



Presents

A QUAD Production

With

François CLUZET

Omar SY

UNTOUCHABLE

A film written and directed by **Eric TOLEDANO** and **Olivier NAKACHE**

**FRENCH RELEASE NOVEMBER 2
2011**

Running time:

Official site: www.gaumont.fr

Press site: www.gaumontpresse.fr

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SYNOPSIS

After a paragliding accident, Philippe, a rich aristocrat, hires Driss, a young guy from the projects recently released from prison as his care-giver... In other words, the person least suited for the job.

Together they will blend Vivaldi and Earth, Wind and Fire, elegant diction and street jive, suits and sweatpants...

Two worlds are going to collide and come to terms with each other to give birth to a friendship as crazy, comical and strong as it is unexpected, a unique relationship that will create sparks and make them... Untouchable.

INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTORS

How did you get the idea for UNTOUCHABLE?

Olivier Nakache: It dates back to 2003. One evening, we watched a documentary that marked us both: A LA VIE, A LA MORT. It was all about the highly unlikely encounter between Philippe Pozzo di Borgo, who was left a tetraplegic after a paragliding accident, and Abdel, a young guy from the projects hired to take care of him. At the time, we had just finished shooting JE PREFERE QU'ON RESTE AMIS (a.k.a. JUST FRIENDS). We probably weren't mature enough to tackle the subject at that time, but the documentary stayed with us. We often watched it again... and, after TELLEMENT PROCHES (a.k.a SO CLOSE), we felt that maybe the time had come to work on the story.

Eric Toledano: The circumstances were a little special after that film, in which Omar played the part of a doctor. It was such a pleasure for us to see him become an actor at our side in NOS JOURS HEUREUX (a.k.a THOSE HAPPY DAYS): we naturally wanted to continue this adventure with him. We felt that Omar hadn't yet been used to his full potential on the big screen. And the relationship between Philippe and Abdel came back to us like a boomerang, like something obvious. And so we showed Omar the documentary to see if it might interest him. On obtaining a positive response from him, we at last realized that this story contained everything that we were looking for: an incredible story, a powerful subject, a great deal of humor... And, beyond that, everything that Olivier and I admire: people who, in extreme situations, keep their sense of humor and remain positive. That's how we work in everyday life anyhow: we knew that we would have things to say on this subject.

Once you had Omar's agreement, how did you proceed?

O.N.: Before starting work on the screenplay, we wanted to meet Philippe Pozzo di Borgo in Essaouira, Morocco, where he has remarried. To see if our desire to make a film about his story would be increased by meeting him.

E.T.: We were able to contact him easily because he gave his email address at the very end of the book he had written, LE SECOND SOUFFLE. And he answered right away saying that it wasn't the first time that directors had wanted to adapt his story for the screen, that he had even read screenplays but that he would be delighted to meet us.

O.N.: And that meeting was decisive!

E.T.: Because he told us the end of the story, everything that wasn't in the documentary. And a number of the things he said left their mark on us. Philippe doesn't talk much but, when he does, his words are powerful... And so he told us, "If you make this film, it has to be funny. Because this story has to be treated with humor." We were delighted and reassured to hear that. Then he added, "If I hadn't met Abdel, I'd be dead." That conversation allowed us to open up a number of lines of thought. For instance, how the two levels of French society, represented by Philippe and Abdel, create new relationships and feelings when they come into collision. These two men, one struck by a physical handicap, the other a victim of a social handicap, have a sort of strange and unexpected complementarity that was able to bring about this exchange.

Did Philippe Pozzo di Borgo immediately give you his agreement to allow you to get to work on UNTOUCHABLE?

O.N.: The meeting allowed him to find out who we were. We also showed him our previous films. There was a genuine exchange. And he urged us to take the plunge.

E.T.: He realized right away that we would of course allow him to read everything. We could tell that he was eager to, that he wanted to talk about it with us... He was generous and extremely courteous in the welcome he gave us as in all the emails that he continued to send us from that point on.

