was this cohesion important to be moving in the right direction for the project?

Yes, I think so. Firstly, it had to affect us emotionally in order for there to be a chance of being able to do the same for others. François Cluzet very rightly says that an actor cannot be alone. It's the story of a group, so that group had to exist. I was lucky that over and above each actor's performance, they brought their personality and sincerity.

Did you go to Alcoholics Anonymous meetings before the shoot?

The detox center in the film is inspired by the one in the book. Hervé goes to a clinic where they use the Minnesota method which helps people stop being dependent and which could help anybody in the search for a certain quality of life. I went to that place and I spent some time there.

Group therapy is a phenomenal task. You can't explain it if you haven't experienced it. Each person, by giving from within and sharing their experience helps someone else get better.

Can we come back to the difficulties you experienced during the casting process?

All the actors to whom we offered the role of Hervé said yes in around 24 hours. Then it ended up not happening. The funny thing is that the first person to whom I gave the book a few years ago was François Cluzet. He didn't read it back then. He didn't feel like it. I think he had a misconception about it: He thought that Hervé was telling the story of his descent. Now, I'm delighted to have made this film with François and I don't think anyone could have performed the role as well as him.

How did you work with François Cluzet during the preparation phase and shooting?

We saw each other around three weeks before the start of shooting and we talked a lot, about ourselves, about fairly intimate things, very simply and with complete trust. I think that allowed François to let himself go. He gave some phenomenal things in this film without me even having to ask.

And your encounter with Mélanie Thierry ?

She was the first person I called and she happened to be pregnant at the time. She loved the script but she told me that she felt totally incapable of getting involved. Having a baby and then two months later having to play a totally broken down alcoholic was complicated. So I looked around and met up with lots of young actresses and then I heard through Jérôme Salle that she was still available. So she called me back and said she'd do it. During shooting, she gave me a wonderful compliment. She said: "This is the first time someone has watched me perform."

You said that this first film for you as a director almost happened by accident. Now, you're already thinking about the next one. Have you become addicted?

Yes, I want to but I'll take my time. I also love my work as a producer, I'm very close to a lot of talented people who have trusted me for years. They knew that I was making a movie but I never hung up my producer's hat.

AN INTERVIEW WITH HERVÉ CHABALIER

You followed different stages of the film. Were you nonetheless surprised when you saw it?

One of my concerns was to know how the fictional parts would marry with the more real episodes drawn from the book. But everything which is pure fiction is totally believable. I was absolutely bowled over by François Cluzet's humanity and soberness - no pun intended!

We don't know each other very well, only having met once or twice, but bizarrely, I found that at certain moments he uses expressions that are very personal to me. And Mélanie Thierry is someone I'd have liked to hold in my arms too! She's superbly fragile in the film. I was also concerned to know if the message regarding alcoholism got across. The essential is said and said well. That is the thing to which I attached the most importance and I hope the film will be as useful as the book. Alcoholism is still considered a defect, thought of as deviant behavior. Too many people don't know that it is an illness. So alcoholics hide their dependence, their addiction when they are not in full denial mode. I think the film will help to raise awareness, like the book.

Do you think the power of the image will be equal to that of the written word?

I love writing but image is my craft and I know very well that when you have a true, strong image, it's hard to better it in words. The interest of the written word is the imaginary and being about to push for depth. I believe in the "punch" of a film.

How did you work with Philippe Godeau and Agnès de Sacy on writing the script?

Philippe and I have a relationship that has always been based on a deep, mutual trust. We didn't talk much about the script, we know we were on the same wavelength in terms of the nature of the film. Even before finalizing the acquisition of the rights, Philippe and I saw each other a lot and I knew spirit in which he wanted to make ONE FOR THE ROAD. Agnès and I naturally found the places where it was legitimate for me to intervene. I wanted to keep an eye on the script, not in order to control her work but just to verify there weren't any problems in terms of the description of the disease that is alcoholism and its consequences, and the progression of the alcoholic, his character and behavior. Agnès and I talked a lot. I got quite involved in the dialogues because alcoholics have certain traits in the way they talk. I intervened as a kind of alcoholics "expert". It was, in my opinion, an exemplary collaboration.

