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LOCARNO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL • IN COMPETITION



Festival del film Locarno
Concorso internazionale

TONNERRE

a film by Guillaume BRAC

starring

Vincent MACAIGNE

Solène RIGOT & Bernard MENEZ

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SYNOPSIS

“Think carefully... All that may be very romantic, but it could cost you dearly...”

When 33-year-old rock musician Maxime gets this warning, it's a long way from the tranquillity he came looking for at his father's place in the remote town of Tonnerre. Just days after his arrival he meets the dazzling 21-year-old beauty Melody. Rather than any of the musical instruments with which he's surrounded himself to compose his next album, it's to Melody's lush curves that his hands inevitably stray. But they are not living out the same story, and a storm is unleashed.

GUILLAUME BRAC – FILMOGRAPHY

Guillaume Brac directed three short films during his studies at La Fémis in Paris. After graduating, he worked as assistant director on *PARC* by Arnaud des Pallières and *SHALL WE KISS* by Emmanuel Mouret, among others.

In 2008, Brac created his production company ANNEE ZERO, through which he directed and produced *STRANDED* (2009) and *WORLD WITHOUT WOMEN* (2011).

The 58-minutes *moyen-métrage* *A WORLD WITHOUT WOMEN* was a revelation, released theatrically in France, Belgium and Japan, and rapturously received by the critics and festivals in France and internationally:

- Nominated for Best Short Film - César, 2012
- Selected for Taipei, Montreal, Vienna and San Francisco Film Festivals 2012.
- Best Short Film of 2011 Award - Syndicat de la Critique
- Award for Best Short Film - Amiens Film Festival, 2011
- Audience Award and Janine Bazin Best Actress Award - Festival Entrevue, Belfort, 2011
- Special Jury Award - Vendôme Film Festival, 2011

TONNERRE is Guillaume Brac's feature film debut, produced by RECTANGLE PRODUCTIONS.

A CONVERSATION WITH GUILLAUME BRAC

Once again, you're working with Vincent Macaigne...

Hélène Ruault, my co-screenwriter, and I wrote it for him. He was the starting point of the screenplay. In *A WORLD WITHOUT WOMEN* he played an awkward, clumsy character with a lot of hang-ups. I'd promised him that this new character would be handsome, charming and charismatic. I didn't want him to be a comedy character. I wanted to take him somewhere else, somewhere he had never been before in film. I also wanted to erase some of his characteristic ways of being, of speaking, so as to keep only his essence, this fragility and sweetness you can see in his eyes. Through Vincent I can address things that are very intimate for me, but have meaning only because they are the same for him too. We know each other extremely well, he is a vehicle for me and I'm not sure I could have made films if we hadn't been friends first, and if I hadn't had the idea, the desire, to make him a sort of alter ego. The fact we know each other very well doesn't mean the work is any easier: the shoot was often harsh, often tense, because - curiously - our friendship made us demand more of each other.

Why did you make the main character a rock musician and how did you envisage this character?

From the onset I wanted to talk about the relationship between how you live your life and what you create. I thought the figure of the rock musician was more popular, more universal than that of the director, the writer or the painter. You can get a bit away from the "cursed artist" figure, the audience can identify a bit more easily. Cinematographically speaking it's easier to film someone who makes music than someone who writes, for example. From the start I know I had to find a model for Maxime. But who? I knew I didn't want a singer who sings in French. My films are already so deeply rooted in France and French culture... And one day, by chance, I saw the cover of Rover's album in a record shop window. I loved his record and told myself I had the model for Maxime. I contacted Rover, showed him *A WORLD WITHOUT WOMEN*, and it moved him, so I asked if he would be willing to be the musical soul of the film.

To the point of lending his voice to Vincent Macaigne when he sings!

Vincent took singing lessons before the shoot, but even though he's a great actor he's not such a great singer! I was afraid it would undermine the credibility of the film and during the editing I asked Rover to dub him. I'd already thought of it before the shoot but was a bit reluctant since I thought it might be too artificial. With hindsight I realise it's entirely consistent. Rover composed the songs, he was the inspiration for Maxime's character, it's pretty natural that he would lend him his voice. Rover did it as an actor would, trying to find the right timbre, the emotion and the fragility for Vincent.

TONNERRE is different from A WORLD WITHOUT WOMEN but both films share a romantic lead character.

I must be a bit of a romantic myself! Cynical or manipulative characters don't interest me. In *TONNERRE*, they can be hurtful but only because they are clumsy, because they themselves are hurt. Each character is completely sincere at the

time they live the events. I was absolutely at ease with my desire to make a sentimental romantic film....

... very romantic, particularly when Maxime gazes at Melodie as she dances in the snowstorm, or when they go boating on the lake...

