

Fidélité et IMAV présentent en association avec Wild Bunch

VALÉRIE LEMERCIER

KAD MERAD

SANDRINE KIBERLAIN

ALCESTE
mange tout le temps !

NICOLAS
est drôlement chouette !

GEOFFROY
son papa gagne
des tas d'argent !

RUFUS
fait beaucoup de bêtises !

AGNAN
est le chouchou
de la maîtresse !

CLOTAIRE
est le dernier de la classe !

EUDES
donne des coups de
poing sur le nez !

JOACHIM
son petit frère est
moche comme tout !



Le Petit Nicolas

Un film de **LAURENT TIRARD**

D'après l'œuvre de **RENÉ GOSGINNY** et **JEAN-JACQUES SEMPÉ**

Scénario et adaptation **Laurent Tirard** et **Grégoire Vigneron** Conseil au scénario **Anne Goscinnny** Dialogues **Laurent Tirard** **Grégoire Vigneron** et **Alain Chabat** Avec **François-Xavier Demaison** **Michel Duchaussoy** **Daniel Prévost** **Michel Galabru** **Anémone** **François Damiens** **Louise Bourgoïn** Image **Denis Roudes A2C** Montage **Valérie Desnoie** Son **Ricardo Castro** **Paul Heymans** Mixage **Thomas Gauder** Décors **Françoise Dupertuis A2C** Costumes **Pierre-Jean Larroque** Assistant mise en scène **Alan Carro** Casting **Agathe Hassenforder** **Gérard Moulévrier A2A** Musique originale **Klaus Babelt** Directeur de production **Sylvestre Guanine** Productrice exécutive **Christine De Jekel**

TERRE INNOVATIVE © photo: Thierry Valadeux, Jean Guichet © IMAV, éditions / Gaudin-Sempé

FIDELITE

IMAV
EDITIONS

Orange
cinéma séries

IMAV

www.lepetitnicolas-lefilm.com

IMAV

SCOPE

willimage

6

wild bunch



FIDÉLITÉ AND IMAV PRESENT

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH **WILD BUNCH**

VALERIE LEMERCIER KAD MERAD SANDRINE KIBERLAIN

LITTLE NICHOLAS

A FILM BY **LAURENT TIRARD**

FROM THE WORKS OF **RENÉ GOSCINNY** AND **JEAN-JACQUES SEMPÉ**

WITH **FRANÇOIS-XAVIER DEMAISON, MICHEL DUCHAUSSOY,
DANIEL PRÉVOST, MICHEL GALABRU,
ANÉMONE, FRANÇOIS DAMIENS, LOUISE BOURGOIN**

FRANCE • 2009 • 90' • 1.85 • DOLBY SRD DTS • COLOUR

WORLD SALES: wild bunch

Carole Baraton | TEL +33 6 20 36 77 72 | cbaraton@wildbunch.eu
Laurent Baudens | TEL +33 6 70 79 05 17 | lbaudens@wildbunch.eu
Vincent Maraval | TEL +33 6 11 91 23 93 | vmaraval@wildbunch.eu
Gaël Nouaille | TEL +33 6 21 23 04 72 | gnouaille@wildbunch.eu
Silvia Simonutti | TEL +33 6 20 74 95 08 | ssimonutti@wildbunch.eu

PARIS OFFICE: 99 Rue de la Verrerie - 75004 Paris - France | TEL +33 1 53 01 50 30 | FAX +33 1 53 01 50 49

PLEASE NOTE: High definition images can be downloaded from the 'press' section of <http://www.wildbunch.biz>
Download press kit and photos <http://www.lepetitnicolas-lefilm>

SYNOPSIS

For Nicholas life is perfect: loving parents, terrific pals and no desire for anything to change. Then an overheard conversation leads him to believe his mother is pregnant. He imagines the worst: his parents will no longer have time for him. Maybe they'll even abandon him. Something has to be done.

Nicholas and his gang come up with all kinds of plans - plans that lead them into increasingly crazy adventures...

CAST

<i>Nicholas' Mother</i>	Valérie LEMERCIER
<i>Nicholas' Father</i>	Kad MERAD
<i>Teacher</i>	Sandrine KIBERLAIN
<i>Old Spuds</i>	François-Xavier DEMAISON
<i>Head Teacher</i>	Michel DUCHAUSSOY
<i>M. Moucheboume</i>	Daniel PRÉVOST
<i>Minister</i>	Michel GALABRU
<i>Miss Navarrin</i>	ANÉMONE
<i>Blédurt</i>	François DAMIENS
<i>Florist</i>	Louise BOURGOIN
<i>Nicholas</i>	Maxime GODART
<i>Alec</i>	Vincent CLAUDE
<i>Geoffrey</i>	Charles VAILLANT
<i>Matthew</i>	Victor CARLES
<i>Eddie</i>	Benjamin AVERTY
<i>Rufus</i>	Germain PETIT DAMICO
<i>Cuthbert</i>	Damien FERDEL
<i>Jeremy</i>	Virgile TIRARD