You say you never saw the film as an ordinary spectator. Is it still painful to go back over that episode in your life?

The pain is less now because I've been dry for almost seven years and I've talked a great deal about this problem during the three years following the publication of my book. First, I wrote the book which was a kind of therapy in itself. Then it was such a success that I talked a great deal about it, went to many meetings and participated in a lot of debates so I almost completely liberated myself.

In the end, it has almost become somebody else's story because I've told it so many times. Of course it's my story but it belongs to the collective so it's less violent for me.

On watching the film, one has the feeling you couldn't have reached the end of this quest for harmony without having shared it with others. The idea of the group is very strong.

When you are an alcoholic, you can't negotiate with alcohol. You can't decide to only have one or two drinks in a day. You can no longer live without alcohol. Alcohol takes control of your life, alcohol is in charge. During the final period of my alcoholism, I didn't drink to feel good, rather to not feel bad. I became a true addict. Of course I tried to get over it alone, through pride. Under the shower in the morning there were countless times I told myself that I'd stop that day. In the end, I stopped nothing and the worst thing was that when I said it, I knew I wouldn't do it. And that's when you hit rock bottom, when you consciously lie to yourself. You can't escape alcohol on your own, and you need some very positive egotism to succeed. Of course the group is essential because only alcoholics know how to talk about alcohol. They are the ones who understand their problems best, much better in any case than most doctors who don't understand this disease. The great thing about these discussion groups is that everyone is the same, wherever you come from, whatever your status or education. You have the same disease and the same deep reasons that make you dependent.

One feels there is a turning point in Hervé's evolution when his wife comes to visit him in the clinic and he sees his own alcoholism through his wife's words.

Anne Consigny is a remarkable actress. It's very strange because Philippe didn't know my wife and yet Anne is remarkably like her, she has the same self-restraint. I don't know if things really changed at that moment but it was a very important moment nonetheless. You have to tell alcoholics the truth. You must never pick up an alcoholic when they fall. You have to leave them on the ground. A loving wife must never help him up, put him to bed and in the morning have him wake up and think: "Everything's fine, it's not as bad as all that". You have to succeed in making them truly face up to the damage caused by this illness.

Do you feel like a survivor now?

Today I feel like I'm alive and that's not bad going. And I feel I was very lucky in that respect. The fact of not drinking doesn't remove the day-to-day problems. I just try to place myself differently, to handle my emotions and my anger, to let go rather than to eat away at myself. I often recite that famous Serenity Prayer which is a real guide to life: "God (however you see him); grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; Courage to change the things I can; And wisdom to know the difference." Obviously the third part is the most important. I take care of myself, I know that I will never be cured of alcoholism and I have to remain vigilant. A glass is never very far away.

AN INTERVIEW WITH FRANÇOIS CLUZET

How would you describe your character?

He's a reporter, a man of action, he's passionate and he's an adventurer. As he says in the film, he's a guy who needed to cover every war breaking out around the world. It's perhaps a little selfish that he always went so far away from his family. He's a double character – an individualist and a team player at the same time.

Did you feel a particular responsibility embodying a contemporary like Hervé Chabalier? How was it meeting him, before and after the shoot?

Hervé Chabalier touched me. I found him extremely sensitive and perceptive. I read his book which I found overwhelming and that's for a large part why I agreed to do the film. I felt the responsibility of not disappointing him. We actors are just a link in the chain, but if it's not solid, it won't hold.

Hervé's opinion was very important to me because within the framework of a biography, it's important to know what the author is thinking. Hervé Chabalier understands the world of movies well. The fact that he was very moved when he first saw the movie was also due to the entirety of the film. The film is simple. It directly addresses the sensitivity of the viewer and doesn't intellectualize the affair. The problem with lots of films is that they often call upon the audience to reflect. But the audience isn't there for that. Viewers are there to receive emotion despite themselves, to be touched as deeply as possible and that's my job.

What was the emotion, the trigger that meant this character moved you?

The emotion really comes from Hervé's story with alcohol – that's to say the way in which he finds himself in a difficult situation and manages to get out of it. I like the way one can bounce back. I believe nothing is planned in advance in life and that when you have an hour of breathing left, you can still change your mind. I've always believed life is made solely of ruptures. So you have to be prepared for them. When you're really at rock bottom, you have to realize that and come up with a solution that you must then act upon to resolve the problem, be it a love, family or professional issue.

