



PRÉLUDE
presents

Mélanie THIERRY Josiane BALASKO Marina FOÏS Yolande MOREAU Carole BOUQUET



Party Of Fools

a film
by Arnaud DES PALLIÈRES



France – 110 min - Scope 2.35 - Colour – 5.1

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Synopsis

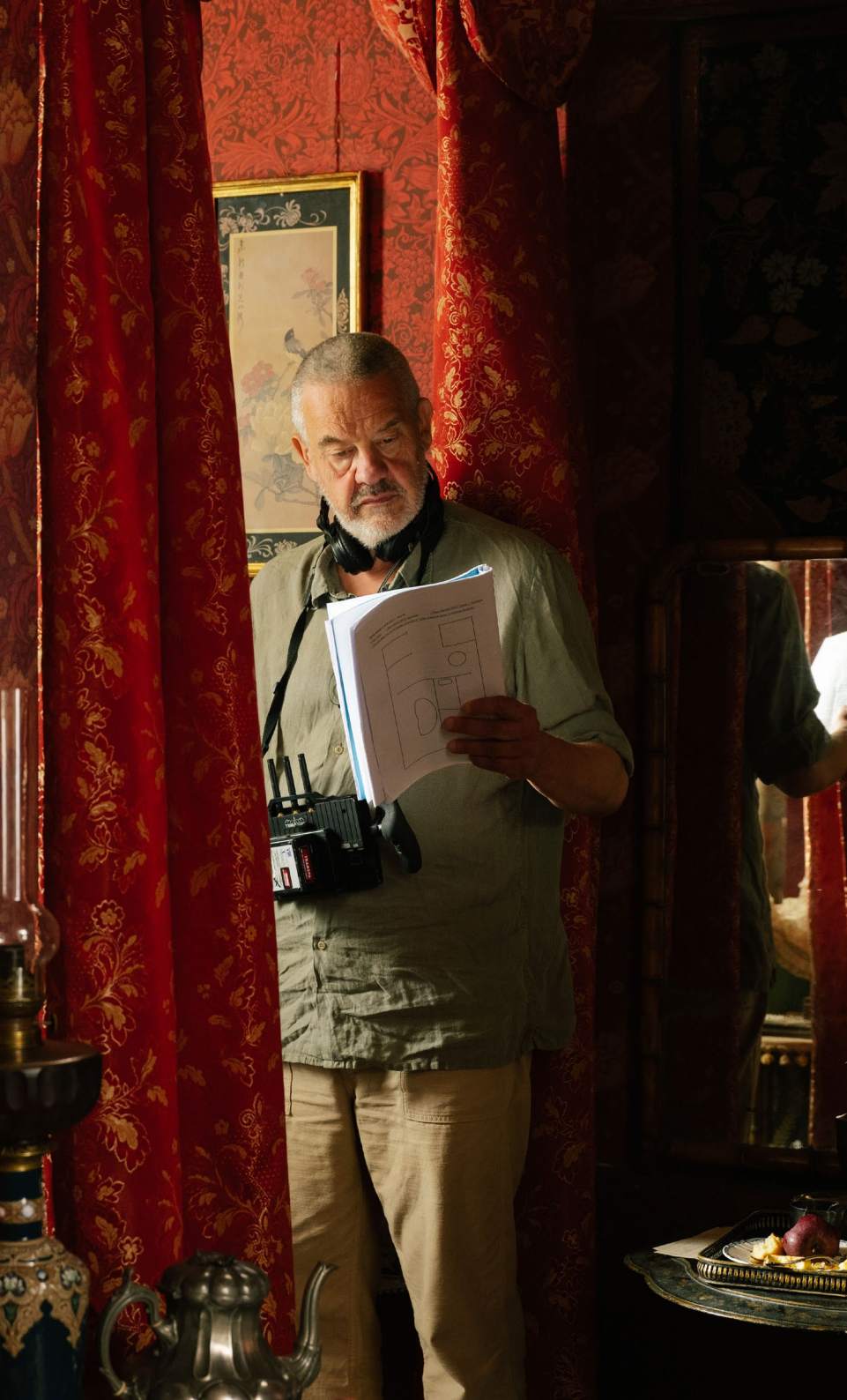
Paris, 1894.

Who is Fanni, who claims to be voluntarily locked up in a women-only mental institution?

Searching for her mother among the multitude of so-called «madwomen», Fanni discovers a community of modern heroines who defy her expectations, along with the unexpected friendship of fellow patients.

The sumptuous and renowned “Party of Fools” of the asylum is being prepared. Politicians, artists, and social figures will flock to it.

It's her last hope of escaping the closing trap...