CREW

DIRECTOR	Laurent TIRARD
SCREENPLAY & ADAPTATION	Laurent TIRARD Grégoire VIGNERON
SCREENPLAY ADVISOR	Anne GOSCINNY
DIALOGUES	Laurent TIRARD Grégoire VIGNERON Alain CHABAT
ORIGINAL WORK "LE PETIT NICOLAS"	René GOSCINNY & Jean-Jacques SEMPÉ
DP	Denis ROUDEN, AFC
EDITOR	Valérie DESEINE
STILLS PHOTOGRAPHER	Thierry VALLETOUX
SOUND	Ricardo CASTRO Paul HEYMANS
MIX	Thomas GAUDER
PRODUCTION DESIGNER	Françoise DUPERTUIS
COSTUME DESIGNER	Pierre-Jean LARROQUE
1ST ASSISTANT DIRECTOR	Alan CORNO
CASTING	Agathe HASSENFORDER, ARDA Gérard MOULÉVRIER, ARDA
ORIGINAL MUSIC	Klaus BADELTE
CREDITS SONG "ON EST PAS À UNE BÊTISE PRÈS" SUNG BY	Renan LUCE
LYRICS AND MUSIC BY	Renan LUCE
<small>© LES ÉDITIONS REPENTIES UNIVERSAL MUSIC PUBLISHING SAS © 2009 BARCLAY, A UNIVERSAL MUSIC FRANCE LABEL WITH THE AUTHORISATION OF UNIVERSAL MUSIC VISION</small>	
PRODUCTION MANAGER	Sylvestre GUARINO
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER	Christine DE JEKEL
PRODUCED BY	Olivier DELBOSC Marc MISSONNIER

PRODUCED BY FIDÉLITÉ FILMS CO-PRODUCED BY IMAV - WILD BUNCH
M6 FILMS - MANDARIN FILMS - SCOPE PICTURES WITH
THE PARTICIPATION OF ORANGE CINÉMA SÉRIES - M6 AND
THE RÉGION WALLONNE

A CONVERSATION WITH LAURENT TIRARD

SCREENWRITER & DIRECTOR

How was the project born?

Marc Missonier and Olivier Delbosc, the producers, wanted to adapt LITTLE NICHOLAS and they thought I was the right person for it. They contacted me. It didn't begin as a personal project but quickly became one. I grew up with LITTLE NICHOLAS. I read it as a teenager. The books are relevant to me, they talk to me. I immediately knew what the film would be look like.

What were your links with LITTLE NICHOLAS?

LITTLE NICHOLAS is universal, everyone can relate to him. He sent me back to my own childhood – even if it took place in a different era. He made me laugh, with a hint of nostalgia. I like the second degree – one level for children, one level for adults. LITTLE NICHOLAS is also poetic. The scene where he decides to leave home at night with his bundle really struck me – I had planned to do the same thing myself! I even got as far as a few hundred meters! And later it became an example: if I was angry I'd threaten to leave with my suitcase, using the same line as LITTLE NICHOLAS: *"I'll come back one day with tons of money and everyone will feel really awful"*. It was a way of not taking myself too seriously.

How do you explain the fact that the Goscinnny-Sempé appeal is so universal?

It is difficult to express in words why such a body of work rings so true. How were Sempé and Goscinnny able to touch on something so close to everyone's heart? It's an ability peculiar to artists because they are attuned to our shared unconscious. They were able to capture a spirit, a music that comes through the book and touches its reader. It is childhood, each and everyone can recognise him/herself in this mixture of irony and poetry, this way of looking at things from both a child's and an adult's perspective. When Spielberg makes a film with children he is able to look from a child's perspective. I've watched his films over and over again to try and understand how he does it: it certainly isn't simply a matter of placing the camera at kids' level. It's a question of how to tell the story from their perspective while remaining an adult and addressing yourself to adults.

Were you overwhelmed by the richness of details when it came to the preparation? How did you proceed?

Up until now, from an artistic point of view I've only had to answer to myself and to the producers who allowed me to make the film I chose to. It wasn't the case with this film: I had an artistic responsibility and it wasn't always easy. I felt a bit daunted after the initial phone call because of the subject. But if you're scared you can't embark on anything! You can't spend your time wondering what Sempé or Goscinnny might think. You have to be foolhardy and hope that people will like it. Grégoire Vigneron (who always writes the scripts with me) and I buried ourselves in the works and the life of René Goscinnny.

After having talked to Anne Goscinnny I wanted to understand what in the stories came from René the man. I knew that the key to this adaptation would be in his works and in his life. So I tried to understand who René Goscinnny was. He was looking for his place in society and he set out to do that through laughter. When he was an accountant he got his kicks imagining he was the grain of sand that could cause the whole machine to come grinding to a halt. He had a taste for chaos and realized that laughter could be a defence against society if one is not comfortable, as well as the means to integrate with it. These are things I read in between the lines of his biographies, things that resonated with me. This little boy who is looking for a place in society became the axis on which the whole story would be built. In the first scene Nicholas is asked what he wants to do when he grows up, and he doesn't know. By the end he will know. From this central theme we went through the whole body of work, we dissected it story by story, situation by situation, line by line. We already used this method when we worked on MOLIÈRE, my preceding film: we realized that we had enough material for a 12-hour movie! We had to make some hard choices, to suppress certain episodes we were very fond of, if the story we chose to tell was going to be consistent. We did keep a few though, such as the minister's visit, not essential to the story but important for Clotaire's character. We worked at dissecting the oeuvre for a few months, building a fluid and consistent story which eventually became the first screenplay.