The film and Hervé Chabalier's opinion indisputably show that you can't do it alone, you need the group. That is a driving force in terms of bouncing back. ...

I believe in that, too. Hemmingway said: "One man alone ain't got no chance". You're alone when you get into a fix but you need help to get out of it. I believe in the power of teamwork, my job is about teamwork and it's something I like. Alone, I wouldn't have been able to do anything. I'm neither painter nor sculptor nor composer. I'm just an actor. I need a writer, a director and above all, partners. To me, a good actor is a good partner.

That notion of exchange is something that often crops up in your interviews. And that's also a theme of the film – the characters can't make it alone.

Exactly. To me, that's a fine metaphor for life – you can't do anything alone. As an actor, when I have the leading role, it's my obligation to make sure all the actors feel good.

Because I started out as an extra, I know what an actor feels when he's only on set for a short time. He is often obliged to master what is demanded of him but acting – real acting – goes beyond mastery, it's about abandoning oneself to one's partners in the situation.

I'm happy that we succeeded in that in this film, thanks to the spirit of all the actors chosen by Philippe Godeau. He demonstrated great harmony. He makes out his involvement is minimal but he has succeeded in bringing together a virtually perfect cast.

How did you work both on your character and on the way the group functions around Hervé?

Firstly, I work on the text, saturating myself with the story. When I have the feeling I know what's going to happen on the next page, I try to work out what the mood is for each scene. I do it all very simply, I try to get more confident. Then I talk to the director because once again, these things aren't done alone. I tell him my ideas be they good or bad – and bad they often are – but it doesn't bother me. Once he's told me his vision of the subject, I try to move towards his point of view, if there's nothing there that shocks me and after meeting with him once again, we move on to shooting. On set, I act for my partner and I like my partner to act for me. Everything happens in the looks, the hands, the feet, the posture of the partner or partners opposite me.

Do you remember how Philippe Godeau offered you the part?

He offered it to me around 18 months before the shoot and back then I thought it was about the unpleasant aftertastes and the nighttime roamings of an alcoholic. I didn't want to do that, I thought it was much too dark. He looked for other actors and then came back to me a long time later. My agent had read the script and told me it was great. So I read it and I understood it wasn't about his wanderings but about therapy. So I found myself in my favorite kind of situation: With lots of partners and a group feel.

After a day on set, was it easy to escape such a dark and complex character?

I'd say that with experience, it's not hard because in the end, you are constantly leaving the character behind during the day, on every "Cut!". What is much harder to experience is when the atmosphere on set is bad. You have to remember that life goes on during shooting and that whatever the job, you are living your life at the same time. That is absolutely essential and Chabrol taught me a lot about it. Some directors think you hold your breath while you're making a film for two, three or four months and they create a stifling atmosphere. It was the opposite in this case. We had a generous director who paid a lot of attention to his cast and crew.

That's the balance all the characters in the film are looking for...

Exactly. The characters in the film are fighting a disease – addiction. They can't do without alcohol, medication or drugs. They are fighting that physiological craving. All addictions are alike so it is good that we can show through different characters that in the end, it's the same problem.

There is a very emotional scene in the film showing the confrontation between Hervé and his wife, played by Anne Consigny. Was it particularly hard to shoot?

It was a difficult scene, particularly for Anne Consigny. The funny thing about that scene is that I make her come to the clinic because I want to show her to everybody, to show how beautiful she is and how proud of her I am. But in the end, it comes back on me because she explains in veiled terms just how much living with an alcoholic is a kind of hell and that being apart is doing her good. I really liked working with Anne, she's a great actress with a rare sensitivity.

Dependence touches all of us in its various guises. Do you think it's important to show that through a feature film? Do you think it has more power than a documentary?

What I found most interesting was succeeding in making a film that is entertaining on a serious and profound subject. The problem with dramatic films is that they have to be digested. Thanks to Hervé Chabalier, we have a witness account. Then the director and scriptwriter turned the story into a drama through the medium of fiction.

