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INTO THE FOREST

A film by Gilles Marchand
Written by Gilles Marchand and Dominik Moll

Jérémie ELKAÏM, Timothé VOM DORP, Théo VAN DE VOORDE,
Sophie QUINTON, Mireille PERRIER

103 min - France/Sweden - 2016 - DCP - Colour

INTERNATIONAL SALES
WILD BUNCH
VINCENT MARAVAL & NOEMIE
DEVIDE
ndevide@wildbunch.eu
CAROLE BARATON & OLIVIER
BARBIER
obarbier@wildbunch.eu
EMILIE SÉRRES
eserres@wildbunch.eu
SILVIA SIMONUTTI
ssimonutti@wildbunch.eu

INTERNATIONAL PR
Press Office Festival del film
Locarno
Stefanie Kuchler,
stefanie.kuchler@pardo.ch
+41 79 565 05 13
Giulia Fazioli,
giulia.fazioli@pardo.ch
+41 79 617 00 31

SWITZERLAND
Jean-Yves Gloor
jyg@terrasse.ch
+41 79 210 98 21
+41 21 92 360 00

SYNOPSIS

Tom and his older brother Benjamin haven't seen their father in a long time. They travel to Sweden where he lives, to spend the summer holidays with him. Tom is anxious about meeting this strange, solitary man again. The father, meanwhile, is convinced that Tom has the gift of seeing things that others can't...

INTERVIEW WITH GILLES MARCHAND

Where did the idea of making this film come from?

The starting point is closely linked to trips my brother and I used to take as children to see my father who lived abroad. It was impressive to go see him in a faraway country, to discover a way of life we knew nothing about. We were uneasy but also curious and extremely attentive. I relied on my memories, but mostly on sensations. I wanted to convey things through the eyes of a child. There is something very powerful about the way we see things when we are small. We experience reality like an adventure. With "Into The Forest" I wanted to reopen doors that we all learn to close when we become adults.

This curiosity and way of looking at things is particular to Tom, the younger of the two brothers...

Yes. Unlike Ben who is older and stands up to his father quite quickly, Tom is intrigued. He is probably also attracted to the dark side he sees in him. He observes him. What is familiar to him? What frightens him? Tom even says it at the beginning of the film: he has a premonition. He wants to know... He doesn't say much, but intuitively he recognises the complexity of things... in an almost supernatural way. I strongly believe in this thirst for knowledge that children have, and the magical connections they create between important events.

I don't want to reduce the film to explanations. I don't have any. Throughout the writing and filming process, I was wary of interpretations. Tom - and the viewer I hope - experiences all sorts of emotions: apprehension, curiosity, fear and even terror, and also empathy...

Did your memories also inspire the character of the father?

Yes and no. My father was a special man, but probably less unnerving than the character in the film! I wanted him to remain impenetrable. We should ask questions about him constantly: "Why is he so distant with his children? Why does he take them into the forest? Does he love them? What does he have in mind? How deranged is he? Will he put them in danger?" And alongside these children's fears that could erupt, I felt that other fears emerging, adult fears, fears of paternity and failure.

From the beginning you present him as a dark, not very likeable character.

He is a fantasy father, seen through the eyes of the children. But little by little, thanks to Tom, we are drawn closer to him and discover his weaknesses. Sons always end up detecting a flaw in their father. We come to realise that this man that we thought invulnerable is more fragile or lost than we were led to believe. Sometimes it's a precise and memorable moment, when we feel that we are perhaps stronger than the one who is meant to be responsible for us. With his madness, Jérémie Elkaïm's character is doubtless an extrapolation of this feeling.

We sense that he is motivated by a real plan... but one he doesn't understand.