Arnaud des Pallières

Born in Paris in 1961, Arnaud des Pallières was introduced to the theatre at the age of 16. After completing his studies in literature, he directed several plays. As a film student, he invited Gilles Deleuze to give a lecture and filmed *GILLES DELEUZE : QU'EST-CE QUE L'ACTE DE CRÉATION ?* (1988). He made a dozen short films, including *L'AMÉMOIRE D'UN ANGE* (1989), *AVANT APRES* (1993), *LES CHOSES ROUGES* (1994).

DRANCY AVENIR (1996), his first feature film, is an investigation into the traces of the extermination of Jews in Paris and its suburbs today. This was followed by two documentaries for television: *IS DEAD (PORTRAIT INCOMPLET DE GERTRUDE STEIN)* (1999), a free portrait of Gertrude Stein based on her autobiographical texts, and *DISNEYLAND, MON VIEUX PAYS NATAL* (2001), a nightmarish journey to the famous park. His second feature film, *ADIEU* (2004), starring Michael Lonsdale, Aurore Clément and Olivier Gourmet, portrays an inhospitable France, indifferent to the fate of illegal immigrants sent back to their countries of origin. It was presented in Official Selection at the 2003 Locarno Film Festival. *PARK* (2008) starring Sergi López and Jean-Marc Barr, adapted from a novel by John Cheever, was presented at the Venice Film Festival and TIFF. *DIANE WELLINGTON* (2010), shown in Venice, and *POUSSIÈRES D'AMÉRIQUE* (2011), screened at the opening of the FID Marseille, are based on American archive footage.

AGE OF UPRISING: THE LEGEND OF MICHAEL KOHLHAAS, based on Kleist, starring Mads Mikkelsen, Bruno Ganz and Denis Lavant, was in competition at the 2013 Cannes Film Festival. This epic film allowed the filmmaker to reach a large audience, won many awards in international festivals and at the 2014 French Césars. He then directed *ORPHAN* (2016), starring Adèle Haenel, Adèle Exarchopoulos, Gemma Arterton and Solène Rigot, selected in Toronto and San Sebastian in official competition.

PARTY OF FOOLS, starring Mélanie Thierry, Josiane Balasko, Marina Foïs, Yolande Moreau and Carole Bouquet, is his eighth film.

Arnaud des Pallières writes and edits the films he directs.

Interview with Arnaud des Pallières

Where did the project come from? When and under what circumstances were you inspired to tell this story and deal with this subject?

In January 2019, Jonathan Blumental, a young producer, came to suggest to the tandem of screenwriters I was forming with Christelle Berthevas that we think about making a film on the history of the «bal des folles» at the Salpêtrière. He discovered this episode by chance on Wikipedia and, for personal reasons, wanted to produce a film about it. For us, this story was a complete discovery for us (it was a year before the publication of the novel by Victoria Mas, which helped to make it better known), but we immediately saw the opportunity to make a film about the condition of women... and not just in the 19th century. When we started our research, we quickly became enthusiastic about the possibility of an exclusively feminine film.

The publication of the novel, followed in 2021 by the eponymous adapted feature: how has this changed the direction of your work?

We had finished writing a first version of our script when the novel - which we preferred

not to read - came out. As we already had the outline of our script, our producer didn't think it was appropriate to acquire the rights of the book. The publisher went to see another producer... which resulted in a parallel project. We did not dislike the idea, but we stayed focused on our project.

We wanted to tell the story of the daily lives of these poor women who lived inside the Salpêtrière, confined according to criteria that today would be the purest arbitrariness, at the time of the last «party of fools», which took place in 1894, after Charcot's death. The ball was typical of late 19th-century Paris, where people liked to get rowdy in hoodlums' bars and take their families to visit the natives of the colonies who were kept in «human zoos». To see and laugh at the lunatics behind their gates. When a handful of progressive young doctors decided to put an end to it, the 20th century began. The film is set at this moment between two eras.

Was the project difficult to produce?

Chaotic, like many films in the wake of the pandemic. The film stopped twice. Our combined

efforts together with Jonathan Blumental and Philippe Rousselet finally enabled us to shoot in the summer of 2022, with a strong commitment from Canal+, as well as France 2 and three regions: Île de France, Hauts-de-France and Normandy. As the film did not receive additional funding from the CNC, shooting planned for 9 weeks was reduced to 7, which led me to adopt a shooting method that 'gave' the film's cinematographic style.

The title *Party of Fools* can be misleading, because the heart of the film lies before that, namely the reality of what we don't see during the ball itself. The film is more about imprisonment and confinement.

I wanted to allow the spectator to live the experience through the eyes of Fanni (Mélanie Thierry) when she enters the Salpêtrière and gradually discovers the place, the institution, the women inmates, the 'carers', and the complex relationships that bind them all. La Salpêtrière was a city within a city, and an almost exclusively feminine society. Little by little, Fanni discovers - and the viewer with her - poverty, brutality, violence and worse: the reign of irrationality and arbitrariness. We didn't want to

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precious *Mémoires d'une Aliénée*.

