

NORD-OUEST
PRESENTS

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MY SON

DIRECTED BY CHRISTIAN CARION

STARRING

GUILLAUME CANET MELANIE LAURENT

France – 2017 – 84 min – Format: 2.4 – Sound 5.1

PHOTOS CAN BE DOWNLOADED FROM: <http://www.wildbunch.biz/movie/my-son/>

A FATHER, A DISAPPEARANCE, A HUNT.

GUILLAUME CANET
MELANIE LAURENT

MY SON

A FILM BY CHRISTIAN CARION



SYNOPSIS

Julien travels constantly for work – perpetual absence from home has wrecked his marriage. During a stopover in France, he gets a message from his very distraught ex-wife: their seven-year-old son has disappeared during a school adventure trip in the mountains. Julien begins the search for his son. He will stop at nothing to get the boy back...

Interview with Christian Carion

MY SON is an intense thriller – a big change of direction after three period films. Where did your desire to make this film come from?

First of all, MY SON is an old project – I found a document I had written in 2002 about which my producer Christophe Rossignon and I had discussions at the time. But the subject, a missing child, scared me a bit. I knew I would get to it someday but it wasn't the right time. I had also just completed THE GIRL FROM PARIS, and was very keen to make JOYEUX NOËL – which was my very first cinematic dream. It was later, when we were prepping COME WHAT MAY, that I remember telling Christophe: "Whatever happens, I know that the next film will be contemporary, with a smaller cast, in French, tighter, leaner.... and with fewer Panzers!"

How did you decide on the film's cinematic "device"?

It came to me while talking with Guillaume Canet, with whom I'd wanted to make the film for a long time. He was very keen on the idea, which I'd mentioned to him during the shooting of JOYEUX NOËL. In the meantime, he had also become a father, like me, which was very important. It all went very quickly while discussing the film with him. I told him: "Guillaume, I want to follow a simple idea all the way to the end. Your character is an absent man, constantly traveling. He comes home and learns about things he didn't know. Can we imagine a situation where you, as the actor, would find things out gradually? Where I wouldn't give you the script? Would you be willing to take the risk?" I saw right away that the actor in Guillaume Canet was absolutely thrilled at the idea of living such an experience! But there were scheduling complications... Guillaume was very busy... I had showed him VICTORIA, a German film I really like, shot in a single continuous take. We talked about it again, and decided that we wanted not only a lead actor without a script, but also to shoot in real time, or almost. To gamble everything on 'the moment'. What did it mean, concretely, shooting in real time? We started to look into it

and at the same time I started writing the screenplay with Laure Irrmann.

What is it about Guillaume Canet that has led to you casting him in three films?

To embark on a project like MY SON, we needed someone with a strong character like his. He is a generous actor, and I see the depth he has acquired since 2008 when we shot FAREWELL. I like his commitment, his very physical approach to acting, which is also full of angst. Guillaume is a hard worker, which was funny in this case, since I asked him to prepare absolutely nothing. I gave him a six-page character outline, that's it. It's not in his nature, being such a perfectionist, to throw himself into a film with zero preparation. Another reason I wanted Guillaume was because I know him well, and I thought I'd be able to anticipate what he was likely to do, to predict his reactions – which was the case, 80% of the time. I also knew that, as with all of us, there is violence in him. It fascinated me to see a man who, when confronted with the situation of the story, sinks into things that are clearly not good, outside the norm, reprehensible, illegal even and punishable by law. But don't think for one moment that MY SON is an apologia for vigilantism. It's no DEATH WISH and Guillaume Canet is no Charles Bronson.

So you were careful while writing to avoid making this 'apologia for vigilantism'?

Yes, because I knew it was a risk. That's clearly why the police van arrives at the end. That's what Guillaume said: "I like the way the character walks towards the police." It's clear. He is going to pay, and there's no debate. I think the film makes this very clear. It's the journey of a man who gets lost somewhere along the line, who falls into paranoia and who is overwhelmed by guilt, due to his absence – which drives him crazy deep down – and ends up acting irrationally. I hope we can understand him without accepting what he does.

So Guillaume Canet didn't read the screenplay, unlike Mélanie Laurent, who plays his ex-wife. Why Mélanie Laurent?

I called Mélanie, who was about to leave for the US to shoot an American movie. She read it and called me to say: "It's sleazy! It's horrific! Halfway though I couldn't take any more, I was suffocating... It's not easy for me, I have a problem with this story, my little boy's the same age, it's just too difficult for me". I insisted and she accepted. In the scene in front of the big patio door, we all witnessed something very intense... Mélanie basically knew what she had to tell Guillaume, but she also invented some great stuff. When she says: "We didn't get divorced, you disappeared," she came up with that line, and I love it.

