

CG Cinéma presents

Félix Kysyl

Catherine Frot



FESTIVAL DE CANNES
2024 OFFICIAL SELECTION
CANNES PREMIERE

Misericordia

a film by Alain Guiraudie



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A man in a brown jacket and dark pants is walking through a dense, misty forest. The ground is covered in fallen leaves and branches, and the trees are tall and thin, creating a somber and mysterious atmosphere. The lighting is soft and diffused, typical of a foggy day.

Jérémie returns to his hometown for the funeral of his former boss, the village baker. He decides to stay for a few days with Martine, the man's widow. A mysterious disappearance, a threatening neighbor and a priest with strange intentions make Jérémie's short stay in the village take an unexpected turn...

Interview with Alain Guiraudie

Perhaps, to begin with, let's talk about the title. What does the word 'Misericordia' (Mercy) mean to you? Is it the premise behind this new film?

The title came to me while I was writing this script. For me, mercy exceeds the question of forgiveness. It has to do with empathy, with understanding others beyond any morality. It's about reaching out to others. It's an old-fashioned word that we don't use much anymore, and it becomes the film well, its timelessness, and above one of the great characters in it, namely the priest.

This idea of 'mercy', of 'understanding others in spite of everything' permeates the whole story. Throughout the first part, we don't understand the relationships between the characters, or even your hero's intentions. Everything is left unsaid...

Here, even more than in my other films, I've worked hard to cultivate the mystery. I've tried to get the viewers to ask questions and take part in the story. It's the best way of avoiding boredom, and transcribing desire. Which, for me, is life's great mystery. You realise pretty quickly that the hero stays here because he wants someone. Even if the whole thing is shifting. He himself is the object of desire. And I'm also very interested in the confusion that this stranger and his unclear intentions can bring. I like the fact that we don't know who the villain is, and we don't really know which side we're on.

You also play on our imaginations and on what we expect from your cinema... This adds to the tension of the film...

I reckon that the viewers of my films expect a few things from me nowadays; they can see more or

less where I'm going. I'm well aware that I'm almost always working on the same questions, the same motifs, and I play with that, with what's expected of me. But I also want to surprise, to surprise myself, to renew myself. Perhaps it was also time for desire not to end in sex. I don't know if anyone's said this before, but it seems to me that people used to film fights to avoid filming sex. In a sense, I'm going in the opposite direction. In any case, here, desire isn't clear either, I'm not looking for resolutions, there's also a main character who imagines things, and so must the viewers, just as I have (and still do).

Whereas *Nobody's Hero* was a film about the times, very much in touch with our present



anxieties, *Misericordia* looks to the past... A mysterious past whose consequences we can only begin to perceive...

Let's just say that things have happened, the protagonists have a shared past, but the film is here and now. Truth be told, I didn't think it necessary to film the slightest flashback. All that remains of this past is a photo album that Jérémie enjoys looking at. And like many of my films, it takes place between yesterday and today. The village in which we filmed has a timeless feel, built around its church and square, with its majestic presbytery, its old buildings and its very recent houses. With the bakery closed and the streets empty, you can't help feeling that the village was once a livelier place. The relationship between Jérémie and Vincent itself is quite unclear. You can imagine that they must have been great friends as teenagers, sharing secrets, but they've lost touch, and something has changed. They're not really back together like they used to be. This unease interests me. It creates a tension that can only build up towards something tragic.

Is the film also linked to your past?

Yes, I looked back a lot on my youth. I've put a lot of my teenage feelings into this film. The rivalry





between boys, the underlying desire, the way we look at a friend's mother, and his father, of course. It's always the same: cinema allows me to mix my experience with the great history of cinema and the world. It's a way of universalising my personal story. It's also a way of learning and discovering. I'm fond of quoting Michel Schneider: 'All novels are stories in which we tell ourselves what we are, what we would like to be, and what we don't know we are.' The same goes for films.

While you usually film in summer or spring, *Misericordia* is really an autumn film. Why is that?

It's a twilight film. It begins with a funeral and ends in a cemetery at night. A man returns to the place of his adolescence, his early youth, and gradually finds himself imprisoned there. Autumn suits the film's themes. Autumn is melancholy. It offers beautiful light and colour. And it also brings its share of bad weather, fog, and wind. I was very interested in filming in November. But the colourful autumn (the red and yellow leaves) doesn't last long, three weeks or a month. Here, it was risky and fragile (when we were shooting, we hoped that the leaves would stick to the trees), and in a few days we went from summer to winter.

You made a thriller with *Stranger by the Lake*, but *Misericordia* is truly a film noir. What references did you have?