O.N.: He trusted us. And when you meet someone like that, it marks you.

E.T.: He gave us pages of notes on each new draft of the script. For instance, he would point out situations that were technically impossible in his condition. In short, he brought a form of truth to the film by telling us at times about a reality that was even crazier and funnier than what we were writing. At all times, he retains a normal side in an abnormal situation. And this ability to make us forget his condition, guided us throughout the film. And that's also why, once Omar and François Cluzet were ready to set off with us on this adventure, we organized our "integration course". We went back to Essaouira to see Philippe with them. And, once again, he gave us more food for thought...

O.N.: It was at that point that François began to take his inspiration from him, observing how he lives, how he moves, how he talks. Before recreating all that in the film. At the end of those three days, François simply told us, "I'll carry the flag." He is so intense and gets so caught up in the parts he plays that this meeting overwhelmed him.

Why did you want François Cluzet for the role of Philippe?

O.N.: Initially, for this part, we were looking for a marked age difference with Omar, implying actors of a certain caliber. And then we learned that François had read the script, thanks to his agent, without us knowing. He then asked to meet us. And this triggered off everything!

E.T.: His immediate enthusiasm was enough to make us want to work with him. When he explained, for instance, that he wanted to experience the situations and not just perform them. Then, on getting to know him little by little, we started to look forward to the electricity that would arise from his encounter with Omar who, like him, lives out situations more than he performs them. It went way beyond what we hoped for.

O.N.: François is a genuinely intense actor. This part required huge preparation. He couldn't turn up the day before shooting, sit down in a wheelchair and perform the breathing and the suffering... without having worked beforehand. As he had promised, he took up the challenge.

On screen, we never see two "actors" performing, each one focused on himself. They genuinely perform together and create a sort of two-headed character. Was that obvious from the first days of shooting?

O.N.: To be honest, we didn't realize right away. Because François is an actor who keeps a certain distance at first. He has a very intellectual approach to things prior to shooting. For him, the main part of the work is done by the time he arrives on the set where everything that he has prepared is fine-tuned. So the obviousness that we were of course looking for didn't strike us immediately. But, as soon as we realized it was there, it was a permanent delight to watch. Omar and François, each in his own way, tried to use his role to make the character as real as possible and to avoid an acting competition.

How did Omar surprise you in this film compared to the other films that you have directed him in?

E.T.: We would never have embarked upon a film like UNTOUCHABLE if we hadn't had a clear idea of the cast that we wanted. And, as with Philippe, the person playing Driss had to be instantly credible. Omar continually surprised us. He took the initiative of losing 10 kilos and bulking up his muscles without us asking simply because, in his mind, a guy from the projects would be thinner than him in real life. When I saw him turn up with his head

shaved, simply dressed in a hooded sweatshirt and a leather jacket, I was blown away by the way in which he had moved so skillfully towards the character on his own.

O.N.: And then, on the set, in his performance, Omar was amazing! We always knew there was an actor hiding in him. But here, he really knocked us out.

E.T.: Omar brings good humor and friendliness that are priceless to a shoot. He possesses a rare form of humility. Sometimes, people would wait for him near the set because we were shooting near a middle school in Bondy and he would let himself be photographed with all the kids, without ever losing his happy mood. He never takes himself seriously. His relationship with fame is totally natural.

How did you work with François and him prior to shooting?

O.N.: We did a lot of readings with them. That brought us a great deal because we love to steal things from the actors at those moments, things that escape them completely. We have a number of different stages in our work "method". First of all, we write the script and then rewrite it during shooting. Indeed, we didn't know how François was going to react on the set because we talk all the time, including during the takes!

E.T.: By doing that, we try to unsettle our actors' performance and bring out unexpected things, accidents, unforeseen stuff.