Then Alain Chabat came on board. I had asked him to because we thought at the time he would play the father. We also needed his blessing. For Anne Goscinny – and for us as well – he is probably is the spiritual heir to René Goscinny. Anne considers that *ASTERIX AND OBELIX: MISSION CLEOPATRA* is in the spirit of her father. We needed Alain to read the screenplay, approve it and add his touch – in the lines, the situations, the little ideas.

You mentioned earlier the double level of understanding, one for children and one for adults. How did you work on this?

I love this double level in the original work. In Hollywood, from the thirties to the fifties, script writers had no other option but to tell the essential in the subtext in order to get around censorship. With hindsight when you watch these films again today you realize the true meaning of lines which seem so tidy and clean at first. I love this. Censorship engendered this type of writing. It isn't the case with *LITTLE NICHOLAS*: the characters are tidy and neat. But you feel their flaws, their frustrations and their uneasiness. If you read *LITTLE NICHOLAS* to a child, he/she will not perceive all what an adult would discover. This shows the richness and the intelligence of the work.

How did you give life to the characters?

I don't usually write for specific actors: I write with the characters in mind. In this case I was having a hard time with Nicholas' mother, she was so flat. This is a mother who loves her child: she prepares meals, tells the father off when he messes up the sofa, burns the roast sometimes and quarrels with the father because of the burnt roast! It wasn't as difficult to make the father's character more complex by playing with his social ambition or his relationship with his boss. But we had to avoid at any cost that she should be bland. One day I asked Gregoire to imagine Valérie Lemercier as the mother. That's how she helped us create this character. With Valérie's wackiness instilled in her, we were able to feel the frustration this housewife experienced. What it was like to be a homemaker in the fifties and sixties, with her own dreams and aspirations – learning how to drive, cultivate herself, and gain her independence.

Some characters are absent, others more important than in the books. How did you decide?

We couldn't have all the characters of the books in the film; again, we had to make choices, and it wasn't always easy. The teacher is a key character in the because so many scenes are set in school and the classroom is a crucial location. We also had to keep Old Spuds because of his name and because he clearly exists in one sentence. The grandmother is a funny character but we didn't have enough room for her. We kept the characters we knew we could bring to life in the framework of the double story we had in mind – fear of abandonment and the dinner with the boss for the social ambition of the parents.

LITTLE NICHOLAS was created in the fifties.

How did you bring out the universal and timeless aspects?

To put a date on *LITTLE NICHOLAS* is impossible! It was created in the fifties but today's kids still read the books. We were very surprised by the fact that the world described in the books didn't even exist in the fifties! When you read it today you think life was really good then. But you never come across unemployment, crime or divorce; society is stable and everything is in its place. It's an ideal society. It is not reality, not in the fifties, not today. This is a fairytale. If you consider *LITTLE NICHOLAS* in this light, it had to be set in the past, in a world that does not exist. For children today, this tale could be set in the middle ages or in space. We had the freedom to set it circa 1958, the year Jacques Tati made *MON ONCLE* – one of the film's references – and the date of *LITTLE NICHOLAS*' creation. But it doesn't matter if a car is from 1961, it's not important. What matters is the spirit of the past, a reality born out of the collective imagination and the image of the France of *THE GLORIOUS THIRTY* (the name given to the period from 1945 to 1975 during which the French standard of living had become one of the world's highest).

How did you choose your cast?

The first issue was of course the choice of the children. *LITTLE NICHOLAS* is first and foremost a children's tale. We saw many children most of whom had never acted. These were the most interesting and

I soon realized that a child is very quickly 'spoiled': he/she understands things very quickly. On set it was amazing to see how, after only three days, the kids would ask for their hair or make-up to be touched up. Some know exactly how to soften the adults up. From then on all innocence and freshness were lost. But on the whole, the choice of the principal children was not difficult. On the other hand, I was concerned that they would be able to act in front of a camera, because I had chosen a 'face', a character, gambling they would be at ease on set. I had never worked with children before and all this was terra incognita for me. At the end, I thought they were incredible! They are actors. The physical resemblance of Maxime Godard to the character was uncanny. His determination to be an actor as well! At nine years of age he knows what he wants to do with his life. I didn't think he would be frightened in front of the camera, being such an extrovert. I was wrong. When the enormous crane arm holding the camera came down towards him for a first shot, he was petrified! With Maxime, more so than with the other children, the pleasure and the desire for acting were so strong. He never showed any signs of fatigue nor did he ever need to stop.

As we wrote the character of the mother for Valérie Lemerrier, we were very anxious that she would accept. When we contacted her she had just finished a very long shoot and didn't really feel like beginning again. We had to convince her. I explained to her why her participation was essential to the film.