I thought a lot about Edgar Poe's short story *The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether*, about a visitor to an asylum who gradually realises that the madmen have taken the place of the doctors and locked them up. Such an inversion is only plausible because of the eternal difficulty of defining madness. Pretending to be «mad», Fanni enters the Salpêtrière to look for her mother, whose whereabouts the authorities have lost because her true identity has been erased from the records at her family's request. Planning on revealing her own identity when the time comes as a bourgeois married woman who is not mad, Fanni realises that she is trapped in a place where, like herself, every inmate claims not to be mad. Through Fanni's eyes, it is the everyday condition of the «mad» that the film narrates. Like a barely magnified image of women's condition, both past and present.

There's another aspect to the film, which lies in the plot. It's the story of an infiltrator, who comes with an objective (to meet her mother and go out with her) and the ball scene, apart from what it shows, is aimed at this goal: will her plan succeed?

It was a wish from the producer, who wanted almost a thriller plot. Which my co-writer liked to indulge in, like in an exercise in style. Personally, this aspect of the mechanics sometimes went a bit over my head. In hindsight, I think I felt even freer in my research because the script was so solid.

At the start of the film, we discover this place through the eyes of Fanni, played by Mélanie Thierry, and the way everything is captured on her face. The camera is both on her while following her gaze.

I experimented with this principle on *ORPHAN* (2016): telling a story through the sole perceptions of the main character. Accept that you only see what the character sees, that you only know what the character knows. So there are gaps in the story, because Fanni can't see everything or be everywhere. This allows us to get close to the character while making clear choices on what to show and what not to show. It's a strong constraint, exciting from a storytelling perspective, and powerful in the way it helps to immerse the viewer. As the camera is not omniscient, the film is built above all on the anxiety of what is to come, and what we don't know.

Like Fanni, we experience each encounter without knowing whether it is reliable, crazy or, like Émilie (Dominique Frot), a bit of both. I wanted to let the audience make up their own minds about the characters' qualities, establish their own categories: crazy/not crazy, friends/enemies. It is up to them to judge. Starting with Fanni. Did she come here voluntarily, as she claims? Wouldn't she be a mythomaniac if the mother she thinks she recognises says she never had a child? Isn't the whole film one of Fanni's delusions? And when Camomille finally recognises Fanni, isn't she just caught up in her own desire? The script was built more on certainties, but the intensity and sensibility with which each actress «defended» her character, starting with

Mélanie Thierry, brought a richness of nuance that made simple categories of «crazy/not crazy» or «friends/enemies» irrelevant. I like it when a film shoot nuances or even contradicts what was written, to make it as complex and indecisive as life itself.

The film is centered on Fanni, who we follow from beginning to end, with many important secondary characters around her. We follow the main character's storyline, while being at the same time in an array of characters, almost an ensemble film.

Christelle Berthevas had the intuition at an early stage for a multitude of characters inspired by true stories drawn from our historical

research. The idea of an exclusively feminine film was also introduced early on. According to historians (and especially women historians...), doctors were rarely present. They were mainly researchers and teachers, delegating the care of patients (whom they mistrusted) to nurses. They gave their instructions to the warden (Josiane Balasko), who passed them on to the nurses (Marina Foïs), who gave their orders to the orderlies (Candy Ming), who in turn lived with the inmates on a daily basis, sometimes being former patients, to the point where it could be difficult to distinguish between staff and patients (as in Poe's novel!). Hence our desire to portray the thousand ways of being a woman at the time, nuancing each character (young or old, poor or well-off, strong or fragile,

politicised or not) according to the needs of the story. This multitude of characters was one of the (exciting) difficulties of the film. The casting was all the more lengthy and complex because the extras themselves required a real casting session of their own. Each individual was chosen and met one by one.

I wanted to make sure that the film decently represented what we call «madness», mental illness. I think it's unworthy to ask an extra to «act crazy», because for most of us, madness is just a cliché, whereas it can take as many different forms as there are human beings on Earth. My solution was to call on disabled women, whom we chose as actors for their beauty and uniqueness, through institutions and associations. Their presence on the set required us to treat them with more sensitivity than ordinary extras. And required me to consider them as actresses in their own right. I knew that this exchange would be an opportunity for all of us on the set, actresses included, to experience some intense and moving moments, and those moments were not lacking...

This is particularly noticeable at the ball, with the many close-ups of the people attending, whose faces and expressions are captured. The boundary between supporting role and extra becomes completely blurred.

I don't think I do 'cutaways'. In this case, I prefer to talk about 'portraits', which give these faces the status of real characters, for the duration of one or two takes.



At what point did the actresses come to your mind?

