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VINCENT MUST DIE

A film by **Stéphan Castang**
starring Karim Leklou and Vimala Pons
Written by Mathieu Naert

France – 2022 – 1h48 – 2.38 – 5.1



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Synopsis

Random strangers have suddenly started attacking Vincent with murderous intent. His existence as an unremarkable man is overturned, and as things spiral violently out of control, he is forced to flee and change his life completely... A nerve-shredding, ground-breaking movie riding the new wave of French horror.

Stéphan Castang interview

Director

Vincent must die, but why?

This is the question Vincent asks himself throughout the film and to which he cannot find an answer. From the intern to the postman, everyone tries to kill him at first sight for no apparent reason. Yet Vincent is an unexceptional character, a graphic designer who lives in Lyon, neither friendly nor unfriendly, certainly quite happy with himself, but nothing more. Overnight he finds himself the centre of attention and suffers a multitude of aggressions from strangers as well as from people he knows. Why him? Is he the only one? What did he do to deserve this? Why such irrational violence? We don't know, everyone is free to have their own opinion about this. And quickly, for Vincent, the question "Why is everyone trying to kill me?" will give way to another more crucial one: "How much time do I have left?". It is through this new question, in survival mode, that he will find some meaning.

"The irony of the film shows that this violence is the violence of our society".

The tone is very original. It combines different movie genres: paranoia, survival, farce, comedy. Was that your intention from the start?

This was already in Mathieu Naert's screenplay. There was the promise of something bizarre, a combination of genres that I liked. Above all, I felt there was some space to combine mine and Mathieu's neuroses. I felt we had to remain loyal to genre codes, and yet that it wasn't exactly a genre film. We had to play with this combination, find the right balance to harmonise the films various genres. Because each of the different tones arise from the situations in which Vincent finds himself, and the gratuitous violence of which he is a victim. At some stage it naturally produces paranoid cinema, at another it goes into detective film territory, at another still it's an action or a zombie movie. And since these ordinary people don't know how to fight, it often becomes clumsy, messy, bordering on the burlesque. You can't exactly call it comedy. I would say there's an irony that runs through the whole film. The irony that underlines the violence of our society and the absurdity it can create. What I like about the absurd is that it allows you to laugh at serious things, without thwarting the tragedy of the situations or ridiculing the intention of the film.

Did you have specific film references from the start?

You're always somehow the product of your cinephilia. George A. Romero, of course, the earlier work, *Martin*, or *The Crazies*. Romero, for example, doesn't explain why the dead come out of the ground, or why good people become crazy, it's swiftly evaded; what's important is how humans react to these situations. Luis Buñuel is another reference. Incidentally, the film begins like one of his, that is to say with a character recounting a dream. And I wanted this scene to be filmed like a dream: with a big disorienting close-up before the

frame widens into this strange open plan office. But the main influence is Carpenter, I'm thinking especially of *They Live!* The film where he explains that capitalism is the result of an alien invasion. This paranoid aspect and the ironic dimension were really inspiring, also because his lead actor was a wrestler, bringing the question of combat, a certain physicality.

Is this physicality linked to the choice of an actor like Karim Leklou?

"Karim is the ideal actor: both ordinary and singular, very sweet yet brutal."

He was the ideal actor for me: he is both ordinary and singular, very sweet yet brutal. You wouldn't necessarily associate his physique with action films. He is a great actor for that, he can have something burlesque about him, between a hyper-reactive body and an impassive face, like a Buster Keaton caught in a train going at full speed who tries to adapt himself and understands what is happening to him. Beyond his incredible quality as an actor, if you place him somewhere ordinary, he's ordinary, he becomes a Mr Nobody, with a Mr Nobody's physique, like all those who attack him, from the post-

man to the accountant, to the children. That's kind of burlesque too! Ordinary characters who find themselves having to face extraordinary situations with no other choice than to deal with it somehow. I like the idea of having Mr and Mrs Nobody in most of the roles. It is a choice that totally guided the overall tone of the film.

And Vimala Pons?