O.N.: We prepare things a great deal, of course, but when it comes to shooting, we like to try out all the ideas that come to us. And that's necessarily unsettling, even for the crew that often asks us to do the scene as it's written at least once!

E.T.: But we can do it because we have prepared everything together and we know it can work. There comes a point when we need to demolish it all because we're worried the actors may get bored. We need that particular excitement, we share it, it's one of the main things we have in common.

After two ensemble movies, NOS JOURS HEUREUX (*Those Happy Days*) and TELLEMENT PROCHES (*So Close*), this film focuses on two characters, a little like your first feature, JE PREFERE QU'ON RESTE AMIS (*Just Friends*). Which of the two styles do you prefer?

E.T.: The ensemble movie was, unwittingly, influenced by the success of NOS JOURS HEUREUX, and we wanted to continue in the same vein with TELLEMENT PROCHES: working with the group but also with each character. Besides, we really like stories where everything mixes together, Italian movies where people talk all the time...

O.N.: We have a phobia about boring our audience! Having lots of characters and stories allows us to avoid running that risk.

E.T.: That's why INTOUCHABLES was a complex undertaking for us. But we were able to count on our very vigilant producers who knew how to urge us, from the very first drafts of the script, to remove the secondary characters in order to focus on the duo. And they were right because it was the desire to talk about that two-person relationship that led us to write and direct UNTOUCHABLE. We therefore decided to place our trust in this story and this relationship, trying not to veer from the path.

O.N.: In UNTOUCHABLE, there are very few supporting characters and they provide a break in the comedy, allowing the story to move along without us losing sight of the essentials.

E.T.: But, of course, to succeed, they have to exist and we have to give them flesh. We owe a great deal to the actors who play them and who all accepted something that wasn't that obvious: just a few days shooting, not much to perform but key parts in which they would need to serve the plot in all humility. And we were lucky enough to find that in Anne Le Ny, Clothilde Mollet, Audrey Fleurot, Grégoire Oesterman and all the others who accepted to play along with incredible talent.

Music plays an important role in your films, particularly in this one. At what stage do you think about it?

O.N.: At every stage. For instance, as soon as we began writing, we were thinking about the song by Earth, Wind and Fire that Driss dances to at Philippe's birthday party. As for the songs that accompany the film's montage sequences, we think about them during filming and editing. To be honest, we're kind of neurotic about music! We spend a lot of time thinking about it. Then comes the headache of obtaining the rights!

E.T.: As for the composer of the film's score, we came across Ludovico Einaudi while surfing music sites on the Net. His piano pieces – similar to the flawless compositions of Michael Nyman or Thomas Newman - also accompanied the writing of many sequences in which we required both emotion and a certain distance. And then one day we called him to ask him to write the film's score. And he accepted.

Were there scenes that you dreaded shooting?

O.N.: On a set, there's something you dread every day...

E.T.: The scenes with the wheelchair that Omar has to position before carrying François to it and sitting him in it. The scene in which François suffers because of his "phantom pains" as if his limbs were coming back to life. In this latter case, we didn't feel up to giving him directions, so we were pretty tense. The other complex scenes were those with a lot of extras.

O.N.: And then there was a major first for us: shooting car chases! Those were crazy moments but we were more excited by them than stressed out.

E.T.: In fact, in the film, there are plenty of scenes that we were looking forward to shooting like two excited kids, notably the one in which Omar dances to Earth, Wind and Fire! We probably started talking to him about it four days before. We'd go into the room and he would start to dance. At the end of each day prior to the shooting of that scene, I would put that number on so that everyone could imagine the mood that we were looking for.

O.N.: And then there were those really special days that began in a housing project on the outskirts of Paris and ended in the luxury homes of the city's smartest neighborhoods.

E.T.: That sums up the film perfectly: we move from one world to another, from one visual realm to another. At such times, we felt we were at the heart of what we were after.

This is also an opportunity to adopt a special approach to the projects...