She deserves praise, all the more so since she had to play her part *and* to lead Guillaume Canet to where you wanted him to go...

Mélanie used to say: "It's a double punishment for me, I have to defend what is written and be aware of what I have to do while monitoring Guillaume, to be able to take him from A to B!" I hadn't thought about the problem of the other actors. It became clear once we started rehearsing with Mélanie, and also with Olivier de Benoist.

How long did rehearsals last?

Two weeks. It's not long, two weeks with the actors... it allowed them to get a feel for their acting space, but without knowing what Guillaume was going to do. And the whole crew had to settle in. In concrete terms, during rehearsals we agreed on focal distances, on where the sound people would place themselves... For two weeks we pretended to shoot the film since we didn't have Guillaume, and I can tell you, after these two weeks, we were well and truly sick of pretending! They all had notebooks in which they had drawn sketches to be able to anticipate as much as they could. But when Guillaume arrived, we had to pretty much start from scratch.

How did you prepare, logistically?

The logistics were super-efficient so that we wouldn't waste time during the shoot. To start with, the sets were chosen very close to each other. We shot in a 10km range. We used two cameras when the actors were face to face, since we couldn't do shot reverse-shot. The two weeks of rehearsals taught us that sometimes the second crew could anticipate the next scene, so they would stop and move on to the next set, and when we were done with Guillaume, I'd jump in the car with him – he always drove – and we'd go to where the second crew was already set up. I didn't waste any time. The preparations were diabolical; the first assistant and the production manager's work was crucial.

For this film, you have changed your style and chosen another D.P. Why Eric Dumont?

Christophe Rossignon suggested I meet Eric Dumont, who had worked on THE MEASURE OF A MAN, and whose documentary background and experience of "fly-on-the-wall" filming could be valuable.

Did you develop the style of the film - somewhat reminiscent of Michael Mann - together?

The meeting with Eric was inspiring. He's crazy! He knew we were going to film with hand-held cameras and immediately suggested shooting in 'Scope! He also suggested using a series of lenses from the 1970s, favoured by Coppola, adapted to our digital cameras. The result is sublime but the depth of field very short! My hat is off to the focus puller who agreed to work on a film with no floor marks and no tape measure... And yes, it's true we talked about Michael Mann a lot. We thought about THE INSIDER, his film about the tobacco lobby, with its rapid, bilious style – probably the result of incredible preparation.

So we went on the shoot with these general ideas in mind, but the aesthetic choices – and it’s always the case – are born from an idea and a constraint. Once we found ourselves in the Rocher Blanc building I told Eric: “I don’t want you to bring light into the corridors. You can increase the intensity of the green of the exit signs, you can fake an open window in a room and bring a little light, but that’s as far as we go.” Another example was the scene of the phone call at the red traffic light. When we were scouting for locations, there were a lot of road works, and I thought: “Guillaume should stop at a road works red light, that’s where he’ll have the phone call.” And Eric integrated it. So during the scene, Guillaume drove to a place where we had set up a prop traffic light. I asked him to stop and wait a bit, and he saw electricians coming out of nowhere bringing in a more powerful light to boost the red glow on his face in the car! When he saw them setting it up, Guillaume wondered what the hell was going on, and that’s when I triggered the phone call!

How did you direct him? Did he have an earpiece? Were you hidden at the back of the car?

You’re not far off! First I thought of using an earpiece but the sound engineer told me that since we already had wireless tie-clip microphones, it would be messy and he couldn’t guarantee it would work. And Guillaume said that he wouldn’t be able to do it with someone talking into his ear. So I decided I’d have to be everywhere, all the time! So when Guillaume was driving, he had the DP right next to him, the focus puller and the sound engineer behind him. Since there was no room left for me, I was in the trunk with a monitor allowing me to follow the scene!

So you talked to Guillaume Canet while shooting?

Yes, and when we were ready I’d tell him to come in. And he would tell me: “It’s completely freaky for me because I know you are all prepared but I don’t know for what, and I don’t know what is going to happen in this building either!”

The crew kept Guillaume Canet at arm’s length. Did you isolate him intentionally during the shoot?