It was an obvious choice. I think that she and Karim make a wonderful couple of lovers. I've seen a lot of Vimala's work, both in film and theatre. She is luminous, solar and lunar, she is a very physical actress yet carries real depth too. With her as with Karim, there is no need for background or psychology, they are artists who carry within them real poetry and remind us that actors are also creators.

The actors playing the other parts also have "real faces", that give the film both a quirky and ordinary aspect. How did you choose them?

We must agree on what we're calling "mugs". When actors are physically a little less polished than what we are used to see in films, we are quick to call them "mugs". It's like the journalists who describe the gilets jaunes as "awful" or "unsightly". But in fact, you find people like that throughout France; quite simply these are actors who look like a lot of French people, members of my family or my neighbours. This is also the image of a France I know, living in the provinces myself. I chose all the actors among people I know because I've been a theatre actor for over twenty years. I've worked with most of them: François Chattot, Emmanuel Vétrité and Guillaume Bursztyń, who plays the postman, who I was with in *The Swarm*. His horrifying fight in a sceptic tank with Karim is an extraordinary performance.

Most of the fights feature characters that we are not used to see fighting in film: the intern, the postman, children...

It is this the ordinariness and the realism I was looking for. Violence is even more confusing when it is carried out by someone who looks like your neighbour. It carries everyone away, from grandmas to kids. These are almost taboo bodies, which we do not want to see fighting on screen. That's why we didn't want masterful choreography but clumsy, awkward, unadorned fights. I didn't want the violence to be too stylised or virile. Manuel Dacosse, the DP, and I were very careful never to film violence as something fun.

"Violence is confusing when it is carried out by someone who looks like your neighbour."

Vincent is a double victim. He is the victim of the beatings he takes and of the disbelief of others. Everyone thinks he's crazy...

Perhaps the most brutal violence in the film is the psychological and social violence that falls on Vincent. The fact that he becomes a target, a victim, makes him seem suspicious, someone his neighbours and colleagues just don't want to be associated with. He arouses incomprehension rather than empathy. It is this violence tinged with benevolence that is unbearable. From this point of view *Vincent Must Die* is first of all the story of a personal disintegration. The film is not post-apocalyptic, but rather pre-apocalyptic, you could almost call it an intimate apocalypse. You could assume for a long time that this guy is crazy, before realising that it's the world that is becoming completely mad.

The film talks about a society becoming more and more violent, and it shows that like an infection, something blind that strikes at random.

Yes, the film is only about that, it only talks about violence. But for me, it's not so much the violence that is extraordinary, it's the fact that we don't all beat each other to death that is a miracle. If you take the current sequence in the West, you could have the feeling of permanent peace time, but it is a total illusion that's catching up with us, including calling into question the exemplary nature of our democracies. The incredible thing is to still be able to live together. The film is mostly about that... As well as our indifference to this violence, or our ability to look away from it. In fact, Vincent's first line reflects this blindness, he asks his colleague "Who's that?" when talking about the intern who will hit him in the following scene. This "Who's that?" is going to question Vincent throughout his journey, will force him to be struck by a reality that he may not have wanted to see.

We get the feeling in *Vincent Must Die* that salvation can only come from the margins...

This is, among other things, what Vincent will finally discover. The only people Vincent can talk to really are a homeless former university teacher and a somewhat marginal waitress who lives on a boat. It is a classic trope of conspiracy films to find salvation through characters who live on the margins. It is also a lesson from history that often shows that resistance begins with outcasts, with those who have nothing to lose. It is also the case of our Sentinels of the film, who look like members of a conspiracy website. As for the character of Margaux who lives on a boat, it's reality! There are people who can't afford anywhere to live other than on small boats, or wherever they can...The idea isn't to play on some sort of picturesque social marginality but to show that if you're in the shit, you continue to live.

You even fall in love. More intensely, since you have to stick to what's essential, when the context is complicated. That's also what Vincent will discover: by finding himself on the margins, he might just find, or discover his own essentials.

“By finding himself on the margins, he might just find, or discover his own essentials.”

Bresson's *Pickpocket* opens with a card that reads: “The film is the meeting of two lost souls”. Is this also somehow the story of Vincent Must Die?