E.T.: When you go out into the projects, the images are instantly striking. But we were careful to remain focused on our subject. In the first minutes of the film, we don't want to paint a portrait of the big city outskirts today but explain who Driss is, where he comes from and, through that, highlight the contrast with Philippe's townhouse in Saint Germain des Prés. Today, audiences are aware of the harsh reality of the projects. Therefore, one shot is enough to get across the world we're in.

O.N.: Moreover, Omar's presence makes our footage all the more credible. Because he comes from a housing project like Driss, in Trappes. And because he was able to tell us if what we were doing was right or not. With him, we couldn't go wrong...

Was the film rewritten a great deal during editing?

O.N.: When we saw the editor's first cut - he works while we shoot - it still needed work of course but the film was already there. We rewrote it a lot less during editing than our previous features.

E.T.: Because we improvised much less on the set whereas we always tried to send things off the rails in our other films. Here, things were more focused. However, even if there were fewer changes, the last stage of writing really occurs during editing. Since there's a great

deal of spontaneity and improvisation on the set, it can take a while to find the film's final form.

O.N.: The heart of the scenes shifts.

E.T.: Here, the challenge was maintaining that fragile balance between laughter and emotion. During shooting, we often mixed everything up and no two takes were alike. Editing allows us to pick among the different moods of each one to build up something coherent while switching between comedy and emotion. Editing was a very pleasant moment: like a puzzle where the pieces fell easily into place. That was a particularly encouraging and reassuring sign for us: we were on the right track.

Since you had based UNTOUCHABLE on a true story, did you feel a special kind of responsibility?

E.T.: Yes, even if we felt very free in spite of everything. We weren't shooting a documentary so we really had no limits. After reading the different drafts of the script, Philippe told us that there were times when we even fell well short of reality. All the same, I really had the impression that we were morally responsible for something...

O.N.: And I don't think we have betrayed Philippe's story, even if we have necessarily had to adapt certain parts of it.

E.T.: Moreover, it was no accident that we felt the need to go and show him images from the film just after shooting. We were invited to his surprise birthday party. Abdel was there, along with Philippe's mother, his family and all his friends. Using a computer, we gave him a slideshow of photos taken on the set. It was a necessarily strange moment for him to see François Cluzet playing him. There was a fine silence in the middle of that happy evening. They were all moved. I think the first screening of the completed film will be a very intense moment for him and those close to him.

Filmography

Eric TOLEDANO and Olivier NAKACHE

- 2011** Intouchables / Untouchable
- 2009** Tellement Proches / So Close
- 2006** Nos Jours Heureux / Those Happy Days
- 2005** Je Préfère qu'On Reste Amis... / Just Friends
- 2002** Ces jours heureux (short film)
- 1999** Les petits souliers (short film)
- 1995** Le jour et la nuit (short film)

INTERVIEW WITH FRANÇOIS CLUZET

What won you over when you first read the screenplay for UNTOUCHABLE?

The fact that it was the story about two characters and the birth of a friendship. Quite simply the story of two men. I like nothing more than performing for my partner. And I saw right away, on the set, that Omar worked in the same way and was performing for me too. There are times when you know you're not mistaken. UNTOUCHABLE really owes him a lot: he's an exceptional guy. I really had the impression that he was carrying the whole film. I would often say to him, "Remember, you're acting for us both, I can't do anything..." (laughter). There was a great deal of complicity between us.

Did you approach this role of a tetraplegic as a challenge?

Yes, because I'm an actor who isn't fond of dialogue and who loves to act silently. That means I usually need my body to express things in the place of words! But, obviously, in this case, there could be no body. So when there's no body, I listen, I participate, I take what there is to take, I laugh at whatever's funny. The complicity between Philippe and Driss comes about in this manner. On the one side, a mobile character. On the other, an immobile character. Driss becomes my body in a way. When he dances, it's a little as if I were dancing. When he jokes, it's a little as if I were joking. Because they're so different, they're made to get along. And each one takes a step towards the other.