Yes, because I was worried someone would give the game away. I had told Barbara, the first assistant: “Try not to talk to him at all. If you need to tell him something, I’d rather you come to me.” So no one talked to him except if there was a technical problem. In the evening, Guillaume had dinner in his hotel on his own, not with the crew. It was very hard for him until the Friday – when most of the manipulation was over – and we were able to function more or less normally. So on Friday he had lunch with us and said: “You know it’s really cool, eating together!”

There are grey areas in the film, particularly regarding the reasons for the kidnapping. Was that intentional?

There weren’t any grey areas in the screenplay. The explanation was given during the torture scene in the garage. But since we had decided against any rehearsals, Guillaume didn’t know that the actor opposite him was supposed to give that information. At the end of the scene, when Guillaume goes to get the chain to hit him with, for me, it was an execution. But I didn’t ask him to do that, I didn’t know what he was going to do, and the actor who was tied up by the car didn’t know either. Guillaume came back and I swear the chain missed the actor’s head by an inch! So Guillaume was caught up in the madness of the moment, and the other actor didn’t have a chance to give him the information.

Now I think it’s better like that: it’s a lot scarier if you don’t know exactly why. I had a few screenings where people told me amazing things. For some it was obvious there was human trafficking involved, for others it wasn’t. It doesn’t matter. A friend of mine said: “Above all, it’s the story of a man who becomes a father.” I hadn’t thought of that but it’s exactly right. Now that he’s told me, it’s obvious! I thought of that again when I watched the last scene: the three of them are playing frisbee, Guillaume is talking to his son...



The character has found his place at last, and even if he is going to prison, that's not the problem, there is something more important here: he has found a place he didn't have before. So yes, it's the story of a man who becomes a father, who has passed through a horrible ordeal that made him grow up.

The music is another element that contributes to the tension...

At first I had asked Philippe Rombi, with whom I had worked on *THE GIRL FROM PARIS* and *JOYEUX NOËL*, to compose the score. But he had several projects on the go and declined. We decided to put three composers in competition, each of whom made a proposal. Laurent Perez Del Mar, who composed the score for *THE RED TURTLE*, proposed the overture. It was very powerful, straight away, I thought it was masterful... We used it in the film without changing a thing.

You must be eager to show *MY SON*, a new film genre...

Evidently yes. I don't know any filmmaker who doesn't want people to watch their film. To me, *MY SON* is a genre film. And it is indeed the first time I don't have a true story to champion. It allowed me a freedom, and the pleasure of telling a story while playing with the codes of a genre. The only justifications I have to make here are to the genre. That is to say I ensure that the "hero" should evolve in a certain atmosphere, that the audience should be thrown into a story and ask: "What's going to happen next?" One of my biggest worries was that the audience would figure it all out before the end. So I tried to discard that. In fact, to play with it! *MY SON* was for me the joy of going back to my first cinematic longings with no historical ties to observe, no design brief. And that was a lot of fun!



Interview with Guillaume Canet

Christian Carion first talked to you about MY SON on the JOYEUX NOËL shoot...

Yes, he only talked to me about the story of a missing child, and the father who is looking for him. Without having gone through the same experience as the character of course, I think it touched a nerve in Christian Carion; an absent father who has missed crucial years of his child growing, a man who is subjected to a tragedy and has to be present. I had been touched too but in a different way because I wasn't a father then. Time passed. I regularly asked him for news about the project, put aside because he was working on other films. Then we did FAREWELL together. Last summer we were having dinner and Christian said: "I would like to make MY SON. I've written it and would like to shoot in the autumn." I had just done one film after another, I was exhausted, and I still had the ROCK'N'ROLL post-production to do... so I told him I just couldn't. VICTORIA entered the conversation, this German film shot in a single sequence-shot that Christian recommended. So I said to him: "I won't know the script or the story and you'd like to shoot it in a single sequence-shot?" I saw a gleam in his eyes but he replied it was impossible. So I suggested making it in real time: "You prepare everything beforehand, I get there and we shoot." He said "You got it!"

Had it been mentioned you wouldn't read the screenplay then?

Yes. Christian told me: "If we make it this way, you mustn't read the script. Since this is the quest of a man who doesn't know what he is going to find, I'd like you to be in the same situation: that of a man who is going to be surprised, who can't anticipate at all what's going to happen and who's going to be shocked, moved... who is going to go through all kinds of emotions as he confronts the unknown." And that's what was really exciting to me as an actor: throwing myself into such an adventure.

How do you prepare for a part you know very little – or nothing – of?