Yes, absolutely! Besides, *Pickpocket* also ends with an embrace. In *Vincent Must Die* what I really liked was to tell a story that escapes all the rules of romance. They are castaways. There is a mythological dimension, and I wanted the final image to echo it. Everyone will find her or his own references, you can see Orpheus, or Antigone, Tiresias... There's this thing, they are there for each other. She falls in love with Vincent when she sees the disaster that is his life. That is what is charming in Margaux' character: she should be terrified, but on the contrary it's the fact that everyone wants to kill him that makes her want to throw herself into his arms. But does the film tell us that you find salvation in love? Yes and

no... Because it's complicated to love. The film shows that: what is it to get attached to someone, literally and figuratively? The end is anything but a “happy ending”: it's a way out, a moment of respite... But for how long?

In this almost cerebral film, music plays an important part. It reflects Vincent's moods, his feelings...

The music was conceived very early on because I sensed that it would play a crucial role in the construction of Vincent's character and the in architecture of the film. It was composed before we started filming by John Kaced, who wrote the music for all my shorts. We started by listening together to music by Mahler, Shostakovich, some John Carpenter. Eclectic references but we followed our intuition. Since the film would try to play with different genres, the music had to go that way too. It was going to bring a lot to the dramaturgy, to the narrative. The music had to carry the genre, the infernal machine in which Vincent finds himself trapped. So from the opening credits, John had to compose a piece that gave the promise of something scary, ferocious yet contradicted by the first scene of the film. It is this dialogue with the music that interested me. I wanted to work on recurring themes. The phenomenon for example, had to have its own theme and frequency. We thought of certain scenes almost like opera. If you take away the music, you remove an entire dimension of the film. Take an opera text: it can be nothing special but add the music and it becomes something entirely different. In the final scene of *Don Giovanni*, the Commander's line is: “Don Juan, I have invited you to supper and you have come.” Not exactly frightening, you have to admit! But add Mozart's music and all of a sudden it becomes something really quite terrifying! John's music brings an emotion and an understanding of the film that goes beyond words and sensitively recounts the descent into night that is *Vincent Must Die*.

April 2023

Stéphan Castang

Biography

Born in 1973, Stéphan Castang is a filmmaker and actor. On stage, he has acted with Marion Guerrero (*Les juré.e.s* by Marion Aubert), Benoît Lambert (*Tartuffe* by Molière, *Enfants du siècle, une dyptique* by Alfred de Musset), Ivan Grinberg (*Folie Courteline*), Thomas Poulard (*Romulus the Great* by Friedrich Dürrenmatt). He has worked with the company L'Artifice as an actor (*Nam-Bok le hâbleur*, *Aucassin et Nicolette*) and playwright (*Lettres d'amour de 0 à 10*, Young Audience Molière Award 2005) and is also the author of texts for the theatre: *Boule de gomme*, *le Défilé de César*, *Une divine tragédie* (written with Sacha Wolff). A lecturer at the University of Bourgogne-Franche-Comté and Paris VIII, he has written and directed several short films, and was 2021 was laureate of the Foundation Gan for Cinema. *Vincent Must Die* is his first feature film.

Filmography

2020 – FINALE

Selected at the Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival, Jury Award at Off-Courts (Trouville), Audience Award at Côté Court (Pantin), Special Jury Award (Brussels Short Film Festival).

2016 – PANTHÉON DISCOUNT

Audience Award and Youth Award at the Clermont- Ferrand International Short Film Festival, Special Jury Award and Audience Award at Itinérances Festival (Alès), Audience Award at Brest European Film Festival, pre-selected at the Césars 2018 for Best Short Film.

2015 – FIN DE CAMPAGNE

Selected at the Côté court Festival (Pantin).

2014 – SERVICE COMPRIS

Best Actor Award at the Aubagne Film Festival.

2011 – JEUNESSES FRANÇAISES (AKA French Kids)

Selected at the Berlin International Film Festival 2012, Awarded at Festivals Côté Court (Pantin), Un festival, c'est trop court (Nice), Festival européen du court métrage (Lille), Quality Award CNC, Pre-selected at the Césars 2013 for Best Short Film.