The wilderness of things! Let's say that he wants to pass on an ideal to his sons, especially to the youngest, and strangely enough I think he manages... not in a reassuring way. Whilst a reasonable adult would tell the child not to be scared and to go back to bed, the father maintains that it's good never

to sleep and that evil hides in the shadows. Instead of reassuring him, he worries him. Instead of lulling him to sleep, he awakens him... Of course it's not recommendable but by doing it, he nonetheless passes on to his son powerful things in which he believes. In his own way he opens Tom's mind. From the time Dominik Moll and I started writing, we wanted to instill fear with unsettling changes but without narrative stunts.

Tom faces events with exceptional patience.

True. Many in his shoes would rebel. But what we could interpret as passivity turns into wisdom. By staying calm, in a way he chooses to accompany his father. It is he who is the most scared, and yet he will go the furthest...

The further we go, the more we sense the father losing control.

That's true too. I feel something almost organic, like a cycle. The deeper we go into the forest, the more independent the children become, the more the father is destined to disappear. He is programmed for that. Until he dissolves completely, leaving behind nothing but a trace in his children's minds.

The first time Tom see the terrifying man he takes for the devil is when he goes to the toilets in the laboratory where his father works. As if fantasy were taking over exact science.

I suppose science has always been closely linked to the occult, no? But why does he appear here exactly? I don't have the answer. Why in a lab? Why in the toilets? I don't know, but I felt it had to be that way.

Tom is scared, and yet once again he is curious and meticulous.

He must have been told that monsters don't exist, and yet he has seen something that he fears may cause harm. When he asks his brother if the devil exists, it is a serious question. The word might seem naive and make us smile, but we too have seen something. The fact that this apparition doesn't correspond to the image we have of the Prince of Darkness shakes our beliefs, and perhaps connects us to fears we thought we had outgrown, but that we have only pushed aside. This area of things interested me.

The father never seems too far away from this 'devil' that appears to his son...

There is obviously a connection between the two. Tom even says: "*I think he knows him.*"

But certain shots also tell us that this disfigured man really exists, like an autonomous entity.

I wanted to convey as much as possible the children's feelings. The rest is up to the viewer.

The monster is terrifying. How did you come up with him?

As I did the whole film - I wanted him to be simple in form and yet trigger complex emotions. When I was writing, I imagined him wounded, covered in mud. Then came the idea of the hole in the head. One day, when I was working with Frédéric Lainé and Guillaume Castagne who created the makeup, we came across a photograph of a mutilated serviceman from the First World War, a badly disfigured man with very gentle eyes. The contrast between his terrible injuries and these kind eyes was exactly what I was looking for. Tom's emotions change every time he sees the stranger: when he sees him furtively, he is overcome with an unconquerable fear, feels threatened and doesn't dare look at him. He is submerged by another feeling altogether when at the end he manages to lay eyes on him.

It's the same effect that the beast has in the fairytale "Beauty and the Beast" .

Yes it's the same emotion.

Where does this love of fantasy films come from? It's a genre you have already explored in your two previous films "Who Killed Bambi?" and "Black Heaven".

I don't know. As a spectator, I've always been attracted to genre films. As a child, "The Night of the Hunter" or "Nosferatu" made more of an impression on me than most other films. Probably because it's a genre closely linked to dreams... I can't help it, I love films that are like paths leading to the unconscious, that tip me into another dimension.

With only three characters and very rich setting, the film seems both simple and surprisingly complex. It's full of trails.

The first time he read the script, Jérémie Elkaïm told me: *"It's very weird: it's both a straight line and a labyrinth."* I was very happy about that! The idea that a straight line can be a labyrinth in which you can get lost is very exciting for the brain, don't you think?

The forest plays a central role, sometimes magical, sometimes horrendously frightening...

The forest is the father's project. It embodies an ideal that he wants to share with his children. It had to be big and strong, the trip had to be beautiful and desirable, it had to bring them things. In their city lives, Tom and Ben have never seen a place like this. The purity of the landscapes, the vast spaces, its trees, its lakes; the Swedish forest embodies this ideal. It's a magical and powerful setting. The forest didn't wait for us to exist. It doesn't need us. We can lose ourselves in it.