It really is very strange. Instead of a screenplay, Christian sent me a document – "keynotes" I think he called it – several pages about the character and his life up until his son disappears. So I knew his name was Julien, that he worked for Véolia as a geologist, that he met his wife (Mélanie Laurent) in Grenoble while he was a student, that he started to want to travel after their first child was born, and began working for Véolia, which allowed him to leave home more often, that finally he got more and more involved with work until the day he made the difficult decision to leave a child, with all the guilt that entails... And I knew that the film starts while I am in transit, when I receive a voicemail telling me my son has been kidnapped. That's all I knew. So my preparation involved watching documentaries about geologists, about Véolia, because I thought it would become useful at some point... that I'd have to talk about it.

I asked Christian: "Should I do some research?", and he said yes, when in fact it had absolutely nothing to do with that! So I watched a ton of stuff, worried that I'd have to communicate some important scientific information. I really worked on it. Ten days before shooting, I was petrified because I didn't know what was going to happen. And then there was the question of the script: it could have been terrible, and I would only be able to find out as we shot. Christian is a very old friend and I trust him but still it was fraught. During these ten days, the tension grew and grew, and by the time the film started I was more ready than for any other film I've done before. I was obsessed by one thing: I didn't know what was going to happen to me! So I was on the alert, in the mind of a father who is going to go through something so terrible. I think the preparation happened subconsciously, psychologically.

Then came the time to pack...

Christian came to my house, opened my wardrobe and said: “OK, you’ll need hiking boots, a pair of jeans, a sweater, a spare t-shirt, clothes he could have worn in Canada, and a suit. Do you own a suit?” So during the six days of shooting I kept wondering when I was going to wear the fucking suit in the trunk of the car! I got on a train with the suitcase and the suit carrier thinking I might find myself face to face with some bigwigs, guys from the company who had hired me, that there might be a reception... Every day I arrived on set wondering how I should dress. And I’d hear: “Same as yesterday, you slept in your car last night” So why the suit? Christian said:

“No reason, you have a suit, that’s all.” So we packed a suitcase and I left for the first day of shooting with nothing else. I left home and I *was* the character.

And shooting began right away?

When I arrived at Gare de Lyon, there were four people waiting for me: Christian, the DP, the sound engineer and the executive producer, Eve Machuel. They fitted me with a tie-clip mic and off we went. We took a train, Christian told me: “Sit here, look at the scenery and wait”. They gave me a phone and at some point it rang, and as I would normally do on a train, I got up and got out, without the camera following me – they filmed me through the glass... Before the train set off I had asked Christian if I was free to do what I wanted and he told me: “When you’re be in the car, if you feel like stopping, stop; if you want to go and buy cigarettes, do it.” It was extraordinary, just like role-play.

A game where you felt a little alone?

Yes, because I didn’t speak with the crew. They had rehearsed for two weeks but they became the audience because they didn’t know what I was going to do. So we looked at each other, observing each other. I wanted to be with them but they’d been instructed not to talk to me, they didn’t dare... I was absolutely on my own.

Were you ever thrown?

Yes. For example when you think the day is done – since you have been shooting since 8am – it’s now 11pm, you’re shooting a sequence and the director suddenly says “Hit that guy!” and the actor in front of you lifts his shirt, exposing his protective wear and says: “Go for it, you can even hit me in the face if you want!”

And did you do it?

Yes! It’s in the scene with Olivier de Benoist. So I hit him, then Christian asked me to tie him up, I didn’t know what with! I spotted a lamp, yanked out the cord and tied him up with it. The Christian said: “Put him in the trunk of your car!” It’s easy in the movies – “Put him in the trunk!”. But there I really found out what it means to carry a man, drag him over the ground and try to stick him in the trunk! I was exhausted. It was 11pm and I said to Christian: “So now we call it a day?” “No, we’re going to the police station.”

Did you say no to anything?

To sleeping in the police cell! I was up for everything, even sleeping in the car, but not sleeping there. Can you imagine? So I told Christian no. There’s the Laurence Oliver method of acting and the Dustin Hoffman method... you know the story?

No.

During the filming of MARATHON MAN, both actors had to start a scene out of breath Hoffman ran around the block three times, came back breathless, asked Oliver: “You’re not going for a run?” Oliver said no. They started filming – and he acted! I told Christian this anecdote and said: “Tonight I’m using the Olivier method!”



All the same, didn't the immersion allowed you to live through a powerful experience?