Josiane Balasko as Bobotte was obvious to me when I started writing. All I had to do was close my eyes to see her perform the scene and say our lines. The same goes for Yolande Moreau, who inspired us very early on to play Camomille. I could only imagine her playing this woman with an intermittent conscience with such grace and delicacy. She tries to survive the terrible world around her by slipping into a kind of general absence. It was also when I saw her film *HENRI* that I found Kenavo in the unusual and lunar Candy Ming. Later, I remembered Dominique Frot's incredible performance in *THE SMELL OF US* by Larry Clark, hesitating between two roles that I finally melted into one to suggest it to her. Mélanie Thierry, Marina Foïs and Carole Bouquet joined the film quite late. Very shortly before the preparation.

What made you want to give Mélanie Thierry such an important role? What did you sense in her that matched your vision of the character?

I didn't immediately think of Mélanie for the role of Fanni. I had the idea of her as an essentially modern actress, not picturing her as a bourgeois woman from the end of the 19th century. When we heard that a film she was supposed to be making had been cancelled, someone suggested that we meet, and we immediately decided to make the film together.

Coming from different film families, we were intimidated by each other. During the preparation, we watched each other, each seeing the other as a curious animal. I suggested that she read a few books, or take lessons in posture, dance or singing, but it didn't really put us on the right track...

A few days before shooting, I created quite a stir with the costume designer when I chose a simple, dark, shabby rented dress for Fanni instead of the sumptuous, colourful creation that the team had been working on for months. I imposed this worn-out, faded period dress as her only costume in the film. This choice was all the more unreasonable given that we didn't have two of them, as we should for any important costume. This simple dark blue dress with 'gigot' sleeves gave Mélanie a perfect period silhouette reminiscent of the autochromes by Heinrich Kühn that I had looked at so many times while writing. My last-minute whim intrigued Mélanie. But an actress likes a director to know what he wants and, better than anyone, knows how decisive the choice of costume is in the development of a character. Mélanie

understood, or sensed, that in this dress, I was seeing her as Fanni for the first time. I think she began to feel confident that day.

Then shooting began. And that's when I realised something... From the first frame on Mélanie, David Chizallet (cinematographer) and I looked at each other as if we were witnessing a paranormal phenomenon. I call it «cinégénie». Or presence. Mélanie radiated whenever the camera was on her. She was amazingly plastic. Nothing to do with photogeny or simple beauty. An immediate sensitivity. A way for the whole being to be present on the surface and to stand there, strictly skin-deep. Paul Valéry said that the skin is the deepest part of a human being. On that first day with Mélanie, I felt that very rare emotion that I had only felt once before with Mads Mikkelsen, on the first day of shooting *MICHAEL KHOLHAAS* (2013). From that first day on the set of *PARTY OF FOOLS*, I knew I was going to love those eyes, that face, that voice. That energy! I made no secret of my enthusiasm. And every day that followed, we built on that enthusiasm to create a working relationship that has met with no obstacles that it couldn't overcome.

Josiane Balasko is very impressive in a register that she is not known for.

Like almost all the characters in the film, Marguerite Bottard (known as Bobotte) really existed. This daughter of poor peasants, a symbol of the Republican upward mobility, rose through the ranks of hospital administration to become the general supervisor of the Salpêtrière

Hospital at the age of seventy-five. Entirely devoted to the medical profession, she was, in the eyes of the doctors, an ideal combination of self-sacrifice and firmness. It was through her that they exercised their authority over patients whom they feared and avoided meeting in person. I wrote a letter to Josiane in which I described the character as I saw her: a woman of the people, who worshipped the doctors, served them blindly, and ‘ran’ the Salpêtrière almost single-handedly. I insisted on her ambivalence: Bobotte is not a bad woman. She just happens to be in the wrong place. I confessed to her my indulgence, even my tenderness towards this character. A woman of duty, with a strong social inferiority complex, to whom the doctors give the wrong role, making her believe that she could be one of them. Despite her roughness and authority, it seemed to me that this character could be very touching. Josiane made Bobotte into exactly what my letter asked for, bringing something worried, fragile and tense to her, as if to defend her. When I first met Josiane at her home, I realised that she also had a dimension that you never see in her roles: Josiane is a boss, a company director. She runs a production company, directs films and plays, and writes books. She’s a ‘boss’. That’s what I used for the film: her ‘Gabin’ side. In the last few films (I was very impressed by the delicate simplicity of her performance in François Ozon’s *BY THE GRACE OF GOD* (2018)), it’s as if she’s starting a new career. Expanding into a new dimension. Acquiring a depth, a breadth, that we hadn’t suspected and that makes her a truly great actress of our time. Josiane gives Bobotte a complex dimension and makes her a

tragic character with a great sense of humanity.

She differs from the character played by Marina Foïs, who is immediately in conflict and tension with the heroine, from the very first scene.