The film location seems inaccessible...

It is. In Sweden, nature is vast but not hostile, you can move around easily in it. It was sometimes quite physically demanding to reach the set with all the equipment, but even the paths we were supposed to take were stunning and this created a fantastic working atmosphere.

Does the hut in the film really exist?

Yes. They're not hard to find there - they are called "stuga". This one was completely abandoned. I liked the idea that it seemed imprisoned by the trees and the forest. And it's not a simple hunter's shack; it's a real little cottage. It seems incredible that someone built a house like this, so isolated, far from any road or even a path. That interested me. It seems fairly practical and allows us to share the father's desire for self-sufficiency. But it already contains the failings that led someone to abandon it. It's a story that has already happened. And that repeats itself.

The whole film relies on fear, the imaginary, the unspeakable. How do you film that?

I suppose it's about partially opening doors. Catching glimpses of things so that the brain can then allow the imagination to do its job. The darkness of a movie theatre is the ideal place for that. And as for all stories, to tell it you need to believe in it, really believe in it. Watch "Cat People" by Jacques Tourneur: the camera films the shadows and we know the panther is there, very close to us. In order to believe, I try not to reason too much, to work instinctually.

When we were filming the scene where Tom comes face to face with the disfigured man in the forest, the light was so beautiful that I made the most of it and filmed Tom running away through the trees. The shot was

extremely seductive and with Yann Dedet, the editor - who is by the way an extremely dynamic editor - with Yann, for a long time we thought that we should include this shot. Then, one day, I felt that what would really make an impression would be to leave Tom face to face with the man, and suddenly switch to Ben and the father wondering where he is. So in the end we cut this shot that seemed so successful. This cut, the break between the two spaces, creates a hole that we emphasised with the sound: a hole in space and time into which Tom seems to have fallen for a moment. This simple ellipsis is pure sensation. I seem to be analysing it with you, but you can't produce it by reasoning or thinking, you feel it, that's all.

Jérémie Elkaïm is the only adult opposite the children. What led you to choose him?

I've known him personally for a long time now. I had considered him for the role played by Melvil Poupaud in my previous film, but it didn't work out. I've always been moved by his exceptional intelligence and his maturity. Beneath his charming good looks, seductive and lighthearted manner, I knew he had a more complex, darker, magnetic side. After initially considering an older actor, I found it more surprising to choose him, a young actor. Jérémie has children the same age as those in the film; he knows what it is to be a father. Jérémie and I were very excited by the idea, but we both wanted to do tests. When I saw him interact with the children, I was more than convinced: I was very impressed.

How did you work together?

Jérémie followed the project from the beginning. He and Valérie Donzelli are the producers. They were my first readers. He read the different drafts of the screenplay and was with me for the first location scoutings in Sweden. Generally speaking, he knew as much as I did, perhaps even more. Physically, I asked him to forget his city ways and to prepare for a challenging shoot. Dragging the boat through the forest, rowing for hours, acting alone with children and above all, diving into the mind of a tortured man, is certainly not easy or enjoyable. Whether during the preparation, the filming or the post-production, he always pushed in the direction of the film. And he wasn't scared by the darkness of the character.

Tell us about Timothé Vom Dorp, the little boy who plays Tom...

I told the casting team: "Tom must be particularly attentive, he must have a particular expression in his eyes... and ideally he must have supernatural powers." We saw about a hundred children, many were pretty amazing, as kids often can be, but when I saw Timothé something really clicked. You know, when you're shooting with children, spontaneity is key, and it allows us to steal snippets of their life. Timothé controls what he is doing, nothing is stolen from him; he's the one who gives. He is not only a very gifted actor, he also has an understanding of situations, an extraordinary presence and precision, a way of always bringing something very real to the scenes... Qualities that not all experienced actors possess. He is also a great human being, attentive, generous and playful but also serious and deep... A sort of happy little Buddha who in theory, exists only in our imagination. I shouldn't say that, he might read this...

How old is he?