As far as film noirs are concerned, Hitchcock and Fritz Lang are always a reference for me. In any case, they're part of a common cultural background, so they're always there, at the back of my mind. I'm often referred to Chabrol, no doubt for his mix of darkness and comedy. But there's often this mocking, ironic side to him that I have a problem with. I'm very close to my characters. I put a part of myself into each of them. If I had to name one filmmaker, oddly enough, the one who hung over this film was Bergman. It doesn't have much to do with film noir, but Bergman shows great mercy. A way of



loving people no matter what, in spite of everything. His films are at once very controlled, very calm, and shot through with a real darkness. And by the way, have I really made a film noir? *Misericordia* doesn't seem to fit into that tradition. I was more interested in mixing genres. And essentially, I think this film owes more to Euripides than to Fritz Lang.

At the heart of every film noir is the question of the immoral and the amoral. In your opinion, is *Misericordia* a film without morals or, on the contrary, a film that deliberately goes against morals?

The films that interest me seek to shake things up; they observe and show the world from a unique angle. And here I've chosen to question or shake



up a few established moral rules, particularly on the question of guilt, remorse, forgiveness, and of course, how far love of neighbour can (or should) go. These are questions that we think we've settled once and for all, but I don't think we have. Should murderers be put in prison? Are we really innocent of the world's disasters? And these questions (and turnarounds) are answered by the priest. In fact, he takes charge of my own questioning, my own reflection. *Misericordia* doesn't really provide any answers, but I hope that these questions and these troubles will resonate with the viewers.

How did you choose your lead actor, Félix Kysyl?

Stéphane Batut introduced me to him about ten years ago, at an audition for a film I didn't make. He was already a very interesting actor, and I kept his name in mind. I love his instinctive yet polished way of acting. There's something very contemporary about him. Although he's a modern young man, in his behaviour, in his way of being, there's something timeless that reminds me of the cinema of the past. A classic side. I can't really explain it. Something about the way he looks. He reminds me of actors from the Golden Age of Hollywood. And above all he's very complex; I think that's what impressed me





about him back then. You'd think butter wouldn't melt in his mouth, and yet he can look like a killer. He can be both angel and demon.

And Jean-Baptiste Durand, whom we now know as a director?

I met Jean-Baptiste as a young actor from Montpellier, I didn't know he was a director, I hadn't seen *Junkyard Dog* (which hadn't been released yet). He is a character, a strong figure. He's not the kind of actor you often see in auditions. I knew straight away that he had a place in the film, not just because of the way he is but also because of the simplicity of his acting. In fact, it wasn't until quite late that he knew he would be playing Vincent. He and Félix work well together as best friends and sworn enemies.

Opposite them is Catherine Frot. After Noémie Lvovsky in *Nobody's Hero*, you are welcoming a very well-known face from French cinema into your world. As someone who usually favours new faces, how did this encounter come about?

Catherine Frot is really a very popular actress. In both senses of the word: everyone knows her, and she can blend into popular worlds. She doesn't stand out. I never write with actors in mind, and it's usually

at casting that the trouble starts for me. That's when I have to give a body, a voice to these characters I have in mind in a very vague form. I quickly thought of Catherine Frot to play Martine, mainly because of her ingenuousness, her childlike quality. But I hesitated to ask her, because I'm always afraid that with such a well-known actress, whom we've seen in so many roles, it's hard to believe in a new character. I think I'd find it hard to believe myself. But as soon as I took the plunge and met Catherine, everything went swimmingly. We rehearsed and Catherine fit right into the world of the film. And very quickly I believed in Martine.

It's always said that great film noirs are also great romantic films. Would you say that *Misericordia* is a film about love?

At first glance, I'd say yes. There's a real love story underlying the whole film. But there are hidden ones as well: Jérémie's love for the dead man, and another one I won't reveal here, as it would spoil the film too much. But it's really about desire. Our hero is at the centre of this circulation of desire, and little by little he finds himself a prisoner of this village. ■

Interview conducted in May 2024






Cast

Jérémie **FÉLIX KYSYL** • Martine **CATHERINE FROT** • Vincent **JEAN-BAPTISTE DURAND** • The Abbot **JACQUES DEVELAY** • Walter **DAVID AYALA** • Jean-Pierre **SERGE RICHARD** • Annie **TATIANA SPIVAKOVA** • Kilian **ELIO LUNETTA** • The policeman **SÉBASTIEN FAGLAIN** • His young colleague **SALOMÉ LOPES** • Extra characters **PHILIPPE AUZUECH, LUIS SERRAT, SANDRA MARINHO DE OLIVEIRA**