The character of La Douane (The Eye) comes from the *Memoirs of Hersilie Rouÿ* (played by Carole Bouquet), in which she describes a beautiful nurse who is the persecutor of the inmates and the murderer of several patients who have been beaten up. We added to her a distraught tenderness for Camomille, creating a visceral rivalry with Fanni. La Douane is pure hatred. And she is the threat that Fanni might die on the spot if she doesn’t manage to escape. The character’s climax, her apotheosis, came quite unexpectedly from Marina Foïs in the magician’s scene. As we were shooting the scene, Marina confessed to me that she was claustrophobic. I was dumbfounded. Why didn’t she say anything? We get down to work and the slightest second of rehearsal is a torment for her. On several occasions, she almost feels ill, suddenly jerking away in panic. We tried subterfuge: we opened the box, moved the camera around, changed the cut so that we only had a close-up of her face. We had to move quickly, not knowing when panic would overwhelm her and she would say stop. And then, in just a few takes, she lets herself be carried away by an extraordinary laugh. An insane, terrifying laugh that goes on and on. At that moment, Marina does what great actresses do: she injects her unease, her suffering, her panicked fear, into this monstrous laughter that shakes La Douane, as the magician cuts her open. It’s overwhelming

what an actress can offer from her own suffering. This laughter was in the script, but I had never imagined anything so... abysmal. Through this mad laughter, the character reveals herself. She belongs to the place. She’s a madwoman among madwomen, even though she’s a nurse. And here we are again with Edgar Poe...

Carole Bouquet is a unique actress in French cinema, and you have given her the role of a woman who stands apart from the others, who is like a double of the heroine: one comes to look for her mother, the other, fighting against the conditions in which she is confined, leads a political struggle, the only really visible one in the film.

We know the story of Hersilie Rouÿ from her *Memoirs*. Her fragile status as an artist (pianist and composer) and her assumed celibacy were used to intern her in the name of the widespread idea at the time that a healthy woman could only be married and look after children. A place like La Salpêtrière and the extreme rigour of the treatment she received there should have driven her mad for good. But Hersilie never stopped fighting for her dignity and her freedom. After fifteen years of imprisonment, she published her *Memoirs*, which led to an amendment to the law on internment by third parties. Carole has a passion for this character, and was determined to defend her with the strength of her own convictions. Despite her status of eternal princess of French cinema, Carole is determined not to give up on the status of women, past and present. She puts this apparent paradox to the service of her

character to make her exactly what I imagined her to be: a queen in mutiny... an oxymoron.

Where and when was the film shot, and how were the sets chosen and designed?

The film was shot in the summer of 2022, in the middle of a heatwave. It was an ideal time of year, because I wanted to go against the grain of a 19th-century prison film. I wanted the film to be sunny, full of contrast and colour. Shiny, tanned faces. Hair sticky with sweat. In 1894 at the Salpêtrière, the heat was very uncomfortable because of the thickness of the women's clothes, the urban hygiene, the dirty water and its stench. The editor was very surprised when she saw the rushes. She was expecting a hospital environment with cold, grey, metallic tones. But I had fed my imagination with the powerful colours of the autochromes of Heinrich Kühn, Gustave Gain and Antonin Personnaz, which gave us a glimpse of the era without the black and white filter, in a chromatic explosion of fabrics, dresses and the world around them.

At the end of the 19th century, La Salpêtrière was thirty-two hectares in the middle of Paris, with undeveloped areas, vegetable gardens, farms with animals, isolated pavilions and the usual hospital buildings. Using photo archives, we looked for different locations in Ile-de-France, Normandy and Hauts-de-France. In a deserted Norman abbey, we found the dormitory and Camomille's small house (Yolande Moreau). In the Oise region, at the Haras de Compiègne, we found Bobotte's office and its alleyway, the laundry, the refectory and the central garden.

In Paris, at Kremlin Bicêtre, the outside of the ball and the carriage alley. And in a Parisian high school, the ballroom. As the film is based on Fanni's fragmentary discovery of the locations, the editing process made it possible to associate places that are far apart in reality. In this way we reconstructed our imaginary Salpêtrière. We had extremely limited resources for the decor, and the set design team really performed miracles!

David Chizallet's photography is beautiful, pictorial without being rigid.

I was supposed to make the film with another cinematographer, but he couldn't make it. In two days, I met three cinematographers. David was at a point in his career where he was torn between the satisfaction of knowing his job well and the threat of a form of routine. I knew that the photography of PARTY OF FOOLS would be the antithesis of what he was doing, and I offered him the film, launching him in

two extreme and contradictory directions. A clinical with surgical optics, extreme definition, without fearing the digital aspect of the image. To obtain maximum colour and contrast, he even used lighting in bright sunlight. As for the nights, we shot them in day for night, which was a revelation for both of us. Once we had this sophisticated, hyper-realistic photography, we had to contradict it with a documentary camera. Hand-held camera, vibrant and organic, using and abusing the zoom, to portray the turmoil of the main character. This contradiction between lush photography and hand-held camera produces an opulent but not stiff image. Flirting with the silky mastery of painting without leaving the amateurism of the hand-held camerawork. «Pictorial without being rigid»...

