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# Un film de MICHEL OCELOT Après KIRIKOU et AZUr & Smal

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ANNECY 2018

# Dili à RIS

# A film by Michel Ocelot

1h35 / FRANCE – BELGIUM – GERMANY / 2018 / 1.85 / 5.1

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INTERNATIONAL SALES

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PHOTOS AND PRESS KIT CAN BE DOWNLOADED FROM https://www.wildbunch.biz/movie/dilili-in-paris/

# **SYNOPSIS**

With the help of her delivery-boy friend, Dilili, a young Kanak, investigates a spate of mysterious kidnappings of young girls that is plaguing Belle Epoque Paris. In the course of her investigation she encounters a series of extraordinary characters, each of whom provides her with clues that will help her in her quest...

After *Kirikou* and *Azur & Asmar*, Michel Ocelot returns with an enchanting new tale of brave young heroes, mysteries and discoveries, kidnappings and ordeals, extraordinary places and magical encounters, in which good must challenge dark forces and triumph.

# INTERVIEW WITH MICHEL OCELOT

### THE ORIGINS OF THE PROJECT

### What was the starting point of Dilili in Paris?

The first thing was to make a film set in Paris, at last. Through all my films I have explored different continents and eras. The whole of history and civilisation is now within our reach. Faced with such cultural riches, I'm like a kid in a candy store. I can taste everything and I do. Paris is without doubt one of those extraordinary places that deserve to be glorified. Also, it's where I live and I love it. I envisaged it first in terms of setting and costume. I chose the Belle Époque because it was the last era where women wore floor-length dresses, a look that conjures dreams of princesses, queens and fairies. It's an era distant enough to evoke dreams but close enough so that documentation is easily accessible. Yet when I started to do research - as I do for all my films - I noticed that the 1900s weren't only about frills; they were also populated by exceptional people. I suspected as much, but there were so many! The Belle Époque is Renoir, Rodin, Monet, Degas, Camille Claudel, Toulouse-Lautrec, Henri Rousseau, Picasso, Poiret, Valadin, Colette, Renan, Proust, Gide, Gertrude Stein, Anna de Noailles, Brancusi, Modigliani, Wilde, Ravel, Fauré, Reynaldo Hahn, Diaghilev, Nijinsky, Bourdelle, Jaurès, Bruant, Louise Michel, van Dongen, Anatole France – only shown through a photo in the film, but I wanted him in there – Debussy, Satie, Clémenceau, the Prince of Wales (Edward VIII), Santos-Dumont, Pasteur, Méliès, the Lumière Brothers, Eiffel, Marie Curie, Sarah Bernhardt, Alphonse Mucha, Chocolat... the list is endless and I barely looked into technology. In this list, women assert themselves. In France, men of power have always kept women out of it but never imagined a society without them. The result is that women, always present, have always exerted influence over the country, however unofficially. In 1900, bit by bit, heroic individuals manage to break down barriers: the first woman barrister, the first woman doctor, first university student, first university professor. This doesn't stop them being beautiful and welldressed...

A second point: I'd thought of making a horrible film, *The Island of Men*, in which a castaway who at first hadn't seen any women, discovers them little by little, victims of men in thousands of ways. It was only a proposal and I couldn't devote an entire feature film to it, but it remained a fundamental topic: men treat women and girls badly everywhere in the world. The number of women killed ordinarily surpasses the quantity of victims of war and attacks.

### The film was made at a very particular time...

France was under attack. Journalists, artists, people shopping, youths drinking under the trees, at a concert, all were massacred. It was an extra spur – one I could certainly have done without – to celebrate this civilisation of people busy being together, creating and chatting at café terraces.