I went through a monumental experience as an actor, like nothing before! Particularly when I got to the kidnapper's house. It was something pretty crazy for an actor, because I wasn't acting – I was living it! When I got to the front door, I tried to open it and couldn't. Christian told me to kick it in. I smashed the lock, got in and there's the car. It was extraordinary because I started to imagine all sorts of things: I was scared to open the trunk and find a kid inside. When I went upstairs it was dark and I was shaking, thinking: "Something is going to happen..." All the more so as I could see that the crew was in a bit of a panic. It was a real thrill for them too! They knew something was going to happen while I was convinced some guy was going to spring out of nowhere and hit me!

What was it like performing with actors who, like Mélanie Laurent, have read the script, rehearsed and have to take you somewhere?

I could really feel their stress. Christian told me that the day before shooting they were scared out of their wits. What's totally crazy about the scene in front of the patio door with Mélanie is that she played the situation: she didn't think I was going to react the way I did when I said to her: "Are you going to break my balls for long?" She didn't think I was going to use this tone of voice.

It took her completely by surprise and she went off in a different direction... At the end of the scene she apologised to Christian because she hadn't said what she was meant to! It was crazy! All the scenes were, both weakened and broken, if I can put it like that. But at the same time it resulted in a real sense of life, and some very powerful accidents.

Even to the point of changing the theme of the story which, thanks to the grey areas, is more the story of a man becoming a father than a straight police investigation...

Yes, I completely agree. In fact that sums up how we worked on the film: in the end, we always went to the heart of the matter. There were many sequences where we could have had a tendency to talk more, to want to add things... the fact that the film is stripped down comes from our reactions. In real life you don't react while simultaneously trying to explain something to an audience. In a real life situation, you are either an actor or a spectator, you live it but you don't have lines to explain everything. That's what gives the film its truthfulness.

The sixth – and last – day of shooting, must have been a strong moment...

First of all the weather was perfect. It snowed two days before we began. During the shoot we had mist, snow... and then during the night of the fifth day it all melted! The next day we had bright sunshine! I'll never forget it: I arrived on set, in this meadow, got out of the car, looked at Christian and told him: "The gods really are with you!" I knew we were going to shoot the final scene. Christian had told me the day before. It was the only thing he did tell me, by the way...

Once you've had such an experience, being both actor and director, do you...

The answer is yes! Yes I very much want to do this again! On the last day I

thanked everyone with all my heart for having allowed me to live such an experience – my best cinematic experience to date. I have learned more as an actor than ever before. I feel that now nothing on a set can scare me. I've had such a crazy experience that I'm ready for anything. Before, a technician talking while we were shooting would annoy me, probably because I wasn't really inside it... Here I acted without seeing or hearing what was going around the shoot because I was completely immersed in my part. This experience has taught me many things, it has given me lots of answers but mostly, it has made me want to do this as a director! To be able to bring such an experience alive and offer it to another actor... because it truly is a monumental gift!





CAST

Julien Perrin
Marie Blanchard
Grégoire Rochas
Man with pickup truck
Lieutenant Verrier
Mathys
Head Kidnapper
Kidnapper
Spare Kidnapper
Leisure Centre Director
Hunter

Guillaume CANET
Mélanie LAURENT
Olivier de BENOIST
Antoine HAMEL
Mohamed BRIKAT
Lino PAPA
Marc ROBERT
Pierre LANGLOIS
Tristan PAGÈS
Christophe ROSSIGNON
Pierre DESMARET

CREW

A person in a dark jacket and pants is running through a snowy, hilly landscape. The ground is covered in patches of snow and dry grass. In the background, there is a dense forest of evergreen trees, and further back, snow-capped mountains are visible under a clear sky.

Director	Christian CARION
Producers	Christophe ROSSIGNON and Philip BOËFFARD
Screenplay	Christian CARION and Laure IRRMANN
Co-Producers	Christian CARION and Guillaume CANET
Associate Producers	Pierre GUYARD and Patrick QUINET
Original Music	Laurent PEREZ DEL MAR
Line Producer	Eve FRANÇOIS-MACHUEL
D.P.	Eric DUMONT
1st Assistant Director	Barbara DUPONT
Production Manager	Jean-Marc GULLINO
Set Designer	Guillaume WATRINET
Costume Designer	Sarah TOPALIAN
Post-production Manager	Julien AZOULAY
Editor	Loïc LALLEMAND
Sound	Jean UMANSKY
Sound Editor	Thomas DESJONQUERES
Mix	Florent LAVALLÉE
Grading	Mathieu CAPLANNE
Public Relations	Gregory MALHEIRO

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