You're not standing in front of the characters, as you would in front of a painting, you're with them.

I place the camera in the middle of the scene as





Interview with Mélanie Thierry

When and under what circumstances were you approached for this film and this role?

Rather late. I knew that the film had been in the making for many months and there had been talk of other casts. They had to condense a script that was too large for the available budget. I arrived on the film in January 2022. I'd wanted to work with Arnaud des Pallières for a very long time. I love his cinema and his storytelling, as well as his documentaries, *DISNEYLAND* and *DRANCY AVENIR*. He was looking for his heroine. At the same time, I was starting work on Emmanuel Finkiel's new film, *MARIANA'S ROOM*. As it was supposed to be shot in Ukraine and the war came along, the project was suspended and finally shot this summer. That's when I met Arnaud des Pallières, when I was suddenly available. A stroke of luck. Fate does things well.

Did he talk to you about the film before giving you the script?

I read the script first and loved our first meeting. His gentleness, the way he talked about his project, the way he saw me. I liked his voice, his rhythm, his look. I liked the man straight

away. I said to myself that he was going to be one of the two or three people who were going to count in my life as an actress, along with Bertrand Tavernier and Emmanuel Finkiel. On the other hand, during the preparation, before the readings and rehearsals, I had a bit of trouble understanding him, I had doubts, I lacked self-confidence. It took everyone a while to adapt, because you build confidence as you go along, by being attentive and listening.

For what reasons?

In fact, I was afraid I wouldn't be able to play the character he wanted me to play, in a place where I don't have those colours. It was about a bourgeoisie, which was essential in his eyes, with the delicacy of a bourgeoisie, that head carriage, that dress, that education, everything that is ingrained from generation to generation and manifests itself effortlessly throughout her being. I'm anything but that because I come from a working-class background. I have no problem playing a country girl, a provincial. That said, it's part of the performer's job to go out and find colours that you don't have, and that's what's expected of them. It's not enough just to want to embody a character, according

to your own views, but to understand what the director wants in order to serve him or her best. You have to find the director's instructions and adapt to them. As an actress, I need to feel that I'm being held, that I have a master so that I can play as freely as possible, with someone in front of me to hold the reins when things go wrong so that we're at the right distance. Feeling that control during the preparation was more like a constraint. As a result, you don't dare, whereas it's the place to dare everything, even the worst, to get rid of it and find another way to make the character blossom. As an actress, I'm hard-working during the preparation phase, tough and very committed. This nourishes me, strengthens me, reassures me and inspires me, so that when it's time to shoot, I can take flight, feel fulfilled and feel that everything is unfolding and becoming a combination between a character, an actress, a director and a cinematographer. So that everything comes together in the joy of making the film. It was a perilous journey at first, but the director gave me all the tools I needed to get there.

What tools did you use to find this path? How did things start to happen?

I took a lot of ballet classes, for the first time in my life, with an opera dancer. It was fantastic. Reasonably speaking, you can't expect an overnight transformation. Nevertheless, at the rate of three sessions a week for three months, there was a desire to believe in it even more. Singing lessons were added, as he would have liked me to be able to sing like a great opera singer. I put a lot of effort into it, even though I thought it would be unthinkable, because this gift, this tool, is a lifelong affair. Here too, working several times a week opens up new possibilities. You discover a voice, a breath, how it moves through you, circulates, with what emotions. The combination of dancing and singing made me want to believe in it a little more. I also read a number of books that fascinated me. He gave me several books to read, diaries. First of all, *Journal d'une jeune fille*, *Second Empire* by Lucile Le Verrier and then *Le journal de jeunesse 1893-1906* by Catherine Pozzi, which fascinated me. There's a tone, a rebelliousness, with a raging temperament, a way of brooding, of wanting to overthrow everything and emancipate oneself, written in a furious way. There was a magnificent gap between what she could be in life, where she contained herself, and being herself when she had a pen in her hands to give herself away completely. It helped me get inside the head of a young middle-class girl, as close as possible to her emotions. This approach to finding the character through the body, with singing and dancing, and intellectually, through these readings, was extremely valuable. The



work is complete and, even if you're not sure it fits perfectly with the character in the film you're trying to understand, something from that work persists and modifies your approach to the role when the time comes. Furthermore, I don't think that the bourgeois character is the heart of the film. Very quickly, the character is launched. She's in a different bath, with no bearings, buried, drowned in an environment that's so far removed from her, so violent and brutal that she just has to keep her head above water to get through it, whatever the cost. The film is a story of survival, with a person who has a temperament, and whether it's bourgeois or

not, it's still a matter of temperament.