### Let's return to the defence of women, a subject you have been thinking about for a long time...

It's one of the great monstrosities of the world. You only have to read the newspapers, or any number of other publications. 'Le livre noir de la condition des femmes' ('The Black Book of the

Female Condition') by Christine Ockrent and Sandrine Treiner, and 'Half the Sky' by Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, both of which cover every continent, struck me in particular. You have to be conscious of it and not pretend to not know. One of the terrible aspects of the subject is the fact that it doesn't only concern women but also young girls. And France is no exception.

### Why did you juxtapose the two subjects?

They might seem opposite, but in fact they complement each other very well, they highlight each other. We have a choice between two cultures: an open society where men and women develop alongside each other and make their contribution, and a closed society where half the population tramples the other. On the subject of mistreatment of women, I reduced what I had planned by a lot, so my film could remain a fairytale for all, but I didn't avoid tough moments.

# When did you decide that the story would be told through the eyes of Dilili? What made you choose her as your heroine?

I found myself confronted with a small problem regarding the representation of Paris during the Belle Époque: there were only white people. This had never happened on any of my previous films! (Laughs) It seemed an impoverishment for my audience and for myself. I searched for people a bit more colourful than the Gauls. It was too late, historically speaking, to present Alexandre Dumas, whose black father had married a white, high society girl. However I found among the images of Toulouse-Lautrec – whose personality I love as much as his work – a Chinese bartender who came from San Francisco I think, and an African clown originally from Cuba; in one of Jacques-Émile Blanche's paintings, a Tunisian poet, and furthermore, in photos from the era, a maharajah besotted by France. It isn't much... In fact, the first contact Parisians had with different beings was through the "indigenous villages" recreated in parks. While reading Louise Michel's diaries of the time she had been deported to New Caledonia, I discovered she was interested in the country, its customs and legends, and more importantly, that she had pursued her profession as a teacher, giving lessons to the young Kanaks (while other deportees didn't treat them well, happy to have found "lesser beings"). Thus, young Kanaks learned to read and write in French and I imagined one of them as a member of a troupe in one of these villages in Paris. I made her a young girl since the guiding idea was the cause of young girls. Furthermore I added one particularity to the heroine: she is of mixed race, another group that has suffered, rejected by both sides.

How did the other heroes of the film come to be? And the bad guys? The Male-Masters... In Dilili, I had a perfect young girl for this story. But I had to find her a companion who could show her Paris easily. So I thought up Orel, a young delivery boy on a tricycle. He can go everywhere with Dilili sitting in the crate and can introduce her to a lot of people since, as the perfect leading man, he is handsome and everyone loves him. He is passionate about Paris and the great people who live there. The third character is a good fairy who intervenes every time she is needed. I first thought of Sarah Bernhardt, but in the end I opted for Emma Calvé, the opera singer, who was almost as famous in her time, even though she has been forgotten today. She went on a world tour and found glory in the role of Carmen, the ultimate 1900s heroine – and the most performed opera in the world. Now for the bad guys: I represented the men who mistreat women by a sect, the Male-Masters, who live underground. I have to explain here that the kidnappings of the young girls, this terrible sect, the complicity of the heads of the police, are all pure fiction. Nothing like this happened in Paris. And incidentally, the nasty chief of police is the biggest break with historical truth: the great police commissioner Lépine was a brilliant man, audacious, courageous and passionate. When I encountered this exceptional character I didn't know what to do with him, he would have reduced the Male-Masters to mince meat... The fourth fictional character is Lebeuf, the fake bad guy.

### CONSTRUCTION AND NARRATIVE DEVELOPMENT

# A part of your humanist message rests on the character of the driver, who first lets himself be guided by his prejudice, his weaknesses, then takes hold of himself and lets his heart speak. Why was it important for you to show this realisation and redemption, in the context of today?

He is an extremly realistic character. Blockheads who badmouth foreigners and women to reassure themselves can be found on every street corner. But their attitude has limits. Being brought face to face with certain excesses wakes them up. Lebœuf is an oik, a punter at the local café, but in the lair of the Male-Masters he is made to do something he hadn't imagined and suddenly he sees clearly and says "Not this!" then switches to the opposite camp, the camp of worthy men who defend women and children. It is a normal phenomenon I have observed and hope to provoke in the audience.