I'd been very impressed by Kad Merad in DON'T WORRY, I'M FINE where he played a 'regular guy' to perfection! The success of WELCOME TO THE LAND OF CH'TIS has confirmed this; a huge audience relates to him. That is what we needed for Nicholas' father. He's a middle-ranking executive who goes to work every morning, is slightly scared of his boss and dreams of a raise. I talked a lot with Kad about my reference for this character, Darrin Stephens, the husband in BEWITCHED - a somewhat spineless character, also ambitious but always dominated by his wife. We also had to bring real tenderness and fantasy to him. While working with Grégoire we often thought that the mother had two children at home: Little Nicholas and his father! Kad was perfect because he still has a lot of child left in him.

The teacher is like a second mother to the children. She had to be very sweet, I perceived her as being very emotional. She's often overtaken by events, by the children she loves and towards whom she has to show some authority somehow, and by the head teacher as well. With her big blue eyes, Sandrine Kiberlain brought out the sweetness we needed. She is very good at showing emotions very subtly, through a gaze, or a slight gesture. She is the actress I needed for the type of comedy I wanted to achieve.

I'd been impressed by Francois-Xavier Demaison on stage and wanted to work with him. Instinctively I felt that his Old Spuds was going to be credible. Actors like Daniel Prévost, Michel Galabru, Anémone and Michel Duchaussoy are part of the cinema I grew up with and I wanted to work with them. With these actors, beyond their talent and what they bring, I was able to become a child again.

Another challenge was the fact that it is a period film.

That's right, although it's not the first time for me. But it was completely different to MOLIÈRE, a period drama in which all the actors were trying to make you forget the theatrical aspect. On the contrary, in LITTLE NICHOLAS everything had to contribute to giving an unrealistic dimension to the project. This is a film that admits it is not reality. We are in a fairytale. The sets, the costumes and the sound all tell an artificial story. That's why we shot in the studio, to have a house that breathed 'studio', a film that resembled the American movies of the fifties. In AN AMERICAN IN PARIS for example, you know you are in a studio in Hollywood, not in the streets of Paris, but that contributes to the charm. If I could have afforded it I would have had every street rebuilt in the studio. We have tried to create an imaginary world, an artificial world, completely idealised with the spirit of the past, the fragrance of our childhood.

How do you define such a project?

How do you make your priorities?

The strength, the detail and the precision of Sempé's drawings had to be the visual inspiration. It wasn't a question of literally copying but of trying to make a stylised, elegant film that would evoke the spirit of his touch.

We also had to reproduce the music of Gosciny's writing, the poetry you hear in Nicholas' way of talking, sentences completely lacking in punctuation. The sets, the composition, the framing, all had to be very controlled. It also had to have the spirit of the films of the fifties I know so well. I studied how directors filmed stories from a child's perspective – Spielberg, but also WAR OF THE BUTTONS or THE 400 BLOWS. But our intention was not like Truffaut's, to capture the raw energy of children. I had a pretty precise notion of what style of acting was required. We needed dynamic, clean lines. Because this is not the real world, the lines are sophisticated and the way of conveying them very precise. In order for all this work not be noticed we had to rehearse a huge amount, and the children had to learn how to articulate and to put rhythm in their lines. I wasn't banking on their spontaneity but on their freshness. Even if we didn't work at all with storyboards – I think it freezes things too much – each frame, each shot was discussed from the initial stages. It required meticulous care and had to be life-like as well. Rigorous and strict while leaving a door open.

How did you create the visual world of the film?

Some sets were obvious, like the school, the classroom, the playground and inside the house. We knew that a major part of the spirit of the film stemmed from that. This wasn't about reproducing each line of Sempé's drawings but catching the spirit of his work. It had to be minimalist without losing any details; the audience would have to feel that everything was in its place without being distracted by anything other than what we wished to show them. Here again, Tati was a great inspiration. He had a real sense of detail but only showed what was necessary to render the set alive. I also like Wes Anderson's direction, where the compositions are very still but where everything is said. It was important for me to render the story alive in the composition of each image and the sets. Bizarrely, the sets remind me of photographs of my parents' childhood, a time I never really experienced.

Did the presence of so many children on set complicate things?

The first scene is the class photo: the adults

confronted by the children they pretend to control, but by whom they are in fact totally overwhelmed and downtrodden. And that's exactly what happened on set! The kids drove us crazy! Each day would start fine then, then little by little as the day went on, things started to go awry! We were pulling our hair out trying to maintain a working atmosphere but it was a lost cause! We were all exhausted by the end of each day but each morning we were very happy to see them again, in spite of everything. It's in their nature... When someone asks me what it's like to work with children – eight in this case – I reply: Try and imagine being a single father struggling to bring up eight kids, on the day they are all getting ready to go on holiday. They are tremendous: the analogy I make with the single father is not by chance. They were my children and I love them!

How did the young actors behave with the older ones?

It went very well for all. To start with they were overawed of course but they lost their inhibitions very quickly. The adults soon realised that the children were playing their parts very well. The direction of actors was the same for the children and the adults. It wasn't a case of bringing a child on set and trying to preserve his spontaneity by hiding the camera. In this case we were dealing with a bunch of actors being part of a company.

Did any scenes raise particular emotions?

On this film, much more than on the two preceding ones, I was amazed to have in front of me the images I had in mind while writing the screenplay. It was a strange feeling.

Does the film's link with childhood create a particular feeling in you?