After the period of doubt during the preparation, at what moment did the trust come? Because it's so evident in the film, and that's what gives it its strength.

It arrived on the set. Rehearsals and readings are places of research, where you make mistakes, grope your way through, allow yourself to do things. Sometimes I want to be so efficient and in the right place straight away, because that's what the director expects, that I do everything wrong and curl up and shut down

like an oyster. On the other hand, as soon as the shooting starts, when the character exists because the costume exists, because we're in the set, when a chemistry takes hold and everyone is in the right place, at the right distance, it's not the same thing at all. That's what happened with Arnaud straight away, with the feeling of the first time.

The costume, the presence of a camera and the film crew, does it change everything?

Playing a situation when you're in an office, in jeans, when you should be playing a middle-class woman in a corset, with a good posture, is sometimes complicated. The costume designer in the film is very talented and did a magnificent job, but I couldn't feel my character in the costume she'd made, I couldn't find her body because the costume took me back to being a maid. My body was collapsing, becoming very small with my shoulders hunched forward, bent so that I didn't want to be there, as discreet as possible, as if hiding behind the door. The suit crushed me, I didn't exist, whereas a suit should immediately give you a glow. You find the right shoes, the right costume, the right accessory and the character comes to life in a second. The jacket that was chosen for the film was intended for me just for one scene at the beginning. It was a period costume, all worn out, that had a history and carried a life, that of a young woman who really existed, imbued with an entire era. It's emotionally charged, to the point where you can feel the vibe of a ghost in it. As an actress, you feel it immediately when you wear a character through a costume. Somehow it was meant

for me. Its puffed shoulders gave me a broad build. I was photographed in both costumes, and Arnaud and I found it striking. On the photo, in the made-up one, there is nothing, and in the other, everything changes, the head carriage, the complexion, the look, it's not the same person. Seeing yourself in the mirror with a costume is one thing, but a photo tells a story and says something, so the evidence is obvious. The real turning point came with the choice of the right costume. From that point on, the body becomes active and boils over.

The character you play is certainly a bourgeoisie but, given the narration and staging, she is also the viewer's double. It is through you that we enter this place and through your eyes that we discover it.

As a viewer, you had to be able to project yourself onto the screen and identify with the character and, to do that, not put too much into it and find the right place so that there was that innocence in the look and the discovery of a place while leaving the viewer room to project himself. The film was written in this way because, in the script, the character was designed to be a guide for the viewer.

When we see the film, we believe your story and the reason why you've come to this place, and at times we can have doubts about it.

The film cultivates this mystery. I felt it in the writing, when I read the script and when I saw the film, which is a beautiful thing. The director

wanted my character to be unreadable, so that you don't really know what she thinks, how she judges things, what affects her. It's part of her upbringing and way of being, always keeping a distance to protect herself. From the viewer's point of view, I don't like it when we're given all the keys straight away, I prefer it when we're as lost as she is, without really knowing what she wants, what she's looking for, where she comes from or the circumstances that led her there.

In your character, there's the emotion on your face and in your eyes, captured very well by the camera, and on the other hand, there's a physical dimension, that of confrontation, of a character in movement faced with a reality. How was this set up and directed?

The director wanted it to be very physical, brutal, visceral, so that the character, without make-up, would sweat and the corset, despite its rigid frame, would not be an obstacle to feeling things. The cinematographer and cameraman, David Chizallet, did an extraordinary job. He was fabulous and had a lot of stamina because the hand-held camera was so heavy. Arnaud does a lot of takes and, from one take to the next, he likes to make sure there's never a repeat, both in the acting and the framing. We go fishing, nothing is ever fixed. I love it when there's total investment, when everyone is involved in the sequence, like a dance between the director, the cameraman and the other actors. It's very fusional, very intoxicating. It's physically and emotionally exhausting because the director doesn't let anything go, there's no question of letting up, but it galvanises me and

puts me in a state of euphoria and trance. I think «this is it», but we need to dig deeper and go even further. It's fascinating, but you have to have the resources. I like to feel that I'm being held by a master, a demanding authority who pushes me.

You're the main character, who we follow from beginning to end, and you're surrounded by many characters.

I was very well surrounded. I loved all the women he chose, both professional actresses and women who were impaired, more fragile and vulnerable. First of all, you have to look after them when you're acting. You're there to support them. Sometimes they were just extras, but we had to keep them that way. Let's face it, you don't pay much attention to extras on a film set. You're in the scene with your partners, and the rest is secondary, the people who have to cross the street, sit in a café and so on. Here, you had to be with them and you create a bond with women who are there for a few days of shooting. It was moving and it helped to ensure that our involvement wasn't just about ourselves or our acting partner. It involved a whole system.



Given the nature of your character, who has infiltrated this place for a specific purpose, your performance had to be modulated differently from that of the others.