# You have included in the story and in the songs lyrics different parables of racism, misogyny and other forms of rejection. Do you consider it one of your responsibilities as a storyteller addressing youths and family audiences?

Of course. Every author of books, every creator of shows or games, has power, the power to do good or bad. Guess which side I'm on? With our creations, we authors make ourselves and help others. We provide them with pleasure during the show and enrichment afterwards. It's a beautiful thing to do good to others and yourself. In *Dilili* I clearly show characters who do their work well, and "enrich" others. One of the things *Dilili* explores is the possibility of every job, and how she chooses the one she will become passionate about. I mention many bad things. Knowing there will be children watching, I'm careful not to harm them, but I make sure I tell everything; children are here to absorb tons of information without wasting time.

During *Dilili's* numerous adventures we encounter generous heroes who help people in danger, kidnappings, plots, gangsters and corrupt policemen acting for a secret organisation, a worrying-looking metal boat, a subterranean lair, bad guys with coal-black souls. So many ingredients that evoke series like *The Mysteries of Paris* by Eugène Sue, and the works of Jules Verne. Did you bury yourself in this imaginary world of the late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> century when you wrote the screenplay?

I wasn't familiar with *The Mysteries of Paris* and it seemed the right time to investigate it. A friend gave me the book, a first edition. I read a few chapters and had to stop – it's truly sadistic, and not for me. I'm much more at ease with Jules Verne, with whom, like most people, I'm familiar. I played with metal doors, underground tunnels, mechanical and electrical boats,

machines allowing you to go up and down and appear suddenly in the middle of a river... there's also Victor Hugo and his descriptions of Paris, all the way from the top of Notre-Dame down to the depths of the sewers... the rich and the poor. With all these ingredients I attempted to create my own mysteries of Paris.

# Did you also have in mind the famous swan-shaped boats Ludwig II of Bavaria had had built to sail around in the artificial grotto of his palace?

Of course, I thought of Ludwig II on his lake underneath his palace (and of his taste for opera). I thought about the *Phantom of the Opera* imagined by Gaston Leroux. I transformed the reservoir located beneath the opera, answering to people's fantasies, including mine. So I put a real lake underneath the Opera. In the same way I had fun with the fantasy of being able to make a flying object move forward by pedalling, even though I know our muscles aren't strong enough to power a propeller. Twenty young girls pedalling to propel the flying machine that frees them, it makes you feel good! I allowed myself poetic license from time to time, but most of the story is based on historical facts.

### SETS COMPOSED OF REAL PHOTOGRAPHS

# You've used 3D before to represent and animate characters but this is the first time you've integrated them in settings composed of photographs of real places. Why did you decide on reworked real images rather than painted sets?

Quite simply because Paris is a magnificent city as it is. There is nothing to add, you just have to photograph it. I have often said that my films are "advertisements for reality". With Paris, it's immediate. When I look at the Opera, its foyer dripping with gold, I can't imagine myself recreating all this with my feeble graphic palette. I also celebrate Art Nouveau and its extraordinary objects, playing with shapes and different materials, producing a highly refined blend. You can't do better than what great craftsmen took a lifetime to accomplish. I recreated Sarah Bernhardt's interior, long since gone. I made it much nicer than the original: Sarah Bernhardt had a taste for everything 19th century, a motley accumulation of objects imitating a variety of old styles. I treated myself to handpicked furniture from the collections of the musée d'Orsay and the musée de l'Ecole de Nancy.

# You scouted the places in Paris that we see in the film. Can you tell us how you chose, then photographed, them?

I took photos of Paris for four years. Sometimes I aimed for notable monuments that can't be avoided (and that I didn't want to avoid), sometimes at anonymous places I'd discover as I walked around.