With Omar and your two directors, you went to meet Philippe Pozzo di Borgo, the inspiration for your character, at his home in Essaouira. What are your memories of that visit?

Those were overwhelming moments. That encounter intensified my commitment to the film, the heart that I put into the work. If my role had been a tetraplegic without a face, that would necessarily have been more complicated for me. Seeing that man in his daily world and listening to him telling us about his life played a fundamental part.

From that point on, how did you prepare yourself to become Philippe?

Once I was one over by Omar's talent and, in a sort of ricochet effect, the reason why my character hires him becomes self-evident, my work consisted in trying to forget myself. In fact, that is the reason why I chose this job. It allows me to abandon myself. I've never tried to be more handsome or more generous. That's not what I do! And my character has a thirst for the ordinary, even though he finds himself in an extraordinary situation. Even when Driss suggests experiences that push the limits, Philippe accepts them because he doesn't know them and, like a child, he wants to try everything... With UNTOUCHABLE, I went through a process of abnegation that I like very much. The film meant accepting that the character of Driss should have so much heart that he moves for two, cracks jokes for two. And, little by little, I had to try to become his partner, to feed him lines, to make him laugh since he makes me laugh, to make life lighter for him since he makes it lighter for me. To the point of forgetting the handicap in order to say: I'm happy when I'm with him. I want to insist on this idea of abnegation because it is essential for me in our work. We mustn't always want things to pass through us. It's an opportunity when they pass through a partner. It's fascinating on a human level. And I had the feeling that I was more serene after shooting.

Was this complicity with Omar obvious or did it come about gradually?

Initially, when Eric and Olivier told me that Omar was going to play Driss, I took a closer look at his work in the SAV comedy show. And I liked what I saw: the range is fairly broad. But, remember, those are short sketches and the work is totally different on a film like UNTOUCHABLE! I then watched TELLEMENT PROCHES (a.k.a SO CLOSE) and found him remarkable in that. I realized just how fond of him Eric and Olivier were to cast him against type in such a way. He is wonderful in that film because he never has any distance in his performance. He's totally into it and doesn't try to be smarter than the part. He really is a wonderful actor. And so I was completely reassured before embarking upon this adventure. And then, once we met, even if Omar is fairly discreet, I was able to tell quickly that he trusted me. I really wanted to form a duo. For us to have a commitment between men, between actors. At the end of the day, we're just two kids having fun in the schoolyard and who are happy when they have a good partner. I was lucky, as I said before, because I found myself with a prince. Someone with a healthy, honest and generous approach.

The danger of this duo that you form with Omar could have been the confrontation of two actors performing individually. Instead, it's like a hydra with two heads. We can't see one without the other...

This goes back to what I have been saying for years now. Competition between acting partners is over, that age when you had to create a cold war on the set so that the star would crush all the others. For, contrary to what bad actors believe, we don't have that much responsibility. Actors are overestimated. We're just performers. We have to stick to our place. I started out as an amateur actor. I don't want to become a professional, confirmed actor. Thanks to the success I have had that has given me more self-confidence, I can return to the amateur side: the sheer joy of sharing, of not acting but of living to order. From that angle, Omar was in a state of grace, just like the directors, so it was easy for me. I was also carried along by the grace of Philippe Pozzo di Borgo. I know his sister and I'm very fond of her: she was the costume designer on JANIS & JOHN. And so I knew about his accident. Then I read the book that Pozzo had written. This man who says that his greatest handicap is not being in a wheelchair but to be living without the woman he loved and who died. That's what I had to live out: the vulnerability of a man orphaned by love.

Did your view of Philippe alter in the course of filming?