It's true, the lake in the snow, that's real German romanticism! Moreover, the - very romantic - poem by Musset that the father declaims at the beginning of the film is practically the starting point of the writing of the screenplay. When I outlined the story I wanted us to write together to H  l  ne Ruault - a woman abruptly breaks off a romantic encounter, provoking a violent reaction in the man - she immediately mentioned Musset's *Les Nuits*.

I showed her F COMME FAIRBANKS by Maurice Dugowson, one of Patrick Dewaere's most beautiful roles, the story of the encounter between a rather delicate man and a woman who gives him back his joy, his energy. But you can tell from the start that it's not going to be enough, that he's asking too much of her. And their affair falls apart. That film touched me enormously.

TONNERRE also deals with the father/son relationship...

I thought early on that if the film focused solely on the love story it risked ending up a bit narcissistic and over indulgent, too concerned with the neuroses of a 30-year-old man, so I wanted to open it up to another generation. The father and the son seem far apart, but are, bit by bit, revealed as being a lot closer than they imagined. This gradual awareness of the father-son relationship moves me very strongly; in fact it almost becomes the heart of the film.

Did comparisons of your earlier work with the films of Rozier influence your choice of Bernard Menez to play the father?

The paradox here is that I don't think many people will refer to Rozier's influence in TONNERRE... But of course I loved Bernard in Rozier's films. He's been my idol since I was 20. I've always dreamed of making a film with him. Many people have told me I look like him, which isn't entirely wrong. He reminds me of my father! I felt I knew him before I even met him and in a way he was already part of my life.

His acting style is quite unusual...

I had a bit of a hard time directing him at first, but everything loosened up after a week. He quickly understood what I wanted - something very simple and restrained. I often put him in a particular outfit or gave him an unexpected prop - tight cycle shorts, a leaf blower - which was a lot of fun and gave the film the comic touch I was very keen on without wanting to fall into broad comedy. Bernard emanates melancholy, humanity - he reminds me of a character from Chekhov. In any case I'm not interested in filming an actor if it isn't to try and bring into light something that hasn't been revealed before, at least not in this particular way.

Each character is allowed his weaknesses, his emotional journey: it's almost a moral standpoint with you.

Yes. It's one of the reasons why I insisted on the scene where Herv  's daughter Lisa recites a poem at the dinner table. This poem is a common cultural base and

allows everyone to talk about love, life - even the grandmother, who has also had her share of joy and sorrow. Thus she becomes a character, just as much as the others.

And you dare to film men crying!

I'm not the only one and it seems very natural to me, men cry too. When Maxime collapses on his bed, he doesn't just shed a few discreet tears, he moans and screams, it borders on the grotesque and over-the-top, but we needed this scene in order to understand that losing Melodie reawakens and amplifies an older pain, something rooted deeply in him. Vincent was remarkable that day. It was he who suggested it, at the first take. It was uncomfortable, uneasy, but I felt within it something of profound truth, and we didn't even need to do a second take.

Melodie's role is almost like that of the revolver: she exposes the wounds and the violence that Maxime needs to express in order to move on with his life...

In a way Melodie is an empty shell that Maxime fills with many things... the fear of aging, of being alone - a fear exacerbated by his going back to his father. Without being aware of it he behaves as if she doesn't have a life of her own. That which concerns her directly remains on the periphery of the film, except for the brief moment when she talks about herself in the inn and the fleeting allusions to Ivan. I wanted to highlight male narcissism - I include myself here of course - the way men can deny the existence of the woman in front of them. Suddenly Maxime realises that a whole side of Melodie's life is a mystery to him, and an abyss opens up.

It seems more the feeling that she has suddenly escaped him than any real attachment to her that throws him into passion...

Yes. If she had taken the time to explain to him over a cup of coffee that she was going back to Ivan, he would have been very sad but the story would have ended there. It's the fact that he has no right to any explanation that drives him crazy. He starts projecting all sorts of things, even imagining that she needs to be saved. The arrival of the police is almost a relief. It brings their story to a close before it disintegrates - it stops on a romantic peak. The irony is that Maxime isn't entirely wrong. Melodie frees herself from a double emotional yoke. It doesn't in any way justify Maxime's action - which remains morally extremely questionable - but with hindsight, it does give it meaning.

In the scene at the police station, when Melodie says "Yes" to the gendarme, it's like the "Yes" of a young bride at the wedding registry - a "Yes" directed not at Maxime but at Love...

I envisaged this scene exactly as if Melodie and Ivan were at the registry office, only backwards! It's a divorce between her and Ivan and she is saying "Yes" to another life.

Why did you choose Solène Rigot for the part?