Mathieu Naert Interview Screenwriter

How did you come up with the idea of *Vincent Must Die*?

The idea, or rather the neurosis, was connected to my state of mind at a time when I would tell myself: “What if, at any given time, someone went crazy and wanted to kill me for no reason?” This thought germinated until I came up with a scenario, that of a guy who feels persecuted, who distrusts everyone and thinks he’s going to get killed. It’s a wacky premise similar to Romero’s *Living Dead*. Then the character took shape. An ordinary man, an urban man, not used to fighting, not particularly sporty. How would he react to this situation? What would be going on in his head? I wanted it to be dark, and that Vincent would get out of his little life to discover himself differently. I then developed the screenplay through the SOFILM genre residency, with the support of Nicolas Peuffaillit. When I understood then that I wanted to talk about the phobia of intimacy, everything seemed more obvious.

“I wanted to talk about the phobia of intimacy.”

The film combines different layers from several genres, with varied tones.

My stories are very dark, violent, sexual, adult but I also add black humour. In the screenplay Vincent is at first quite obnoxious. He’s an anti-hero: he works in advertising; he is completely inconsequential and immature. His journey will help him discover who he is and, paradoxically, get him out of his mediocrity. It is above all a satire of a generation – urban, working in the service industry – who can’t do a thing with their hands.

Vincent is caught in an endless spiral. How did you work on the structure?

What interested me was to develop the phenomenon gradually. It starts slowly and spreads progressively. At first, it’s an intern in the office, then another guy at work, then more and more people. Vincent begins to suspect everyone; a neurosis starts to spread like a disease. It’s a little like in *The Truman Show*, there’s him and the rest of the world. I wanted to stay focused on the character and always to be able to wonder if all this isn’t all in his head.

Vincent is a victim of all kinds of persecutions. In addition to the assaults, there’s his social isolation...

It makes him all the more endearing. One of the few things I remember from film school is what a screenwriting teacher told me: “To get attached to a character he or she has to have as many problems as possible.” The more difficulties the character has, the more attached you grow to them, it’s human nature. In Vincent’s case, I wanted a character who was unlikeable at first, and who becomes appealing later. Nobody cares about a

character who is perfect and becomes even more perfect, whereas an anti-hero who ends up as hero becomes endearing... Hence the significance of a love story: it allows the redemption of a man and the re-discovery of himself. He reconnects to what is important and regains possession of his body. He who lived in the virtual world of advertising, in the city, reconnects with many things, including love.

“It is above all a satire of a generation, urban, working in the service industry.”

Seeing the film, one obviously thinks of the COVID pandemic; did it have an influence on the writing?

The screenplay was written before the pandemic! But the feeling of isolation isn’t new. I think the lockdown just exacerbated the way we were already living before! We were already all in front of our screens, alone. Everyone can see what they want, the suffering due to COVID, the political tension of the country... We are more and more alone with ourselves; we don’t trust anyone, we’ve grown disconnected from each other. Everyone is a threat because we no longer trust each other. Some will also say it is about insecurity. So no, the film isn’t related to the pandemic, but it made the screenplay even more relevant.

It is also about social violence...

At the time I wrote it, this wasn't voluntary at all. It was a visceral, instinctive idea, not intellectual. For me it's not a story of society "become savage", it's deeper than that. Maybe it's more about loneliness. Loneliness makes you become paranoid and distrustful. All the fanatics we see in the news are people who are completely alone. Our society creates loneliness on an industrial scale, and we reap what we sow.

Did you have any references for this film?

The first is John Carpenter. It's thanks to him I started to be interested in film. If I hadn't watched *In the Mouth of Madness* and *The Thing* when I was 14, I wouldn't be here today. It was a shock. I love his films so much that I don't have any real perspective on them, inevitably they infuse my work. There's George Romero, of course, he's the one who invented the genre. Buñuel also influenced me a lot by the subtle way he uses the fantastical. In *The Exterminating Angel* the fantastic premise is almost invisible. Just a small slight that is all the more perturbing because we think it could happen to us. The fantastical idea is that people have a mental block.

Vincent must die, but why?

Because he has to be reborn!