I had to stay in the background and, for example, during the scenes with Dominique Frot, I had to give her space without trying to impose anything. That's not the point, nor the situation. I'm there to observe her, to be intrigued and curious at the beginning, and to have more empathy as the film goes on, to try to understand her, to get to the bottom of everyone's pain. I play a character who you can guess hasn't always wondered about the lives of others, or what they might be going through. She has a lot to tell Dominique, to bring to life, to deliver.

As well as being a great actress, she has a fascinating personality. I loved working with Marina Foïs. On paper, her role wasn't the most rewarding, with little dialogue, apart from saying that playing a villain can turn out to be rewarding. But she's such an actress that she made this character essential, indispensable, with a look, a past, and flaws. That was a great lesson for me. I really like the character of Bobotte played by Josiane Balasko, who is a wonderful partner. This is the second time we've filmed together, after *TRALALA* (2021) by the Larrieu brothers, where we had a great time shooting in Lourdes and got on really well. I was very happy to see her again. She's very generous and it's a pleasure to work with her. Carole Bouquet and I had already filmed together several times. It's

nice to meet up with people with whom we have fond memories. We played in a film by Téchiné, *IMPARDONNABLES* (2011), shot in Venice. With Yolande Moreau, it was different and more complicated because she was so much in character, absent, that I let her do what she wanted to do. You have to respect everyone's concentration. Some people tell jokes and are open to the partners and team around them, while others are in their own world. That said, I was in the best place, there every day, from the beginning to the end of the shoot, in cohesion with the whole team. Whereas the other actresses who arrived, with a shorter playing time, didn't have these points of reference.

The dance scene is particularly beautiful. Which scene did you start with?

We started with all the scenes with Carole Bouquet in the pavilion. However, the first shot we took was in the scene where we're waiting for the door to open so we can go and get the costumes. An exterior shot with all the actresses in the dormitory. As for the dance scene, it's magnificent, joyful and very moving, like a bubble of oxygen after the characters have gone through other, more painful moments. You can feel life arriving with a little lightness and they're also inhabited by it. They hold hands, it's beautiful, very graceful.

Was the scene shot quickly?

Nothing is shot quickly with Arnaud (smiles). And at the same time, given the very tight schedule and limited shooting time, everything was shot quickly. Arnaud des Pallières knows how to manage his time very well. Because he doesn't repeat the same take 40 times until he achieves what he wants, but rather reinvents everything from take to take, both for the actresses and the camera, he ends up with a considerable amount of material, without the actresses feeling the fatigue or weariness of repeating the same thing several times. When the camera moves or changes, we're always on the alert, on our toes. You have to be reactive. And the result is there, in the way the *mise en scène* unfolds. What the camera captures is powerful, very rich. Just like the way the director takes an interest in the face of each actress, filming the skin and the raw emotions. You have the feeling that you are being filmed in a way that few people film us, that the camera is getting closer than few dare to. Without direction and point of view, there is no character. You always have to trust the director, because in the end it's the director who makes the film. We're just there to bring it to life.



Artistic Sheet

Fanni	Mélanie Thierry
Bobotte	Josiane Balasko
La Douane	Marina Foïs
Camomille	Yolande Moreau
Hersilie	Carole Bouquet
Kenavo	Candy Ming
Emilie	Dominique Frot
Flavienne	Agnès Berthon
Amanite	Lucie Zhang
Esther	Elina Löwensohn
Blanche	Solène Rigot

Technical Sheet

A film by	Arnaud DES PALLIÈRES
Producers	Jonathan BLUMENTAL Philippe ROUSSELET Fabrice GIANFERMI Michel KLEIN
Associate Producer	
Line Producer	
Written by	Christelle BERTHEVAS Arnaud DES PALLIÈRES
Casting	Marjolaine GRANDJEAN
1st Assistant Director	Olivier GENET
Photography	David CHIZALLET
Sound	Jean-Pierre DURET
Costumes	Nina AVRAMOVIC
Set Design	Laurent BAUDE
Make Up Artist	Michel VAUTIER
Hair Stylist	Virginie DURANTEAU
Original Music	Martin WHEELER
Additional and original Musics	Mathieu BEN HASSSEN
Editing	Julie DUCLAUX Arnaud DES PALLIÈRES
Sound Editing	Margot TESTEMALE Jean MALLET
Mixing	Mélissa PETITJEAN
A Coproduction by	Prélude Wild Bunch Elle Driver
With the participation of	France 2 Cinéma France Télévisions Canal+ Ciné+
In association with	Cofimage 34 Cineaxe 4 Cinemage 17
With the support of	La région Île-de-France La région Normandie en association avec Normandie Images Pictanovo avec le soutien de la région Hauts-de-France La Sacem
In partnership with	Le CNC
French Distribution	Wild Bunch
International Sales	Elle Driver