The problem was that we were going to make a comedy but I wasn't going to be able to be ridiculous as I had such fun being in LES PETITS MOUCHOIRS (a.k.a. LITTLE WHITE LIES). I had the burden of the handicap and I had to be sincere that condition. Therefore, I couldn't move but had to be on the ball: listen to everything that was said, have my senses on the alert... Philippe is someone real so I had to be real in every situation. And I had forgotten that he suffered. His suffering came flooding back and struck me hard. So, before certain tricky scenes involving pain, I would move away to one side to prepare myself and concentrate and I would begin a physical exercise to forget myself in order to sense the character's suffering. This bodily and sensorial preparation was indispensable since I didn't have the use of my body to express things. But working without the body doesn't mean the body feels nothing. The face has to express what you feel. Usually, I cut lines to perform with my body. Here, it was the opposite.

Are there any scenes that you were dreading?

No, apart from this idea of getting the notion of pain across. I didn't play on it all the time because this is a comedy: we had to forget it while it remained present. Moreover, Philippe has phantom pains that no one can imagine: his legs hurt when he isn't supposed to feel them.

Nakache and Toledano's writing dares to use an unexpected style of humor bringing in Hitler, famous jokes about the handicapped... They make no apologies for opting for either humor or emotion. They have no complexes...

They understood perfectly that the only things Philippe cannot stand are pity and compassion. He doesn't want to be summed up by his condition since he doesn't impose it on others. He knows that they are lucky to be mobile! But he is lucky in that he is alive. Eric and Olivier were able to get this across perfectly by opting for comedy throughout. Moreover, each member of this duo has a handicap. For Driss, a social handicap. For Philippe, a physical handicap. That's why Driss doesn't feel sorry for Philippe. He doesn't pity him and that's what makes him so appealing in his eyes.

How do Eric and Olivier work on the set?

They were very demanding and very ambitious. So it was tricky for me to tell them that my greatest ambition was to just let things happen. With experience, I have learned that you make great films by allowing life in. Eric and Olivier have a sense of fantasy and wittiness. With them, the days pass quickly and are very pleasant. They love their actors and they are with them. And that is the key that allows you to let yourself go without trying to give a performance. I just try to be anti-performance while never forgetting that only the film matters and that, even without moving, I have to bring something to it that gives it energy and power. And Eric and Olivier were always there to motivate me. Even in those scenes where Philippe is alone and he starts to let go because he doesn't have the strength to go on. He then truly abandons himself in his distress without showing anything, always with a great deal of discretion.

What did you feel on discovering the film?

I'm never really able to watch the films that I act in. But this time I was moved. And I discovered a film that worked because it was made with genuine team spirit. When I see UNTOUCHABLE, I'm also touched because I realize that we got it right, that our job is indeed one of abnegation and that those who believe that they are there to defend their own hides will always be in very disappointing films. The challenge is to make a film work, not to give a performance within it. The film here is the duo: nothing ever leads us to choose between Driss and Philippe. That is the quintessence of our work. And that holds true of Eric and Olivier too: neither one of them has an oversized ego. I'm happy to see that beautiful films are made together, in a good atmosphere. In the end, the easier you make my life, the better I perform because I feel I owe something.

INTERVIEW WITH OMAR SY

Tell us about how you first met Olivier Nakache and Eric Toledano...

It was in 2001, for a short film, *CES JOURS HEUREUX*, that would later lead to *NOS JOURS HEUREUX* (a.k.a. *THOSE HAPPY DAYS*). They came to see me at a time when I was writing for *CANAL + Idées* with Fred. I told them that I wasn't an actor and that, for now, I was trying my best to write jokes and that was enough for me. But they insisted, explaining that they were starting out too, that we were going to make the film and that we would learn together. They spoke to me with such ease and simplicity that I ended up accepting. We had a really fun time making that film. Then they called me for the feature and one thing led to another...

What are your memories of working with them on NOS JOURS HEUREUX (a.k.a. THOSE HAPPY DAYS)?

The memory of my first ever summer camp. I had never been to one when I was younger! (laughter) And I like their way of working: they direct you with a great deal of sensitivity since you feel very free at all times. But, in fact, they're pushing you without you realizing it.