We are tackling a profound and serious subject but it's up to us to give it life, authenticity and also a little lightness. Each time I make a dramatic film I'm constantly asking myself how it can be made digestible. You can't make people come to a movie theater and make them pay to see a film with a serious subject if you don't have entertainment. I use the word "entertainment" within the context of something Ingmar Bergman once said: "Don't forget we're in the business of entertainment".

AN INTERVIEW WITH MÉLANIE THIERRY

How would you describe the character of Magali?

She's a rebel, a young 23-year-old woman who is broken by life and who has rebuilt herself alone. Her parents haven't been there for her and didn't see her grow up. She hasn't yet really hit rock bottom to be able to understand how to come back up to the surface and she's kind of going round in circles. She's lost, she no longer knows where she is and feels that she has no right to happiness and that nobody in the group understands her because she's the youngest. Hervé's character is the only one to pay any attention to her and takes the first step, looking at her in a gentle and kindly way.

What drew you to the project? After having acted in sci-fi films like *BABYLON A.D.* and action movies like *LARGO WINCH*, this a return to something more intimate.

After having tried out action movies, having run around and shouted a lot, it's good to get back to something more simple. I feel like I'm getting back to the essential, really understanding why I do this job: To act. It's as simple as that. This is also the first film where I've invested myself in a role that is very different to my own character. I dared a little more, took more risks.

Is the pleasure of acting very different depending on the film?

I have liked all the characters I have played. I find the role of Magali very touching because she's vulnerable, not well-liked and highly-strung. It was quite powerful to play and yet it couldn't be too black. When I received one of the first versions of the script, the character was much darker and more violent and that cooled me down a little. I was apprehensive about playing that kind of character. I was afraid it would be too emotional.

What was it like filming with Philippe Godeau?

I like his attitude and his humility. Philippe is someone tender and kind, who is interested in people. With some directors, you mustn't be too susceptible or you might cry and no longer be able to act. Philippe is very discreet. He's there without being there, he manages everything. He always instills a good mood on the set without imposing anything which means you have incredible freedom. He's was never behind the lens, he was always at the foot of the camera watching us, so he sees what's happening on our faces. It's very agreeable, even if it's much more intimidating because there's no filter.

You get the feeling he's very fond of his whole team.

Yes, there's a lot of kindness. There was a real feeling part of a gang on this shoot. In general, I get stage fright pretty quickly and I'm never satisfied. But with this film, in that little town of Aix-les-Bains, I felt like I was at the end of the earth, in the middle of the forest, the mountains, and the atmosphere was one of family. It comforted me. It was the first time I felt to what extent you can rely on a crew, to what extent they are important, loyal and there for you.

That's a little like the theme of the film: The fact that it's very difficult to get by on your own, without talking to other people.

Yes, the characters in this story understand one another, they need one another or they'd never manage. They are bound by very deep, sincere and beautiful links. It's moving to feel such mutual support. If one of them falls, like dominos they all fall. The film is a success thanks to that alchemy between a crew, a director and the actors he chose.

What was it like working with François Cluzet ?

I was delighted to work with François. Everything was so simple with him; we listened to each other, we laughed together and there was a real feeling of complicity. Because we really enjoyed acting together, we were increasingly free. François enabled me to go further with my acting. The trio of Philippe, François and me was magical!

AN INTERVIEW WITH MICHEL VUILLERMOZ

of the Comédie Française

How would you describe the character of Pierre?

Pierre is back in the clinic to dry out from his alcoholism once again. Unfortunately, he can't get over it, like many people who are addicted to alcohol or drugs. For any dependence, whether it's hard drugs, cigarettes or alcohol, there are usually some pretty serious consequences for the people around the addict in their home life or at work. Pierre is quite a moving character because he's clear about his own fate, he remains joyful until the end, even if alcohol ends up beating him.

How did you compose the character?

I thought about who he was and about from where he came. I like looking a little at what a character has experienced, like a kind of biography. I invent where he was born, his career, his love life. I also went to Alcoholics Anonymous to see how a meeting went. I read Joseph Kessel's book and Hervé Chabalier's of course. I also met a specialist, Dr. Philippe Batel. For two hours, he told me about how alcoholics behave even when they aren't drinking, and about everything that can be translated physically, right down to a person's vocabulary. In terms of intellect or intuition, it is better to understand a person in order to play them. If you understand them, you know how they function and in principle, you can put them in any situation.