During the shoot I am in the scene. I know its meaning, how it fits into the film, and I have a technical approach to it. But while my conscious is busy trying to manage the technical aspects of the scene, my unconscious diffuses many things. As with my earlier films, once they are completed, I am astonished to find my mark everywhere, much more than I thought. To start with I thought I would adapt LITTLE NICHOLAS and in the end, it is LITTLE NICHOLAS. René Gosciny's LITTLE NICHOLAS but also, curiously, mine.

As a director, did this film help you learn anything about yourself?

It gave me the opportunity to show to myself that I know how to work with children – that I can do it. At least that I can survive and have fun doing it. With them, you never have ego or power issues. If a child cannot play a scene it isn't because he is wondering about the motivations of the character or questions your authority as a director. It's because he can't do it and you have to find a way, a trick to unblock him. If they are not concentrated it is because they are children and you just can't ask them to stay concentrated for six hours in a row.

Do you have a favourite scene that touches you more than the others?

Curiously there was one scene I really liked right from the writing. I like it because there are no lines. It is inspired by a tiny line in *LITTLE NICHOLAS* in which he says that he is sad, his father makes faces and he can't continue sulking. I immediately earmarked it for a scene, an important one for the film and for me. It could be because I write a lot of lines, so when I stumble upon a scene without any I have a feeling of accomplishment. Without being able to explain why, this scene touches me deeply. It resonates with my own childhood, my relationship with my father and also probably with my son.

What made you the happiest during this experience?

There are lots of positive points. From a personal point of view I have the feeling that it is getting easier for me to tell a story. I don't know if this is due to the fact that I know more what I want, or because I struggle less and less to obtain it, but I feel more serene. I feel more in synch with what I'm doing and what I feel. I ask myself fewer questions, I feel less anxious. This doesn't mean my two preceding films were painful, but it seems that I simplify things in a positive way. I need fewer shots to reassure myself for example. I tend to simplify.

What do you think you are offering to the audience with this film?

I hope a return to childhood, a breath of childhood. Whatever era they grew up in, I hope each and every one will have the feeling they are re-entering their own childhood and finding innocence, naiveté and enthusiasm again. The film might also allow people of different generations to talk about their childhoods together. A grandfather might see the film with his grandson and feel the same as him.

A CONVERSATION WITH JEAN-JACQUES SEMPÉ CARTOONIST & CREATOR OF LITTLE NICHOLAS

How did the character of LITTLE NICHOLAS come to you and how did you approach Goscinny about it?

MOUSTIQUE, a Belgian weekly publication which I think still exists, had asked me for a cartoon for each issue. One day I was asked to give a name to the little boy I drew. While I was on the bus going to an appointment with the director of this publication I saw an ad for NICOLAS WINES and decided to call my character Nicolas. The director agreed and asked me to produce not a single drawing per week but a whole comic strip. I really did not know how to do that! I knew René who worked for the same press agency I used to bring my cartoons to so I asked him to work with me. Things worked that way for a while then René Goscinny left the agency and we both stopped. We took it on again with the thought that he would write the stories that I drew.

Where did you get the inspiration for this little character? Where did this particular line come from?

It came naturally, just my hand drawing a child. His character is already defined by the line and that's why it became a cartoon. Children were a favorite subject of mine then. But in life there aren't only children, there are also adults and it's towards them that I have been going for the last twenty years or so.

How did you bring him to life and make him evolve?

When René and I met we were quite young, I must have been twenty-two and he twenty-eight. We told each other childhood stories as people do. Some situations are of course inspired by my experiences. It's more a question of an atmosphere than of particular events. René and I used to talk a lot about that. I wanted to tell the adventures of a bunch of rowdy kids in school.

Does LITTLE NICHOLAS constitute a recurring thread in your career?

Bizarrely, he keeps coming back. Through force of circumstances and because I started so early, it's him I've drawn the most. As time has gone by the cartoons have accumulated, the books as well.

I have no idea of the number of situations I've been confronted with. For each published cartoon, many others were binned, alas. When it's a dud, it's a dud! That's not to say that what is published is perfect, but that what is not published is worse!

Did Goscinny give you situations on which you drew? Or the opposite, did you give him ideas of situations with your drawings?

Apart from football and perhaps school, René did it all! I have collaborated with other writers but he was the one I worked with for the longest – perhaps three decades, although I wasn't really counting. We were close friends and began together.

When a film was suggested, what was your reaction?

I always use a very precise line but there are no lines in the movies. It seemed preferable to me that it would be a live action movie rather than an adaptation of my cartoons, which in my view was impossible. That is why I left the director and all those who made the film completely free because it was their work and not mine. It is a very different type of work. To see the world of my cartoons transposed to the screen was very amusing. I was happy to discover the film. I found the child's perspective on the adult world again. The film was based on my stories and my cartoons but to me it's a show in its own right, it has its own life and I don't try to draw a parallel. I enjoyed the film, it was the first time I was an audience to LITTLE NICHOLAS. I was happy to make this discovery and to try to compare it to the books is fruitless.

How did you react when you saw the actor who played Little Nicholas?

Before I watched the film I had only seen photos of this marvelous little boy; he astounded me. He is perfect! He has the same bounciness about him. He is charming and makes a very good incarnation of Little Nicholas.

What does that film mean to you?