He was 8 when he started filming and I must admit that he already has an impressive filmography. He has just dubbed Nemo in Pixar's "Finding Dory". That says it all!

And Théo Van de Voorde, who plays Ben?

I also loved working with him. He likes to act and be directed very precisely. His position was more complicated than Timothé's. He knew he

wasn't playing a central role and that some of the scenes would be filmed without him. One day, to provoke me a little, he said: "I'm the useless character." I took him aside to talk to him. I explained to him why, on the contrary, I valued his character.

Did you prepare beforehand with them?

No. I was confident after the tests. While we were filming, we all lived together in the same location. In the evenings, Timothé would learn his lines with his father, and I had asked Mika Zimmerman, who plays the disfigured man, to help Théo practise his. Mika was also in charge of keeping an eye on the children throughout the shoot. I liked the idea that the actor playing the disfigured man, was there every day on set with the children, and not only for the few days when we were filming the scenes in which he appeared.

What sort of director are you?

It's difficult to talk about oneself... I don't like conflict. I'd say I'm "fake easy-going". I try to be considerate, but in the end I must admit that I am rather uncompromising. Though I'm open to discussion - in fact I need contradictory opinions - after a fairly long process where there is doubt, things eventually fall into place. And in general... that's their place. It's as if my work were about leaving things hanging as long as possible so that they can crystallize on their own, at the right time and in the right way. I won't allow myself to be negative. I think it was Bergman who said: *"You have to be demanding but not strict."* Strictness stops things. When you are demanding, things move forward.

This is your first time working with DP Jeanne Lapoirie...

I've known Jeanne for a long time and have always LIKED her lighting and framing. She pays GREAT attention to the actors and everything that exists within the image. We were a small team, surrounded by nature, with young children: both freedom and rigour were necessary. Jeanne is very reactive. She works fast and with a very stimulating "work in progress" kind of logic.

What directions did you give her?

We discussed a lot of things, but before we started filming, I told her I wanted to feel eyes shining in the night, a glimmer in the black of the pupils. I wanted an almost "manga" image of the children. We also talked a lot about framing. I wanted tight framing on the faces or on the contrary, very wide with tiny characters amidst the trees and lakes. This contrast between the presence of the faces and these bodies lost in the landscape seemed simple but strong.

Tell us about the work on sound. It submerges us in a world that is both naturalistic and supernatural.

My hearing is bad, so I'm particularly attentive to the work on the sound. I have trouble identifying high notes and very low notes. In everyday life I manage by lip reading or by using other tactics, but I don't hear as well as most people. Paradoxically, this slight handicap has made me all the more sensitive to the work on sound, and the singular and subjective things it brings. I like it to have an intellectual dimension. When we were scouting in Sweden, I was struck by the captivating calm that emanated from the forest. The moss that grows everywhere softens all the sounds. As well as recording live, André Rigaut (sound recordist) would often go looking for ambient sounds... He would come back with a multitude of sounds: wind, leaves, insects, birds, lapping water. In post-production with Loïc Priant (sound editor) and Emmanuel Crozet (sound mixer), we produced a soundtrack that was both organic and cognitive. As if we were in Tom's head, listening with his ears. The film is perceived through Tom's point of

view, but even more so through his eardrums. The work on sound is somehow subtler than the cinematography or editing. It's a powerful way for a director to convey emotions to the viewer. Little by little, the further we go with Tom, the more fantastical the sounds become.

Philippe Schoeller wrote the music...

Yes. Philippe is a renowned contemporary composer. For cinema, he has written music for his brother Pierre's films, including "L'Exercice de l'état". Philippe discovered the film as we were editing it. Of course I wanted his music to instigate sudden fear, but instead of only connecting it with moments of tension, I asked him help it structure the direction of the film. The "labyrinthine line"... It emerges as we are about to enter the forest and then unfolds itself entirely in the final part of the film where it becomes almost omnipresent, mixing melancholy and chaos.

