

ANNE-DOMINIQUE TOUSSAINT
PRESENTS



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HORS COMPÉTITION
SÉLECTION OFFICIELLE 2022

THE INNOCENT

A FILM BY LOUIS GARREL
WITH ROSCHDY ZEM, ANOUK GRINBERG, NORMIE MERLANT, LOUIS GARREL



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SYNOPSIS

When Abel learns that his 60-year-old mother Sylvie is about to marry a man in prison he freaks out.

With the help of his best friend, Clémence, he will do whatever it takes to protect her.

But meeting Michel, his new stepfather, may well offer him a new perspective...

INTERVIEW WITH LOUIS GARREL (THE INNOCENT) by Charles Tesson

Is it true that *The Innocent*, your 4th film, was initially planned to follow your first, *Two Friends (2015)*?

Yes, and with the same producer, Anne-Dominique Toussaint. But the script for *The Innocent* took time to mature, I allowed myself a digression with *A Faithful Man* (2018) and *The Crusade* (2021). I started writing it alone, then I discovered the novels of Tanguy Viel, writer of existential detective novels who likes to hijack the genre to write about intimate things. Initially I was looking for a writer of detective airport novels, in which the detective genre would be like a game. It was a project without Jean-Claude Carrière, unlike *A Faithful Man* and *The Crusade*; it took a long time for us to find a structure for the story, but we were moving forward. A screenplay isn't a novel, it has to move. Then came Naïla Guiguet, with whom I worked on *The Crusade*, who is brilliant and super-talented. All this time was very beneficial for the script. And even if Jean-Claude Carrière didn't work on it, I had him read it. He suggested a couple of things, one of which I did put in the film: the kitten that licks my shoe and eats the caviar when I'm in the cemetery. He had a very visual screenwriter's ideas.

You wanted to write a crime comedy?

I wanted a familial story and a criminal case, a crime, within the family. Right away we had the idea of the mother who gets married in prison. It's the mother who, for love, brings a transgressive element into this utterly "legalistic"/ law-abiding family.

Your film seems inspired by the story of your mother Brigitte Sy, who conducted theatre workshops in prisons and directed her first feature film on the subject, *Free Hands* (2010) where her character, played by Ronit Elkabetz does just that. Having fallen in love with an inmate (Carlo Brandt), she marries him in the first scene, which is also how your film starts.

Yes, yes. In *The Innocent*, it is the story of this marriage from the point of view of the son. A little bit like a shot reverse shot. However, when my mother got married in prison, I was 18 and I wasn't there. So, I gate-crashed her wedding through this film!!! The starting point of the story is the real story of my mother: she did get married in prison and I did get along with the stepfather, who opened the doors of a world I knew nothing about. Always fun to see two worlds rubbing up against one another.

This other world that you and your film talk about, you knew it in real life before knowing it through film?

Exactly. In real life first. My mother worked in prisons for 20 years. From the age of 11, I have spent time with people who came out of prison, and sometimes went back... you see them then no more news. At home, I always knew funny guys. Women too, because my mother also conducted workshops in women's prisons. Some have become writers. In this way I've known this world of politically committed intellectuals, rather attracted by these people on the margins of society.

In *The Crusade* you and Laetitia Casta played young parents overwhelmed by the behaviour of their child, and by children. Here you're an older son overwhelmed by his mother's behaviour.

The relationship is reversed. It depends on the kind of parents you had, but historically, after May 68, the seventies and the eighties were generally decades of rebellion and transgression. Maybe it gave the children of that generation, to which I belong, the feeling that perhaps we had to set boundaries for parents (*smiles*). There's a bit of that in the film: a son who looks after his mother as if he was her father, who tries to impose some authority on her life. It's the story of a son who thinks his mission is to protect his mother, not from her madness but from her joy. A mother who is not doing badly, she's even doing rather well, but her son is a pessimist who tells her all this is all going to end badly, when she thinks everything is absolutely fine. Because what his mother

lives is a perpetual joy, that of a never-ending adolescence, always renewed. Moreover, the character of the son changes dramatically when he hears from behind the door his mother making love to her new husband behind the door. It's an unstoppable joy, a pure joy, he can't do anything against pleasure, he can't thwart it.

In the structure of the story, two parts can be distinguished. First the son who wants to protect his mother and who investigates his stepfather, tailing him. Second, the son who becomes friends with the stepfather and forms an alliance with him.