April 2023

Mathieu Naert

Biography

Born in Paris, Mathieu Naert is a director, screenwriter, and actor. After studying at ESRA (Ecole Supérieure de Réalisation Audio-visuelle), he directed his first short film in 2006 and a clip for the singer Renaud. That same year he was one of the winners of the Sopadin Junior competition for his first feature film script. In 2009 he joined the Blanche Salant theatre school and has since pursued a parallel career as an actor. Between 2012 and 2018 he directed several short films exploring tragedy and the thriller and fantasy genres. In 2018 the screenplay of *Vincent Must Die* was one of the winners of the SOFILM genre residences. He has since written *Lionel meurt à la fin* (Lionel Dies at the End), a kind of spiritual and thematic sequel to *Vincent Must Die*, and directed *Submersibles*, a short film about a crazy and perverse love story which is beginning its journey on the festival circuit.



Karim Leklou

Karim Leklou made his screen debut in Jacques Audiard's *A Prophet* in 2009. Between 2011 and 2013 he pursued the auteur cinema path with impressive appearances in Bouli Lanners' *The Giants*, and Rebecca Zlotowski's *Grand Central*. His lead role in *Heat Wave* by Raphaël Jacoulot (2015) marked a turning point, after which he was reunited with Tahar Rahim (his co-star in *A Prophet*) in *Les Anarchistes* by Elie Wajeman (2015), *Heal the Living* by Katell Quillévéré (2016) and *Treat Me Like Fire* by Marie Monge (2017).

In 2018 Karim Leklou's career was cemented when his performance in Romain Gavras' *The World Is Yours*, saw him nominated for the Most Promising Actor César Award. The same year, he was one of the protagonists in the series *Hippocrate*, directed by Thomas Lilti. Since 2020, Karim Leklou has continued in auteur cinema, most recently in *Playground* by Laura Wandel, and *Sons of Ramses* by Clément Cogitore, while diversifying with more physical roles such as in Giovanni Aloi's *The Third War* and Cédric Jimenez's *The Stronghold*. His role in *Vincent Must Die* stands at the point where these two worlds meet.



Vimala Pons

A circus artist and actress, Vimal Pons studied Art History, then Film History before joining the Cours Florent Free Class and continuing at Conservatoire National Supérieur d'Art Dramatique de Paris and the Centre National des Arts du Cirque. Since 2013 she has appeared in front of the cameras of a new generation of independent filmmakers (Antonin Peretjatko, Bertrand Mandico, Thomas Salvador, Lucie Borleteau, Sébastien Betbeder) and leading figures of auteur cinema (Philippe Garrel, Jacques Rivette, Alain Resnais, Paul Verhoeven, Christophe Honoré...).

In parallel, Vimala Pons directs circus performance shows in collaboration with Tsirihaka Harrivel. These include *GRANDE* in 2017 and *Le Périmètre de Denver* in 2022 from which was born the musical projects *Victoire Chose* (Murailles Music / Teenage Menopause Records) and *Eusapia Klane* (Wariorecords/Kythibong). She confirms her appetite for genre cinema and unique worlds by playing Margaux in *Vincent Must Die*.



CAST

Vincent: Karim Leklou
Margaux: Vimala Pons
Father: François Chattot
Joachim: Michaël Perez
Yves: Emmanuel Vérité
Postman: Guillaume Bursztyn
Policeman: Benoît Lambert
HR Director: Jean-Rémy Chaize
Biker 1: Maurin Olles
Biker 2: Jean-Christophe Folly

CREW

Directed by Stéphan Castang
Screenplay: Mathieu Naert
D.P. : Manuel Dacosse
Original Music: John Kaced
Sound: Dirk Bombey
Editor: Méloé Poilevé
Mix: Xavier Thieulin
Wardrobe: Charlotte Richard
Makeup: Pia Quin, José Luis Blasco
Production Design: Samuel Charbonnot, Aurore Benoit, Lucie Poichot
Stunt coordinator: Manu Lanzi
Producers: Thierry Lounas, Claire Bonnefoy

Production: Capricci, Bobi Lux, Frakas Productions

Coproduction: Arte, Gapbusters

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