René and I would have never imagined that LITTLE NICHOLAS would become what it has today. We are celebrating its fiftieth birthday this year with many events. This film is perhaps the most beautiful candle on the birthday cake! On a more personal level it

makes me very nostalgic for the times René and I worked together. From a cinematic point of view I think it's excellent, it is out of time, out of everything, it is against what in real life oppresses and crushes us.

Are you a nostalgic person?

When you have lost many of your friends and relatives and you have known moments that will never happen again, how can you not be? Nostalgia is a part of life. Nicholas, who allows many to re-live moments of their childhood, is an antidote to this nostalgia.

How do you explain that LITTLE NICHOLAS is known all over the world today? So universal, so anchored in the hearts of people of all ages?

René Goscinny and I didn't stage anything carefully. We saw a lot of each other and knew each other well. He used to write the texts on his own, I drew on mine. It would never have crossed my mind to ask him why he wrote this or that, it would never have crossed his mind to ask me. We reacted to each other according to our personalities. But first and foremost, we were mates. We thought more about our friendship than about the impact of our work. When we created and developed LITTLE NICHOLAS we were young – but one can be young and 'do' nostalgia. People who love life are almost always nostalgic, maybe for the minute that has just passed. As a young man I used to like things that were no longer in fashion or that didn't exist in the same way they had when they had been created. Children of today find themselves in LITTLE NICHOLAS. Even if you don't know a certain context you can find yourself in it. That has always astounded me.

Do you today have a notion of LITTLE NICHOLAS' future?

None, but I know that in many years from now people will still understand him. Children will still go to school. He carries a part of childhood that I believe is eternal. Well, it isn't transient or trendy. I remember a friend of mine's comment: she told me one day she couldn't understand the success of LITTLE NICHOLAS - he was already out of date when we created him. It's probably why he has lasted so long.

Do you have a favorite LITTLE NICHOLAS story? Or an era, a type of situation?

What I like best is this bunch of friends always hanging around together, fighting, making up, fighting again – but never getting hurt. They receive lots of thumps but do not feel any pain. Having received lots of thumps, I can assure you they hurt! It's a perfect childhood.

If you'd been a member of that gang, who would you have been?

Both René Goscinny and I would have been Little Nicholas! Each person who reads his story identifies with him.

A CONVERSATION WITH ANNE GOSCINNY

How was the project born?

Since they were published the books have enjoyed both critical acclaim and great success. This body of work was alive; it was recommended in schools and benefited from a true intellectual reputation. Then, in 2004, the first volume of the unpublished stories sold six hundred thousand copies. This first volume contained eighty stories. To publish this great big book intended for a young readership was a bit of a gamble. The young readers were probably put to their advantage by the fact that they would hold in their little hands this great big book that was very accessible to them while it also amused their parents.

Some of the biggest producers started to show interest in this funny little character who had become a real publishing phenomenon. At the time I was concerned that they wanted to ride on the same wave as THE CHORUS. But I did not want the will to adapt LITTLE NICHOLAS to be motivated by anything other than the quality of the work itself. I was waiting for someone to come up with a story that had a central theme. LITTLE NICHOLAS is composed of short stories; to juxtapose them with each other would have produced a patchwork devoid of any cinematographic interest. I met Marc Missonier and Olivier Delbosc who introduced me to Laurent Tirard and Grégoire Vigneron. They told me a story. I was conquered by their way of telling the story - pretty much acting it out. I talked about it to Sempé who liked the idea. Then the machine started to roll!

How do you explain the fact that people are so attached to LITTLE NICHOLAS?

Many explanations are possible, more or less simple, and more or less obvious. Even though LITTLE NICHOLAS' world is closed onto itself, it isn't frightening or claustrophobic. There is hardly any mention of television or radio, the telephone barely exists. It's a self-sufficient world. The characters live in emotional and social autarchy! We go from the house to school, from school to the piece of waste land, from the waste land to the house. The relationships between the characters are very reassuring. If the parents argue there is no divorce

at stake. A simple apple pie will seal reconciliation. The child as a reader, a spectator or even as a character, has no reason to feel oppressed.

The other explanation, perhaps more literary, stems from the vocabulary and the language. In LITTLE NICHOLAS, the language is almost a character in its own right. It plays a major part. This made it very difficult to adapt. The language is never vulgar. The expressions are slightly out of date, for example today's kids don't say "Neeaat!" anymore. But finally it proves that the interest the youth of today have in Little Nicholas and his adventures and humor overrules colloquial trends.

The words leave room to the reader's imagination and Sempé's lines are also precise and minimalist. In cinema, the image shows everything.

Were you at all concerned that the work would be in some way betrayed?