I didn't want it to be an intimate, minor key family chronicle, but wanted a bolder, more constructed narrative. Since the film has an autobiographical base, I couldn't allow myself to make a chronicle to make that even more transparent. I prefer to take biographical elements and put them in a film that plays with film genres, including comedy. To avoid the pathos of the tragic dimension. The mother-son relationship is a difficult one to deal with in film. You can easily fall into the visceral. The lighter the spirit, the better for the film and the viewer.

There are indeed two parts. One is an amused and amusing history, and the second turns into an action film. With as a bonus, during the scene at the roadside restaurant, the desire to knit a scene of marivaudage in a scene of a burglary where something very intimate is taking place within a small gas factory, at the time of the burglary. So, I needed a very precise mise en scene.

It's clear you had fun, and changed from what you have filmed so far.

Strangely, I was quite uninhibited during the shooting of these scenes because this was more in the vein of cinema itself. When you make a film, you tell yourself it must be a rigorous representation of existence, that you must not betray human relationships. When you make a scene that falls under a cinematic genre, it becomes a game where you are accountable to cinema, without necessarily having to betray life.

In regards to the burglary, from its rehearsal to its enactment, it recalls "old school", films like *Rififi* (1955) by Jules Dassin or Melville's *Bob le Flambeur* (1956) by Melville, both adaptations of books by Auguste Le Breton.

I saw several films, especially the brilliant *Violent Saturday* (1955) by Richard Fleischer, and Kubrick's *The Killing* (1956), where the burglary goes wrong because of a little love story. It's exquisite to bear witness the display of masculinity, virility and violence and see it all perverted by a love story.

You say you want to play with the genre and the film is structured by scenes related to performance. The opening scene, as a trompe-l'œil, of the rehearsal of the scene of the play between your mother and the inmate, her future husband. Then your character and his girlfriend who are rehearsing the domestic quarrel for the scene of the burglary, and the scene of the domestic quarrel at the time of the burglary, in which something else is being played, to do with feelings of love.

It's a principle, a very beautiful one, that I discovered when I acted in plays by Marivaux: the feeling doesn't exist before it's expressed. It is the expression that gives it birth. The minute we say something that implies a commitment, the feeling ensues. The act of speaking unleashes it. Things start with a game and the reality of the feeling comes after, through the game. The starting point of the film is still a man in prison fascinated by the acting profession, since they met through acting.

From the opening scene, they are married in the play and, upon his release from prison he's going to play a double game. Your character is suspicious of the one played by Roschdy Zem, and as a director there is a beautiful scene where you give him credit: that of the flower shop, their shared project. He is very invested in this new mission, his new profession, he has learned about flowers and is disappointed to see she's not into it, she's still stuck in her past as an actress,

when she was given flowers. She retreats into her past whereas he projects himself into their future. This rebalances things nicely.

This scene didn't work at first because it was the mother who was enthusiastic. She was looking for a name for the shop and his ideas were a bit stupid. Then we went for the opposite: it is he who has to be very enthusiastic and worried, like at the start of a love affair, when he realises there isn't the same level of commitment. This makes his character more touching. They are nonetheless all still very much in love. We forgive them that! They are not driven by power or domination. They are people who steal for love. The stepfather for his new wife, the son for his mother. Everything gravitates around this woman. The husband is out of jail, but it is not an absolute evil, hence the the son ends up going there. He will himself also commit a crime, but it's not so bad. There's something tender about the burglary, deep down. Evil, that's the one who betrays, the friend, the figure of the villain, played by Jean-Claude Pautot. Roschdy Zem, the stepfather, is almost feminine. It's fun to see a guy who, right out of prison, becomes interested in flowers, and so motivated! Writing the script, we wanted this flower shop project to make you dream a little. That's why we made the shop unrealistic, almost with a musical comedy side to it, as in the opening scene. With Jean Rabasse, the set designer, we came up with pink walls. He asked me a lot of questions about the character of the mother to imagine the décor in which she'd like to live. At first, he saw her as a post-hippie, but no, not at all. I know my mother – she's definitely not a neo-hippie! (laughs) I told him that if we wanted to stick up pictures of people she likes, we'd need one of Jean Genet along with totally kitsch pop singers. You need both, that's what makes her so special.

Like the music of the film....

There's mainstream pop, Herbert Léonard, *Pour le Plaisir*, *Nuit magique* by Catherine Lara, *Une autre histoire* by Gérard Blanc, which talks about starting a new story, and *I Maschi* by Gianni Nannini. I wanted the film to be immersed in the musical world of the mother. François Truffaut used to say that people love mainstream pop because the lyrics relate to everyone. In only two lines of a song, you feel that the writers are talking about your life. I've tried to make a "pop" film. Not only the pop of the genres, but a film in which everyone can recognise themselves.