During the summer I got up very early with the light, before the Parisians do, so to have a daytime city, but almost empty. This allowed me to limit the elements that had to be erased from the photos (people, cars, motorbikes, bicycles, rubbish bins, any traces of modernity). At first I chose the moments before the first sunlight, or overcast days, so that neutral lighting would allow me to put together photos taken here or there. It was a mistake, Paris is more beautiful when sculpted by the sun, and it was worth far more than a few inconsistencies. I

ended up looking for the sun, it was better to be a bit inconsistent but beautiful, but I wasn't able to redo everything.

# The doors of every private building, museum, and public place opened for you?

Yes, it was amazing and wonderful. While the project struggled to get financed, Paris opened its doors to me. I was able to photograph the Art Nouveau of Bouillon Racine, one of these then-humble restaurants that have retained their original, discreet 1900 decor. In a different style I was able to shoot Maxim's restaurant from every angle, also 1900 but not understated. That is what you see on the first floor of my Eiffel Tower. I was also lucky to be able to have access to the Paris Sewers where friendly sewage workers did everything they could to help me in my exploration. I discovered an extreme profession often passed on from father to son. It is a strange world, quite dangerous if you're not careful (I was harnessed from head to toe). This world is plunged in total darkness, which I didn't know, and which made me change the way I directed. It now has great shadow (real and projected) effects, in sewers reconstituted in 3D but covered with my real photos. And – a miracle! – I was allowed privileged access to the Museum of Orsay, the museum of the School of Nancy – the only one not located in Paris, but which furnished and decorated the capital – the Carnavalet Museum, the Rodin Museum, the Quai Branly Museum, the Marmottant-Monet Museum and the Opera, from basement to rooftops! What happy fulfilment I owe them!

# The film is a declaration of love to Paris. Can we say that the sets are one of the leading characters of the film?

Yes, we can say that! Paris is a beautiful symbol of western civilisation and possesses a particular power. While gradually discovering this Belle Époque, I wondered why there were so many noteworthy Parisians, and why the city attracted so many foreigners, also noteworthy. I was expecting the reverse. Since the French Revolution the country had gone from one catastrophe to another. At the time of the Belle Époque it was picking itself up from ignominious defeat – the Prussians had occupied parts of Paris and paraded on the Champs Elysées – and was paying an exorbitant war compensation to Germany, a new power created in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles.

It could be knowledge we have acquired from the country's past, though we don't know it today, French animators are excellent and renowned, the schools have the reputation of being the best in the world. I'm often asked to explain this phenomenon when I'm abroad, notably at student film competitions. We might have a tradition of excellence, beauty, culture, not being satisfied with a job only just suitably done. Access to education is relatively easy compared to many countries, we live in beautiful cities with rich history that indicate, without us noticing, a minimum level to respect. When a nightingale is alone in the country it sings a dull song. When there are several nightingales, each tries to be at least as good as the others and the concert gets better and better. I reckon the quantity of nightingales we have in France, today and in the past, helps us. Each time I watch *Dilili in Paris* (for work with the labs, sound, dubbing, presentations, etc...) I discover new subtleties in the animation, or admire what I have already observed. Each animator always did more than I asked for, considering with great precision

what the hero was doing as well as the extras in the background. Nothing is left to chance. Those who built the countless props did the same. Every single bolt is there, all the horses' harnesses are well made, even if they are too fleetingly on-screen to be noticed. Along the way I changed the staging of the arrival of Sarah Bernhardt's sedan. I had planned a simple arrival, from the front, where in fact all you could see was an approaching rectangle. But, all these objects being made in 3D, the model designers made them gyrate in front of me. When I saw how beautiful the sedan was from every angle, how its colours gleamed, I decided to have it arrive from the back so it had to describe a curve in front of us. Sarah Bernhardt would have approved. I've just said that animators and model designers did in fact more than I asked them. It is not true. I did in fact quote Sarah Bernhardt more than once: "Natural is very nice – but the sublime is much better."