She was the first actress my casting director Elodie Demey suggested after reading the screenplay. I'd seen her in Muriel and Delphine Coulin's 17 GIRLS

and thought she was great. She was vivacious, cheeky, almost tomboyish... but that wasn't this character at all! I had pictured a slightly older, more sensual woman. So we kept on looking. Most important was that we find someone who would be able to enjoy a quick repartee with Vincent; they must be able to play with each other, and she must be able to put him in his place. And one day, inexplicably, it became obvious to me that it was Solène, that it couldn't be anyone else! Later, when it came to choosing costumes, and in the way I directed her, I did all I could to bring her towards a more obvious femininity, a sensuality. I fought against her "cheeky" side. I realise that I like to take actors where they've never been before and try to reveal a less acknowledged, less visible side to them. Her character - like Maxime's, by the way - continued to evolve, to be honed, during editing. It's often forgotten, but the directing of actors carries on during the editing, and that's when Damien Maestraggi's contribution became very precious.

As in your short films you like to mix professional and non-professional actors....

The four main characters aside, all the others are non-professionals, most of them from Tonnerre - the little town from where my grandparents come - and play themselves. As with *A WORLD WITHOUT WOMEN*, the words I put in their mouths are often words they told me. Some of them, like the Dampt family, I know very well. Hervé and I have been friends for 10, 15 years. His delicacy, his integrity, his generosity touch me deeply. I knew that if he agreed to give me this side of himself he would be very moving. The shooting of this scene - in which human stakes largely exceed film stakes - really made me consider my approach and its limitations. Afterwards I understood how important making this film had been to Hervé, that it had lifted a great weight from him. Even better, it had given him a new energy.

This scene also allows the introduction of the revolver...

The revolver had to be introduced for powerful, true and sincere reasons, so the audience wouldn't see it as a *coup de force*. As Tom Harari (D.P.) said, the film slips into thriller territory by way of documentary. It is at perhaps the most realistic moment of the film that it turns into pure fiction.

Was it your intention to flirt with the thriller genre from the start?

This tale of passion is partly autobiographical, but I wasn't interested in telling it naturalistically. Hence the desire to imagine what could have happened, to push the reality further. I needed to find some distance from this intimate material. Not because it was painful but on the contrary, to reactivate it, to give it back the power it had lost over time.

The film also veers into the fantastic, for example, when Maxime visits the chapel beneath the chemist...

This fantastic aspect is directly inspired by the town of Tonnerre and its mysterious, slightly gothic atmosphere - its old stones, its abandoned houses, its network of underground tunnels, its rumours of black masses. The town seems frozen in the past. Its atmosphere was one of the film's driving forces.

How did you approach directing?

I began from a similar starting point as with *A WORLD WITHOUT WOMEN* but Tom Harari and I quickly realised this film required a more stylised image, a flirtation with genre, at least for the second half. And shooting during winter, often indoors and at night, called for more distinct visual images than the beach in summer! But it also involved a lot more constraints and heavy technical equipment, which destabilized me at first. We had to work within strict guidelines, to prepare more assiduously; things were less flexible. Fortunately during the shoot we managed to return to a greater simplicity and spontaneity in the découpage, to fit sequences into single shots, to regain a relationship with reality and with the actors. And I was extremely lucky to work with a very flexible assistant director, Guilhem Amesland. He gives himself to the film 100%, and - like me - isn't afraid to put himself in danger when it comes to preserving the energy of a scene.

The use of music is sparse but allows the emotion to unfold, like a sounding board for the accumulated feelings.

It's like a little electric shock that allows us to be moved. I like a simple melody, almost a *ritornello*. At the end the theme becomes a song. Maxime's obsession with leaving a mark allows him to come out of this story on top. The film's emotional material has mutated into a song. It's like a memory of what happened. This brings me back to something important to me. Like many others, I'm sure: often, at the very moment I'm living something, I'm afraid that this moment has already passed. It's one of the reasons I used 16mm again, the texture of the image induces this feeling: you can be in a very real, very *alive* present that nonetheless already belongs to memory.

CAST

Maxime	Vincent MACAIGNE
Mélodie	Solène RIGOT
Claude	Bernard MENEZ
Ivan	Jonas BLOQUET

CREW

DIRECTOR	Guillaume BRAC
SCREENPLAY	Guillaume BRAC and Hélène RUAULT
1st ASSISTANT DIRECTOR	Guilhem AMESLAND
D.P.	Tom HARARI
EDITOR	Damien MAESTRAGGI
ORIGINAL MUSIC	ROVER
PRODUCER	Alice GIRARD for RECTANGLE PRODUCTIONS
COPRODUCERS	WILD BUNCH, FRANCE 3 CINEMA
INTERNATIONAL SALES	WILD BUNCH
FRENCH DISTRIBUTION	WILD BUNCH DISTRIBUTION
PRESS	Marie QUEYSANNE

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