Did you have other films in mind while you were shooting?

Yes, many of course. I've already mentioned "The Night of The Hunter" by Charles Laughton, and "Cat People" by Jacques Tourneur. I could also add Kubrick's "The Shining", which, with the idea of the deranged father, is an obvious reference. But also "The Return" by Andrey Zvyagintsev, which shares a similar starting point, and "The Spirit of the Beehive" by Victor Erice, where the presence of the children, and in particular that of the little Ana Torrent, is magical. Miyazaki and Lynch's films are always present in the back of my mind. "Deliverance" by John Boorman and "The Sixth Sense" by M. Night Shyamalan, which I love. I'm probably forgetting some. There's also "Sukkwan Island", the incredible book by David Vann, which made a great impression on me.

Since the beginning of your career, you have collaborated closely with Dominik Moll. You both co-write each other's screenplays. You're also there at each other's shoots.

Yes, we're very much on the same wavelength. This time, Dominik couldn't make it to the shoot. However, he came to the 'work in progress' screenings when we were editing, and I very much sought his opinion for the music. It's always a great pleasure to work with him. Our differences and shared interests bring us a lot. We're great friends. In fact, I was surrounded by many friends for "Into The Forest", including my producers from Les Films de Françoise, Valérie Donzelli and Jérémie Elkaim. Like little Tom in the film, I greatly value friendship. It's what's most precious to me.

GILLES MARCHAND FILMOGRAPHY

AS DIRECTOR

INTO THE FOREST

BLACK HEAVEN

Official Selection, Cannes Film Festival 2010

WHO KILLED BAMBI?

Official Selection, Cannes Film Festival 2003

SCREENPLAY AND MISE EN SCÈNE CONSULTANT

NEWS FROM PLANET MARS

by Dominik Moll

Official Selection, Berlin Film Festival 2016

LEMMING

by Dominik Moll

Official Selection, Cannes Film Festival 2005

HARRY, HE'S HERE TO HELP

by Dominik Moll

Official Selection, Cannes Film Festival 2000

HUMAN RESOURCES

by Laurent Cantet (1999)

LES SANGUINAIRES

by Laurent Cantet (1997)

SCREENPLAYS

MARGUERITE & JULIEN

by Valérie Donzelli

Official Selection, Cannes Film Festival 2015

EASTERN BOYS

by Robin Campillo

Official Selection, Venice Film Festival 2013

HAND IN HAND

by Valérie Donzelli (2012)

L'ÉCLAIREUR

by Djibril Glissant (2005)

L'AVION

by Cédric Kahn (2005)

RED LIGHTS

by Cédric Kahn

Official Selection, Berlin Film Festival 2004

BON VOYAGE

by Jean-Paul Rappeneau (2003)

THE MILK OF HUMAN KINDNESS

by Dominique Cabrera (2001)

LES ÂMES CÂLINES

by Thomas Bardinet (2001)

CAST

Father	Jérémie ELKAÏM
Tom	Timothé VOM DORP
Ben	Théo VAN DE VOORDE
Disfigured Man	Mika ZIMMERMAN
Mother	Sophie QUINTON
Child Psychiatrist	Mireille PERRIER
Camper 1	Frederik CARLSSON
Camper 2	Carl LINDBERG
Camper 3	Anna LINDBERG

CREW

DIRECTED BY	Gilles MARCHAND
SCREENPLAY	Gilles MARCHAND & Dominik MOLL
DP	Jeanne LAPOIRIE
EDITOR	Yann DEDET
SOUND	André RIGAUT, Loïc PRIAN & Emmanuel CROSET
ORIGINAL MUSIC	Philippe SCHOELLER

PRODUCERS

LES FILMS DE FRANÇOISE:

Valérie DONZELLI, Jérémie ELKAÏM and Mina DRIOUCHE

GÖTAFILM:

Christer NILSON, Frida HALLBERG, Olivier GUERPILLON

FILM VÄST:

Simon PERRY

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