Do you have any affinities with the character of Pierre?

Personally, no. I have dependencies too, like we all do, but I can handle myself. I'm not an alcoholic, I like drinking but I drink in moderation – like they say hypocritically. It's more of an affinity with Pierre's character at certain times – his self-mockery for example, his way of not taking himself seriously. I like having a laugh and fooling around so of course I put what I am into Pierre's character.

Does performing something completely different in the evenings at the theater help you leave behind this sometimes-heavy story?

It has nothing to do with it because I compartmentalize the theater plays and the film. It's not the same exercise at all. Moreover, the shoot was great fun, it was a very gentle experience. Philippe is extremely considerate and all the actors got on really well together which is a rare thing. We were like a little troupe, just like at the Comédie Française. We enjoyed meeting up and spending time together, even outside of shooting.

So it was more emulation between you than competition?

Yes, healthy and positive emulation. It's a film about a group, and ensemble film just how Philippe wanted it to be and I think he succeeded even if it was just through the casting. We are very different, we're not working in the same register and there is no competition between us. Sometimes with actors' egos there are rivalries and even jealousies. Here, we each had a different function and a different acting style and different characters, so nobody stepped on anybody else's toes.

What kind of director is Philippe Godeau?

This is Philippe's first film as a director but he was astonishingly precise. He knows what he wants, there's no misplaced pride and he listens to and makes himself understood by his actors. You know what he wants, you can feel it when something is bothering him or when he's happy. He's very humble, very open and at the same time, very ambitious. He never lets his actors down, he's always very attentive and very delicate. This shoot was very pleasant, joyful and fun. The ambiance of a film depends a lot on the character of the person directing it.

CAST

François CLUZET
Mélanie THIERRY
Michel VUILLERMOZ
Eric NAGGAR
Lionnel ASTIER
Raphaëline GOUPILLEAU
Eva MAZAURIC
Ninon BRETECHER
Françoise PINKWASSER
Maryline CANTO
Riton LIEBMAN
Bernard CAMPAN
Anne CONSIGNY
Arthur MONCLA

HERVÉ
MAGALI
PIERRE
GUNTHER
JEAN-MARIE
HÉLÈNE
KRIS
SANDRA
SOLEDAD
CAROL
MARTIN
MARC
AGNÈS
THOMAS

CREW

Directed by	Philippe GODEAU
Screenplay	Agnès DE SACY and Philippe GODEAU
Based on the book by	Hervé CHABALIER Le Dernier Pour La Route
Published by	Editions Robert Laffont
Photography	Jean-Marc FABRE
Sound	Michel KHARAT Jean-Paul HURIER
Assistant director	Hubert ENGAMMARE
Editing	Thierry DEROCLES
Set design	Thérèse RIPAUD
Costumes	Anne SCHOTTE
Make up	Françoise CHAPUIS
Hair styling	Patrick GIRAULT
Script supervisor	Sylvette BAUDROT
Unit production manager	Didier CARREL
Casting	Constance DEMONTOY
Set photography	Nathalie ENO
Original music	Jean-Louis AUBERT
Musical supervisor	Valérie LINDON pour Ré Flexe Music
Production manager	Baudoin CAPET
Associate producer	Nathalie GASTALDO
Produced by	Philippe GODEAU

A PAN-EUROPÉENNE, STUDIOCANAL, FRANCE 3 CINÉMA, RHÔNE-ALPES CINÉMA
coproduction

With the participation of CANAL+, CINÉCINÉMA and FRANCE 3
In association with LA BANQUE POSTALE IMAGE 2
With the support of LA FONDATION GROUPAMA GAN POUR LE CINÉMA, the
EUROPEAN UNION MEDIA PROGRAM, PROCIREP and L'ANGO-AAGICOA

Distributed by PAN-EUROPÉENNE -WILD BUNCH DISTRIBUTION
International sales STUDIOCANAL

Le dernier pour la route © 2008 Pan-Européenne – Studiocanal – France 3 Cinéma –
Rhône-Alpes Cinéma