In *A Faithful Man* and *The Crusade*, the opening scenes take place in a Parisian apartment; in *The Innocent* we immediately find ourselves in a prison. You're taking us to a very different world. Which is why I wanted to shoot in Lyon. I didn't want to be in Paris anymore. For the story, but also in relation to what I convey as an actor, which is very much marked as Parisian. You could almost give me a street name! (laughs) I wanted to escape this to help the viewer enter a different world through my character. I really wanted to go for an escape film that offered a picaresque adventure, with a taste of romance and comedy.

You character contributes a lot to this. Through his suspicion, his tailing of his stepfather, we can tell this character likes to make imaginary films of a reality of which he is the spectator. Before embarking as an actor in the film he's made for himself.

Suspicion is a hidden desire for a story. When you're tailing someone, it's the other who fascinates you, with a desire that the story you're looking for will materialise at the meeting. When you're a child, to have a stepfather is very special. I have experienced that. I've tailed many (smiles), I used to conduct fantastic tails. I used to think it would be great to have a camera to film that. There were no drones back then. I shot a scene of a tail, which was cut in the edit, a little like the museum scene in *Vertigo*. Roschdy Zem's character went into a puppet theatre museum. Basically, my character, it's the story of an inhibited guy, who's going to come out of a depression due to the death of his wife by liberating himself through a fantastic adventure. It could also be the unconscious act of his mother who, by marrying an inmate, wants to immerse her son in another world than his own to spring him from his torpor. He's going to find his freedom, finally – but in prison (laughs).

You shot your previous films with Laetitia Casta, Vincent Macaigne, Golshifteh Farahani. Here, you surround yourself with different actors, Anouk Grinberg, Roschdy Zem, Noémie Merlant.

Bizarrely, they are not choices of actors, rather choices of couples. An actor can be a great actor, play with another great actor and together, they cancel each other. You then see two individuals, or two actors. As a result, we can no longer believe in it. I started with Roschdy Zem. He was happy not to play the butch guy but a more tender, sentimental character. He liked this mixture. I didn't know Anouk Grinberg, even though she had acted in one of my father's films, *I Can No Longer Hear the Guitar* (1991). I had sent her two scenes and when she arrived, I knew right away my job was done, that it would work between the two like a self-generating circuit. Roschdy is tall, Anouk is petite. We did a test. They acted the wedding scene, I filmed it and from the first shot I told my crew, we have to recapture this on the shoot. You can film with good cameras, good sets, the latest story you've added to your script, but it will always be about the personality of the actors and their alchemy.

Same for Noémie Merlant. I had met her in an airplane, on the way to the Toronto Film Festival, and we barely spoke. Then I saw her in *Paris, 13th District* (2021) by Jacques Audiard, in which I loved her lightness and depth. I felt something clownish in her, which I wanted to bring out. Since she has never done that, it was very enjoyable for her and frightening at the same time. So, I had my quartet I could compose with. I don't do individual tests with actors, but between them. They are assemblages, blends which ensure the film holds together // which make the film. Putting the actors together is another layer of writing, as important as the screenplay. During the shoot, something is written between the actors through their rapport. Anouk Grinberg becomes touching when she is in love with Roschdy Zem. He is handsome, elegant. We understand immediately why she has fallen in love with him, yet feel a little afraid for her. Thus, you wonder why he is with her, is he sincere? A whole new score is written with the actors.

There's a beautiful scene, a long focal length panning shot, between you and Noémie Merlant, when she insults you in a field, against a background of green grass background.

I shot the scene the first time on the banks of Lyon with a Steadicam, and it didn't work, despite 28 takes. I got in touch with the editor, Pierre Deschamps, who edited the scene and I found it too didactic. Even though we were shooting in the middle of the countryside, Julien Poupard, the DP, got out a 1000mm lens. We had planned to use it for the tailing scenes. It was very cold, the lens was foggy, and we shot that way, hence the misty, greyish effect. I asked Noémie to improvise on the scene we had already shot. As a result, the shot has a life of its own. Albert Serra often films his characters from far away, which is nicer for the non-professional actors because they don't feel the camera and the pressure of the crew around them.

The cinematography of this film is very different from what Julien Poupard did for *The Crusade*.