Crew

Screenplay **ALAIN GUIRAUDIE** • Artistic direction **LAURENT LUNETTA** • Cinematography **CLAIRE MATHON**
 Production design **EMMANUELLE DUPLAY** • Costumes **KHADIJA ZEGGAÏ** • Hair and make-up **MICHEL VAUTIER** • Assistant Director **FRANÇOIS LABARTHE** • Casting **LAETITIA GOFFI, JULIE ALLIONE** • Sound **VASCO PEDROSO, JORDI RIBAS, JEANNE DELPLANCQ, BRANKO NESKO C.A.S** • Editing **JEAN-CHRISTOPHEHYM** • Original score **MARC VERDAGUER** • Line producer **ISABELLE TILLOU** • Post-production supervisor **DELPHINE PASSANT** • A film produced by **CHARLES GILLIBERT** • Associate producers **ROMAIN BLONDEAU, MÉLANIE BIESSY** • A **CG CINÉMA, SCALA FILMS, ARTE FRANCE CINÉMA, ANDERGRAUN FILMS, ROSA FILMES** coproduction • With the participation of **ARTE FRANCE, OCS, LES FILMS DU LOSANGE** • In association with **CINÉMAGE 18** and **LA BANQUE POSTALE IMAGE 17** • In association with **CINÉCAP 7, CINEAXE 5** • With the support of **CENTRE NATIONAL DU CINÉMA ET DE L'IMAGE ANIMÉE, RÉGION OCCITANIE** and **DÉPARTEMENT DE L'AVEYRON, ICEC – INSTITUT CATALÀ DE LES EMPRESSES CULTURALS, ICA – INSTITUTO DO CINEMA E DO AUDIOVISUAL** • French distribution and International sales **LES FILMS DU LOSANGE**

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A film made in Occitania 

Catherine Frot

(Selective filmography)

Misericordia (Alain Guiraudie, 2024) · **For Better And For Worse** (Tristan Séguéla, 2023) · **The Rose Maker** (Pierre Pinaud, 2021) · **Under the Stars of Paris** (Claus Drexel, 2020) · **Home Front** (Lucas Belvaux, 2020) · **Just the Three of Us** (José Alcala, 2018) · **The Midwife** (Martin Provost, 2017) · **Marguerite** (Xavier Giannoli, 2015) · **Haute Cuisine** (Christian Vincent, 2012) · **Imogène McCarthery** (Alexandre Charlot, Franck Magnier, 2010) · **The Villain** (Albert Dupontel, 2010) · **Happy End** (Jean-Marie Larrieu, Arnaud Larrieu, 2008) · **Odette Toulemonde** (Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt, 2006) · **Viper in the Fist** (Philippe de Broca, 2004) · **By the Pricking of My Thumbs** (Pascal Thomas, 2004) · **The Page Turner** (Denis Dercourt, 2006) · **Eros Therapy** (Danièle Dubroux, 2002) · **On the Run** (Lucas Belvaux, 2001) · **An Amazing Couple** (Lucas Belvaux, 2001) · **After Life** (Lucas Belvaux, 2001) · **Day Off** (Pascal Thomas, 2000) · **The New Eve** (Catherine Corsini, 1999) · **The Dinner Game** (Francis Veber, 1998) · **The Dilettante** (Pascal Thomas, 1998) · **Family Resemblances** (Cédric Klapisch, 1996) · **East Wind** (Robert Enrico, 1993) · **I Can't Sleep** (Claire Denis, 1992) · **Tom and Lola** (Bertrand Arthuys, 1989) · **Sorceress** (Suzanne Schiffman, 1987) · **Guy de Maupassant** (Michel Drach, 1982) · **My American Uncle** (Alain Resnais, 1980)

Félix Kysyl

(Theatrical)

Misericordia (Alain Guiraudie, 2024) · **Consent** (Vanessa Filho, 2023) · **Home Front** (Lucas Belvaux, 2021) · **Lover for a Day** (Philippe Garrel, 2017) · **Godard Mon Amour** (Michel Hazanavicius, 2017)

Jacques Develay

(Theatrical)

Misericordia (Alain Guiraudie, 2024) · **Un jour mon Prince** (Flavia Coste, 2015) · **Welcome Aboard** (Jean Becker, 2011) · **Free Land** (Christophe Malavoy, 2005)

Jean-Baptiste Durand

Is for the first time in cinema · **Junkyard Dog** (Director, 2023)

David Ayala

Misericordia (Alain Guiraudie, 2024) · **Of Money and Blood** (Xavier Giannoli, 2023-2024, TV serie) · **South Sentinel** (Mathieu Gérault, 2021) · **Kamelott – First Installment** (Alexandre Astier, 2021) · **Angel Face** (Vanessa Filho, 2018) · **Heat Wave** (Raphaël Jacoulot, 2015) · **Right Now** (Benoit Jacquot, 2004)

Alain Guiraudie

LONG FEATURE FILMS

- 2024 - **Misericordia**
- 2021 - **Nobody' Hero**
- 2016 - **Staying Vertical**
- 2013 - **Stranger by The Lake**
- 2009 - **The King of Escape**
- 2005 - **Time Has Come**
- 2003 - **No Rest for the Braves**

MEDIUM FEATURE

- 2001 - **That Old Dream that Moves**
- 2000 - **Sunshine for the Scoundrels**

SHORT FILMS

- 1997 - **La Force des choses**
- 1994 - **Straight Ahead Until Morning**
- 1990 - **Heroes Never Die**