Sempé's line is indeed minimalist and allows the reader's imagination to blossom. But when you take a closer look at the cartoons and you see the children, you realize that you cannot differentiate Little Nicholas from the other kids. That is when you understand that Little Nicholas and his friends can be perceived as only one child. The only two characters that one can differentiate are Alec because he is fat and Cuthbert because he wears glasses. The challenge on screen was to differentiate the children. How to extract this line both poetic and full of space in order to create individual characters? It was tricky for me to imagine. LITTLE NICHOLAS is not a burden but sharing the responsibility is! One day Laurent Tirard asked me to be present at the first meeting with all the children who had been selected. I went very relaxed, hands in my pockets. When I opened the door of the studio in the 17th arrondissement and discovered all these kids in knee-high socks and smocks, I had a real shock! They looked as if they had jumped out of the pages of the books. I still feel emotional about it today, an emotion filled with sadness: I would have liked so much for my father to be there, amongst all his characters that had come alive. For me, the boy who plays Nicholas is perfect because he is a sort of essence of *the* little boy. He is both radiant and beautiful; he has a fairly traditional and classic look

which you wouldn't particularly notice in the streets. There lies the success, one mustn't turn around and look at this Nicholas, one must be able to identify with him without any effort. LITTLE NICHOLAS is Laurent Tirard, it's Olivier Delbosc, it's Simon my little boy, it's my father, it's you...

Were you looking forward to some scenes and dreading others?

I had to stop myself from wanting to go on set. My status as beneficiary involves a demanding eye that could be perceived as oppressive so I didn't want to be around too much. I didn't want to add more tension to what was already there during filming. But each of my children featured as extras: Salomé, who is six, is a part of the Mary-Jane's birthday party scene. Simon, who is eight, features in the doctor's visit scene. The day I took Salomé I had lunch with the actors. During the meal I thought Kad Merad would probably think I was mad as I couldn't stop staring at his face. Because he plays Little Nicholas' father and I feel that my father put many of his childhood memories in the stories, he became my grandfather! He was just there, good-natured, kind, funny, and happy. It was surreal! I can't say we actually met because I don't think he remembers me. But I remember searching his face for the features of a man called Stanislas Goscinny whom I never met because he died in 1942. I was very moved to see my children being a part, even if only a small one, of one of their grandfather's major works.

What did you think of the choice of the adults?

The most important parts for me were the parents and the teacher. I wouldn't necessarily have thought of Kad Merad and Valérie Lemerrier for the parents but they were perfect together. There is consistency, an alchemy even, between the works, the picture we have of the characters on paper and what you see on screen. Sandrine Kiberlain could have been the inspiration for my father and Sempé! She *is* the teacher. If I read LITTLE NICHOLAS now, I see Sandrine Kiberlain. She is incredible. Old Spuds, the head teacher, and the minister, played by the wonderful Galabru, are tremendous. All of them have been remarkably directed, they are all very accurate. Anémone has a scene: it's been so long since we've seen her, she's marvelous! Daniel

Prévost is for me one of the most extraordinary actors we have and in this film he is, as always, exceptional. I didn't know François Damians who plays Bledurt but who is also very accurate. In short I am really taken by this film!

Did you intervene in the screenplay?

Yes, of course, I was very involved. I am passionate about this body of work and I felt it was my duty to ensure that the adaptation would be accomplished. I couldn't just let something go by if I had thought it wasn't right. I was very lucky to be faced with Laurent Tirard and Grégoire Vigneron, who listened, were always open to discussion and with whom it was a real pleasure to work. It was also very pleasant to deal with Alain Chabat when he intervened.

What is your feeling for this body of work you grew up with? What does it mean to you?

I have the same affection for all of my father's works - ASTERIX, LUCKY LUKE, IZNOGOOD and LITTLE NICHOLAS - but in different ways. To ask me which one I like best would be like asking me to choose between my son and my daughter! I am very happy to see ASTERIX adapted. But LITTLE NICHOLAS has a special status in my life, for two reasons. First, we can't all have been Gauls, we can't all have been cowboys, we can't all have been viziers but we've all been children. This obvious if unusual observation leads me to the notion that there is probably a lot of my father in this character. I was only nine years old when he died. He didn't have time to talk to me about his childhood. LITTLE NICHOLAS is for me the only access, the only door to his childhood. It is probably why I am so attached to this character. My mother wanted my father's grave to be inscribed with the word 'writer'. It is precisely with LITTLE NICHOLAS that my father let out all his talent as a writer. LITTLE NICHOLAS combines both his intimate and profound vocation and his childhood memories.

What did you think of the way the locations were adapted?

I thought that the 'Tati-esque' sets with their acid colors brought contrast to the timelessness of the works. This text is by nature out of date: there are no more inkwells, no more wastelands. But the values it carries are up to date. For a child, parents, school and school friends are still important!

When I go into the playground of my son's school today it feels as if I have been propelled into a LITTLE NICHOLAS story. Children love their teacher and respect the head teacher. It's the same at home. You could almost transpose the text to reality. The very lenient mother is in love with her son, the father comes home from work exhausted and only wants to read his paper, the mother in law turns up and questions the father's place and authority, the intrusive neighbor...

Did you discover the film bit by bit or did you wait until it was completed?

Marc and Olivier showed me the rushes but I didn't experience the incredible emotion I felt when it was shown in the cinema for the first time. I took my children, and I think I watched them as much as I watched the film! The film stays true to the screenplay, to the potential of the cast and to the original work.

How would you define Laurent Tirard's cinema?