# Even if they are 3D, the characters' contours are delineated in such a way as to make them look close to cartoon characters...

I more or less went back to the approach I took for *Azur & Asmar*. The faces of the 3D characters showed only a very discreet modelling with side lighting, whatever the camera angle, and their clothes were flat, with neither shadow nor light. It was an artificial and stylised choice that I like. I should also add that it's very practical and less expensive. Realistic 3D goes through numerous traps, like the man who lifts his arm too high, tearing his shirt and revealing emptiness, or a chest breathing too hard, sticking out of a bodice. A simple paintbrush stroke resolves these issues.

In *Dilili*, the "light modelling" is indicated by drawing strokes and not by shadow effects. This was necessary because the cost of 3D obliged us to utilize the less expensive 2D in parallel. 2D has to be drawn by hand and we established a similar line for the 3D animation. This imitation tracing, from actual 3D, is highly sophisticated. We improved on what was already perfected by Mac Guff studio for *Kirikou and the Men and Women*. All this is exactly the direction I like. I'm frankly frustrated by realistic 3D; it doesn't make me dream.

# In concrete terms, what were the stages of the treatment of one of your photos, from the raw picture of Parisian buildings to their integration in the film?

It was quite simple. I tried to establish the frame from the start with my camera. A number of photos were used as they were, but all needed re-painting on top. There were the marks of the present to erase: vehicles, rubbish bins, signals, posters, graffiti, cigarette butts, and of course the generally unavoidable passers-by. If I noticed a zone free of these elements, I took a photo; it was so extraordinary, even without any elements to keep (the void could be useful when inserted in other backgrounds). To this basic work, bold alterations had to be made to adapt the buildings to the demands of the story or my desires as director. A third category, the sets made from start to finish, such as the Moulin du Diable (Devil's Windmill), or Sarah Bernhardt's interior. First, I drew the Moulin du Diable, then the designers coloured it, or dressed it with sections of photos taken here or there. The Moulin isn't real, but the timber planks, the stone walls, the gravel floor are. As for Sarah Bernhardt's interior, it is an assemblage of admired objects from the museums. And a fourth category – the three-dimensional computer

recreations necessary for the *mise en scene* and the lighting of the sewers, with both literal shadows and shadows projected on the walls and pipes.

## A HOMMAGE TO WOMEN PIONEERS, ARTISTS, INNOVATIVE MINDS

### How many important figures of 1900s did you choose to pay tribute to?

Over a hundred, although I haven't counted exactly. I experienced a great joy carefully drawing all these remarkable people, with my own hands – it was sometimes very moving. Perhaps one day I'll publish some of them, with short notes about their exemplary lives.

### Some are shown, others alluded to...

Sometimes you need eagle eyes to spot them... the characters I show are the ones I prefer and who are also interesting, cinematographically speaking. I don't mention, for example, Max Jacob, and his free verse, because it's not evocative enough for the screen, and poets have difficulties crossing borders. Artists and musicians on the other hand speak to everyone and come across well in film. I can show Picasso, Suzanne Valadin, Henri Rousseau, Matisse, Brancusi, Monet, Renoir, Toulouse-Lautrec, as well as Debussy, Satie and Hahn quite naturally. I also show Sarah Bernhardt; even though she was too early for her art to be recorded properly, she has left her mark, despite this void. She gave work to authors, craftsmen, couturiers, publishers, she spread French civilisation a little throughout the world, she pretty much invented the star system and she continues to be an inspiration. It was also the era of the Dreyfus Affair (1884 to 1906), which revealed astounding anti-Semitism. Yet at the same time, the most beloved French star was proud of her Jewish heritage, while being a Catholic (you have to read her memoirs!) and extremely patriotic (Dreyfus' innocence finally triumphed).