We you surprised when they asked you to play a doctor in TELLEMENT PROCHES (a.k.a SO CLOSE)?

Actually, when they called me back to make *NOS JOURS HEUREUX* (a.k.a *THOSE HAPPY DAYS*), I realized that they were very loyal guys. A genuine friendship was formed between us and it has grown stronger ever since.

When did they first talk to you about UNTOUCHABLE?

Shortly after we finished shooting *TELLEMENT PROCHES* (a.k.a *SO CLOSE*). They told me about the documentary on Philippe Pozzo di Borgo and Abdel saying that they wanted to make a film of it. Whatever they offer me, I always feel like following them. That was true after *NOS JOURS HEUREUX* (a.k.a *THOSE HAPPY DAYS*) and even more so after *TELLEMENT PROCHES*...

What did you feel on discovering the documentary?

I saw right away that it could make an interesting film, especially with the style, sensitivity, precision, razor-edge humor and depth that Eric and Olivier bring to their work. The marriage could be truly perfect if they found the right balance between emotion and humor.

Did their screenplay win you over right away?

Yes. Reading it confirmed my first impression completely. I'm a sucker for their writing, with all its humor, humanity and truth. And, with this particular subject, their style takes on an additional dimension.

How did you work on the role of Driss?

I discussed it at a very early stage with the directors. Then we had what they called their "integration course": a trip to Essaouira with François Cluzet to meet Philippe Pozzo di Borgo. That's where the team came together and bonded, when the encounter came about. That was the film's true starting point. It really was an incredible moment. We were able to communicate very quickly and an easy relationship was forged between us. We got to know Philippe Pozzo, a highly intelligent man, full of life and humor with a very powerful gaze. I was instantly struck by the love with which he talked about Abdel, the person that the

character of Driss is based on. The very way in which he spoke his name was extremely touching. It was easy to sense the very strong bond between them. After this visit, we all felt responsible and under pressure, due to the respect that this man imposes. Making the most beautiful film possible was the only way to respect his story.

How did you build up the relationship with François Cluzet?

We didn't really know each other before this film: we had only met in passing. And when I learned that he would be playing Philippe, I was both happy and nervous. I felt a little apprehensive, without making a big deal of it, but I instantly sensed in him a desire to perform with me as great as my desire to perform with him. From that point on, everything happened naturally between us, beneath the obviously well-meaning gazes of Eric and Olivier. All my apprehensions vanished instantly. François is very open and very generous. Once he has opened the door, he doesn't close it again. He could have put me under pressure, saying that I was going to have to give my best. But he did the exact opposite. He told me right away, "We're making this film together. The important thing is what happens between us." I felt uplifted by his gaze and encouragement. We inspired each other, carried each other.

Did you feel more apprehension than on your two previous films with Eric and Olivier?

Having already worked with them made me feel more comfortable, just like the idea of forming a duo since I work in a duo all year long! All the same, UNTOUCHABLE was special in my eyes. Eric and Olivier stake a little more on me each time, so the pressure necessarily increases. I aim to be worthy of the trust they place in me.

Was there a lot of scope in the dialogue for your style of speech and diction?

Yes, and that's another reason why I like working with them so much. Prior to shooting, we set up things with numerous readings of the script. And then, on the set, they always left me free to try things. They even urge their actors to do that and deal with the outcome in editing. You never feel walled in. Even during takes, they may start talking because they have suddenly had a new idea. In fact, we carry on searching for the humanity and truth required by the subject during shooting, trying to avoid pathos and heavy-handed jokes.

How do Eric and Olivier divide the work?

There's not really a method. They both talk to the actors and the crew. I couldn't really say who does what. But they do it and they complement each other. You can tell that their complicity goes back a long way.

The film's first scenes show Driss in his world, that of the projects, a world that the cinema often has trouble showing without making a caricature of it. How do you judge their approach?