I asked him to do something more romantic. In Lyon, I talked about it with the production designer; there's a slightly Italian flavour to the architecture of the city which reminds me of Naples and the tone of the film is close to ironic comedy, has something of the Italian cinema of the seventies. The film takes feelings seriously without taking its genre too seriously, by keeping it under an amused gaze. In Lyon there is an historical centre, very typical, where we located the flower shop, and a suburban side too, like the restaurant while he is tailing him, or the parking lot with the roadside restaurant at the end. I didn't want anything in between, only these contrasts, to reflect the contrast between the two parts, the first one very lively, and the second in the practical register of an action film.

From one part to another, there is a change of triangle. Initially, the son alone facing his mother and her new husband and then the son with his girlfriend, and the stepfather, behind his mother's back. It's a great success, the scene at the hospital where the mother realizes she has been duped, betrayed.

She married him suspecting he could start up again while refusing to believe it. Anouk Grinberg didn't understand that her character leaves him because he started again. Lies must be taken seriously, they can destroy everything. For the mother, if you do everything in sight, and talk about it, you feel it can work. This is the anti-bourgeois principle. The bourgeoisie is built on lies and social conventions. She is anti-bourgeois; she accepts everything as long as there are no lies. Lying is unacceptable to her, this is her morality.

Did you face any particular or new challenges for this film?

The scouting was a bit complicated, especially for the road restaurant and the parking lot at the end, which we finally found 60 kilometres outside of Lyon. And, not being used to action scenes, the stunt scene during the burglary, when my character ploughs into the guy with his car and knocks him over. It lasts four seconds, but it was quite complicated to do – maybe 28 shots – and couldn't upset the movement of the scene.

Who is the innocent of the title?

Initially it is Roschdy Zem's character, then it's mine. In a way when you commit a crime for noble reasons, it's somehow innocent. Which is, I must admit, not very moral under the law. It is the famous line in Renoir's *The Rules of the Game*: "*What is terrible in this world, is that everyone has their reasons.*" I was hesitant at first to give the character of the stepfather a criminal past, before giving up very quickly. Anyway, I had a technical advisor for all of this.

A technical advisor? Which means?

A former rogue I was in touch with, Jean-Claude Pautot, who plays the character who directs the rehearsal of the domestic fight with Noémie Merlant and me before the burglary. He is Roschdy Zem's accomplice in the film, he's not an actor but an ex-con who did 25 years in prison. I thought he was so incredible, I wanted to give him a part. I made him read the script, I told him the story of Roschdy Zem's character, and how he is betrayed at the end by his best friend. He said: "*He betrays his friend? Forget it amigo, I'll never do this! I've worked hard all my life to be a trustworthy man, I'm not going to fuck it all up now!*" He got things confused, and I find this beautiful, between the part he's going to play and the idea people in his community will have of him. I went all out with him: Shakespeare, how traitors are the best parts to play...

With Jean-Claude Pautot, we conceived a model of the set of the burglary so we could rehearse the scene with his friends, ex crooks, according to the configuration of the location, the location of the truck and the window of the restaurant, so it would be credible. I filmed them for one hour, rehearsing the scene around the model of the set. It was a lot of fun to observe them, to watch them as if all of this was real, in full preparation of a burglary, quarrelling over the method, and the roles each would play. At the end, I realised that if I considered their directions through wanting to be realistic, I wouldn't be able to film the scene. There comes a time, in terms of perception of the scene, the stretching of time, cross-cutting editing with its rule of "meanwhile", where realism inhibits cinema. It was a fascinating work session, a necessary step to get to a geometry of cinema.

For the hooded guy who robs the others, I tried several actors, but it didn't work, it wasn't believable. So, I asked some "professionals". Same for the cops, I did a workshop with policemen from Lyon. When my character gets arrested, the cop who checks my ID is a real cop. As for the caviar, it didn't happen right away. One tends to go towards the déjà-vu... art robberies. If you want to modernise it, you don't really want to rob a truckload of cell phones, it's not very cinegenic. In Corsica I talked to someone who told me about a guy who did caviar, in the sense of stealing during new year's celebrations, and then selling it on. I loved the idea. The logistics are complicated, you have to keep it refrigerated. It is not a huge deal since the vans don't have security, and it's a lot of money. It was perfect for the characters in the film, for their re-entry into the mafia. And Iranian caviar, that's a small nod to Jean-Claude Carrière.

The last shot is very beautiful

The aquarium... the caviar amongst the penguins, which is plausible, for the best preservation of the product... and out of the ordinary (smiles). It's a bit of a Hitchcock lesson, the sense of the visual shortcut, setting up a situation from an image that you grasp without having to provide an explanation.

Another project after this one?

Nothing very definite. Just about politics over several generations and between two brothers, I have the title already. *The Disciple*.