I think Laurent Tirard is a great director, one of the most gifted of his generation. His cinema is both precise and respectful of the audience's imagination. Long before I knew him I had seen MENSONGES ET TRAHISONS. I came out totally in love with Edouard Baer, wondering how this director was able to combine surrealism, humor and emotion, always so accurately. When MOLIÈRE was released we had already signed the contracts that tied LITTLE NICHOLAS to Laurent. I wanted to be conquered and I was! Grégoire Vigneron has his share of responsibility in Laurent Tirard's films. He is very talented and handles humor, sensitivity and charm with great expertise.

Do you have any idea what your father would have thought of this film?

My father died thirty-one years ago and he doesn't

think any longer. I can't think for him either, just for myself! I don't try to free myself from the fact that I am the daughter of a man of such stature. One must tame the Commander little by little, go towards his work, hover around it without getting burned, and learn how to live with the absence. I have to follow my path and learn how to live not with the shadow that my father's genius would cast over me but in the light of his humor that still shines today, as this adaptation of one his works proves. After his untimely death my mother said better to have had a genius as a father for only nine years than an idiot for thirty. I thought at the time that she meant that she would have preferred he was a little bit more of an idiot and a little less dead. Today I think I am very lucky to be able to keep on laughing thanks to him, thirty-one years later. I just have to read ASTERIX, LITTLE NICHOLAS or LUCKY LUKE to laugh out loud, or just smile. Sometimes laughter brings tears to my eyes: in fact, I'm not sure if the tears precede laughter or if laughter brings tears.

Do you know what this film can bring to the audience?

As a lover of literature I think this film can encourage people to read the LITTLE NICHOLAS books. Many children and adults have already read the book from which the film was adapted. I am very happy with this adventure, very happy that Little Nicholas crossed paths with Laurent Tirard and Grégoire Vigneron, and of course with Marc Missonier and Olivier Delbosc.

THE BIRTH OF LITTLE NICHOLAS

Little Nicholas was born in 1959. His beginnings lie in SUD-OUEST DIMANCHE, a local newspaper, and the first issues of PILOTE, a popular comic. He is surrounded by a bunch of friends: Alec, who eats all the time; Geoffrey, whose father buys him everything he wants; Cuthbert, who can't be punched because he wears glasses; Mary-Jane, the only girl, etc...

There are also adults in his world: his parents, his teacher *"who is so neeaat!"*, Old Spuds, the superintendent who is no picnic, and others. A little clumsy, a little rowdy but with a big heart, Nicholas says he doesn't know what he wants to do when he grows up *"because my life, it's so neeaat!"* 2009 may mark the 50th anniversary of LITTLE NICHOLAS, but he's still a rowdy, endearing little kid.

JEAN-JACQUES SEMPÉ BIOGRAPHY

"When I was a kid, havoc was my only distraction."

Sempé was born August 17th, 1932 in Bordeaux. A mediocre student, he was thrown out of the College Moderne for lack of discipline. He worked as a handyman for a wine-broker, a summer camp group leader, an office clerk... At eighteen he enlisted for military service before call-up and moved to Paris. In 1951, Sempé sold his first cartoon to SUD-OUEST. His meeting Goscinny coincided with the beginnings of a dazzling career as a newspaper cartoonist. In LITTLE NICHOLAS, he portrayed a collection of children and adults who form a part of our history. While still drawing the adventures of the little schoolboy, he started working for PARIS-MATCH in 1956 in addition to contributing to numerous magazines. His first comic strip book, NOTHING IS SIMPLE, was published in 1962. Thirty or more followed (many published by Denoël or Gallimard); all humorous masterpieces, depicting us and our world with tenderness and irony. The creator of MARCELLIN CAILLOU, of RAOUL TABURIN, and of MONSIEUR LAMBERT, his talent as an observer firmly established him as one

of France's greatest cartoonists. Aside from his own comic strip books, Sempé illustrated CATHERINE CERTITUDE by Patrick Modiano and THE STORY OF MISTER SOMMER by Patrick Süskind. He is one of the only French cartoonists whose work has featured on the cover of THE NEW YORKER, and delights thousands of readers each week in PARIS-MATCH.

RENÉ GOSGINNY BIOGRAPHY

"I was born August 14th, 1926 in Paris and started growing immediately after that. The following day, it was August 15th and we didn't go out."

Goscinny's family emigrated to Argentina. The young René spent his school years in the French College of Buenos Aires: *"I was the school clown but I was also a good student so they couldn't kick me out"*. In New York he started his career. Moving back to France at the beginning of the fifties, he gave birth to a whole array of heroes, most of whom have become cult figures. First the adventures of LITTLE NICHOLAS with Jean-Jacques Sempé, then ASTERIX with Uderzo. The little Gaul's success was phenomenal. Translated into 130 languages and dialects, the adventures of Asterix remain some of the most read books the world over. Vastly prolific, he also wrote LUCKY LUKE with Morris, IZNOGOOD with Tabary and THE DINGODOSSIERS with Gotlib, among others.

As the head of PILOTE, Goscinny revolutionized the world of the cartoon, elevating it to the rank of the '9th Art'. On November 5th, 1977, René Goscinny died at the age of 51. Hergé declared: *"Tintin bows to Asterix."* His heroes have outlived him and many of their expressions are now part of our language. But it is with LITTLE NICHOLAS that Goscinny allowed his talents as a writer to truly blossom. Maybe that is why he said: *"I have a particular soft spot for this character."*