These scenes are important so that we know where Driss comes from. And I think they're even more important for me because that's where I come from too. So I feel responsible: if I talk about it, I have to do it properly. Eric and Olivier know that. By offering me this film, they necessarily had that idea in mind. I trusted them: I feel that French cinema has never talked of the projects with so much poetry and delicacy. They don't stress anything, they simply relate things. It's neutral yet very powerful. Eric and Olivier never impose their point of view: they simply express what they have observed in images. And I know that's another reason why I'm very proud to have made UNTOUCHABLE.

Were there any scenes that you dreaded?

Before shooting, I was apprehensive about the scene of Driss's confession, in which he starts to confide in Philippe. That was something totally new for me. I also dreaded the scene with the punch-line, "No arms, no chocolate". I wondered how we were going to do that on the set. I really got stressed out about it before shooting. But once we were filming, it all went smoothly. There comes a point when you stop asking yourself questions. You just let yourself be carried along by the energy. You feel free. We immediately felt that we were experiencing something very powerful. And it was a huge joy to meet up each day. This created a light-hearted atmosphere that dispelled all the questions I had been asking myself.

There's one particularly fun scene in which you dance to Earth, Wind and Fire. What are your memories of that?

One thing that I have in common with Eric and Olivier is a love of music and dancing. And that particular scene is wonderful because it comes just after Philippe has tried to introduce Driss to classical music. And so it's an exchange: Driss wants him to listen to and share his music. He isn't as precise as Philippe but, for him, the body and dancing can get it across. In fact, Driss dances for Philippe. So it had to be as pleasurable as possible. But with Earth, Wind and Fire, that's easy!

What kind of actor are you?

I work a lot on instinct. I react more than I act. I try to ask questions before shooting because I know that it's too late once we're on the set and that means I can let myself go completely at that point. I know that I don't have a lot of acting technique but I work prior to shooting with a brilliant coach, Julie Vilmont, who has taught me a lot. Once I have the script and have talked about it with the directors, I go to see her to ask her to help me with what I have to do. And this work with her frees me, it dispels any guilt I may feel about never having taken acting classes. I no longer apologize for being there.

How did you react on discovering the film?

After the first three minutes – and this is a first for me – I let myself be carried off by the story. Actually, I had seen none of the footage on the set. For this film, I avoided going to view the video feed in order to stay in character. And so, on seeing the film, I rediscovered this story nourished by the work of the whole team. I'm very proud of this film. I was overwhelmed by the emotion in the eyes of Philippe/François. It took me a long time to come back down to earth...

CAST

Philippe
Driss
Yvonne
Magalie
Marcelle
Elisa
Adama
Albert
Chantal
Antoine

François CLUZET
Omar SY
Anne LE NY
Audrey FLEUROT
Clothilde MOLLET
Alba Gaïa BELLUGI
Cyril MENDY
Christian AMERI
Marie-Laure DESCOUREAUX
Grégoire OESTERMANN

CREW

Directors

Eric TOLEDANO
Olivier NAKACHE

Screenplay and dialogue

Eric TOLEDANO
Olivier NAKACHE

Producers

Nicolas DUVAL ADASSOVSKY
Yann ZENOU
Laurent ZEITOUN

Co-produced by

QUAD
GAUMONT
TF1 FILMS PRODUCTIONS
TEN FILMS
CHAOCORP

Director of Photography

Mathieu VADEPIED

Editor

Dorian RIGAL-ANSOUS

Sound

Pascal ARMANT

Original score

Ludovico EINAUDI

Set design

François EMMANUELLI

Costumes

Isabelle PANNETIER

Production manager

Vincent PIANT

1st assistant director

Hervé RUET

Script supervisor

Nathalie VIERNY

Casting director

Gigi AKOKA

Line producer

Laurent SIVOT

Post-production supervisor

Abraham GOLDBLAT

Still photographer

Thierry VALLEToux