LOUIS GARREL – Selected Filmography

- 2022 THE INNOCENT | Louis Garrel
Cannes FF – Out of Competition
- 2022 CARAVAGGIO'S SHADOW | Michele Placido
- 2021 THE CRUSADE | Louis Garrel
Cannes FF – Cinema for the climate
- 2021 THE STORY OF MY WIFE | Ildikó Enyedi
- 2021 OUR MEN | Rachel Lang
- 2020 RIFKIN'S FESTIVAL | Woody Allen
- 2020 DNA | Maïwenn
César Award nominee 2021, Best Supporting actor
- 2019 A RAINY DAY IN NEW YORK | Woody Allen
- 2019 AN OFFICER AND A SPY | Roman Polanski
Venice FF Official Selection 2019
César Award nominee 2020, Best Supporting Actor
- 2019 LITTLE WOMEN | Greta Gerwig
- 2018 A FAITHFUL MAN | LOUIS GARREL
- 2018 ONE NATION, ONE KING | Pierre Schoeller
Venice FF Out of Competition
- 2017 REDOUBTABLE | Michel Hazanavicius
Cannes FF Official Selection 2017
César Nominee 2018, Best Actor
- 2017 ISMAEL'S GHOSTS | Arnaud Desplechin
Opening Film Cannes FF 2017 Out of Competition
- 2016 THE SUMMONING | Rebecca Zlotowski
- 2016 FROM THE LAND OF THE MOON | Nicole Garcia
Cannes FF Official Selection 2016
Cesar Nominee 2017, Best Film
- 2015 TWO FRIENDS | Louis Garrel
Critics' Fortnight Cannes FF 2015 Out of Competition
- 2015 IN THE SHADOW OF WOMEN | Philippe Garrel
Selected Director's fortnight Cannes FF 2015

2015 MY KING | Maïwenn
Cannes FF Official Selection 2015
César Nominee 2016 Best Supporting Actor

2014 SAINT LAURENT | Bertrand Bonello
César Nominee 2015 Best Supporting Actor and Best Film
Cannes FF Official Selection 2014

2013 JEALOUSY | PHILIPPE Garrel
Venice FF Official Selection
New York FF Official Selection

2013 A CASTLE IN ITALY | Valéria Bruni-Tedeschi
Cannes FF Official Selection
Thessaloniki FF Official Selection

2011 A BURNING HOT SUMMER | Philippe Garrel
Venice FF Official Selection

2011 BELOVED | Christophe Honoré

2010 THE THREE-WAY WEDDING | Jacques Doillon

2009 MAKING PLANS FOR LENA | Christophe Honoré

2008 FRONTIER OF THE DAWN | Philippe Garrel
Cannes FF Official Selection

2007 LES CHANSONS D'AMOUR | Christophe Honoré
Cannes FF Official Selection
Washington DC C'est Chic French FF Selection

2007 ACTRICES | Valéria Bruni-Tedeschi
Cannes FF Un Certain Regard Winner

2007 A CURTAIN RAISER | François Ozon | (short)

2006 IN PARIS | Christophe Honoré

2005 REGULAR LOVERS | Philippe Garrel
Winner Louis-Delluc Award
César Winner 2006 Most Promising Actor
Silver Lion Venice FF
Étoile d'or Best Male Newcomer

2003 THE DREAMERS | Bernardo Bertolucci

CAST

Michel

Roschdy ZEM

Sylvie

Anouk GRINBERG

Clémence

Noémie MERLANT

Abel

Louis GARREL

Jean-Paul

Jean-Claude PAUTOT

Caviar truck driver

Yanisse KEBBAB

CREW

Directed by	Louis GARREL
Producer	Anne-Dominique TOUSSAINT
Screenplay	Louis GARREL, Tanguy VIEL
With the collaboration of	Naïla GUIGUET
Original Music	Grégoire HETZEL
DP	Julien POUPARD (AFC)
Editor	Pierre DESCHAMPS
Production Designer	Jean RABASSE (ADC)
Sound – Sound Editing – Mix	Laurent BENAÏM, Alexis MEYNET, Olivier GUILLAUME
Costume Designer	Corinne BRUAND
Head of Production	Julien BRUN
First Assistant Director	Stéphane MANARANCHE
Continuity	Anaïs SERGEANT
Casting	Julie ALLIONE
Management	Julien MEUTERLOS
Post-production Manager	Cédric ETTOUATI
Coproduction	LES FILMS DES TOURNELLES ARTE FRANCE CINÉMA AUVERGNE-RHÔNE-ALPES CINÉMA COFIMAGE 33 LA BANQUE POSTALE IMAGE 15
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