# *Dilili in Paris* reminds us of how far the status of women has evolved since the beginning of the 20th century. As a writer-director, do you think that the progress that has been achieved is in danger of being called into question today?

Progress continued throughout the 20th century. I think that now the status of women is going backwards. There are premature or forced marriages, so-called honour killings, segregation between men and women at swimming pools, imposed dress, young girls who are not allowed to talk to others, or forbidden to go to the birthday parties of those of another religion. It's a clear step backwards. I have Marie Curie say: "Careful, we must not go back!" She had found in France an openness that didn't exist in her own country. Let's keep it.

# Your parents were teachers. Watching *Dilili in Paris,* one can't help noticing that you are carrying on the family tradition by turning the spotlight on the beginning of the 20th century. You are educating young audiences while telling them a beautiful story...

I didn't think about carrying on a family tradition. It's instinctive. It's an author's job to transmit, but perhaps, yes, it's in the genes! I think what separates man from the animals is teaching. Unlike animals, we can assimilate thousands of years of civilisation and progress. I communicate

everything that I've learned; I sow seeds aplenty. I have already seen some flourish. But of course, this is a show, first I tell a story, an adventure, with surprises, thrills and pleasures.

### Can you talk about the score?

I was very lucky to be able to work again with Gabriel Yared, who was fond of the story we were going to tell. I kept him in the loop right from the start so he would be able to think about his compositions. After the screenplay and some drawings, I sent him the animatic (the whole film, made of fixed sketches, with dialogues, before production starts). We established which music had to be recorded before the animation, notably the tune "The Sun and the Rain" that can be heard in different forms throughout the film, and the great final cantata, with choir and Natalie Dessay. Once the animation was completed, we went though the parts that had to be supported by music – they were pretty obvious. I'm very happy with the power Gabriel Yared's compositions bring to my film.

### Natalie Dessay sings and performs in the film...

Nord-Ouest, who produced the film, had already secured Natalie Dessay's participation for Christian Carion's *Joyeux Noël* and immediately suggested her for the role of Emma Calvé. I was very impressed. When they contacted her for *Dilili in Paris*, she immediately annouced: "I will not sing Carmen!" It showed that Madame Dessay knows the history of bel canto, but it was unfortunate because I needed someone to sing Carmen! We met in a café, had a conversation and Natalie Dessay told me: "I'll do what you want!". What a beautiful moment! It has to be said that that I asked her a particular interpretation of "L'Amour est enfant de bohème", first as a lullaby to console a young girl, then ending full blast like at the Scala! To top if all, this veritable Prima Donna also performed to perfection the speaking voice of Emma Calvé throughout the film.

# WITH THE VOICES OF

Dilili	Prunelle CHARLES-AMBRON
Orel	Enzo RATSITO
Emma Calvé	Natalie DESSAY

### CREW

Screenplay, Storyboard, Models, Image, Direction	Michel OCELOT
Producers	
Producers	Christophe ROSSIGNON Philip BOËFFARD
Original Music	Gabriel YARED
Associate Producers	Eve FRANÇOIS-MACHUEL Pierre GUYARD
Executive Producer	Eve FRANÇOIS-MACHUEL
Co-producers	Patrick QUINET Philippe SONRIER & Rodolphe CHABRIER Stéphane CÉLÉRIER & Valérie GARCIA Vincent MARAVAL & Brahim CHIOUA Olivier PÈRE & Rémi BURAH Sonja EWERS & Reik MÖLLER Arlette ZYLBERBERG Philippe LOGIE
First Assistant Directors	Jean-Claude CHARLES Eric SERRE
Animation Supervisor	Gilles CORTELLA
General Supervisor	Malek TOUZANI
Production Managers	Thomas SCHOBER Virginie GUILMINOT
Sound Supervisors	Séverin FAVRIAU Stéphane THIEBAUT
Casting	David BERTRAND
Editor	Patrick DUCRUET
Post-Production Manager	Julien AZOULAY

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