

LES FILMS DU WORSO  
presents

ISABELLE HUPPERT

NAHUEL PÉREZ-BISCAYART HAFSIA HERZI

# MY NEW FRIENDS

LES GENS D'À CÔTÉ

by ANDRÉ TÉCHINÉ



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LES GENS D'À CÔTÉ

by André Téchiné

RUNTIME : 1H25

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Lucie is a specialized agent in the scientific police. Her solitary daily life is disturbed by the arrival in her housing estate of a young couple and their little girl. While Lucie gets to know her new neighbors, she discovers that Yann, the father, is an anti-police activist with a long criminal record. Lucie's moral conflict between her professional conscience and her desire to help this family will shake her certainties.

## Interview with ANDRÉ TÉCHINÉ

**My New Friends opens with a police demonstration. Considering that police violence is such a hot topic today, did you hesitate before shooting this bold and rather politically incorrect opening?**

It is a demonstration of the national police forces. The scene is a reminder that such protests have really happened, I drew my inspiration from reality, from the actual set-up and slogans, even though I revisited and restaged them. In the opening scene, I wanted to show the sensitive, vulnerable side of the police. This hidden side, like the tombs in the Egyptian pyramids, is a symptom of a dysfunction in the field that is seldom talked about. Suicides among farmers are often discussed, contrary to those in the police force. The protest scene is also developed later with a union meeting that allows the film to return to fiction and to reflect on the reasons behind the suicide of Slimane, Lucie (Isabelle Huppert)'s partner. The media often depict police officers as raging vigilantes; in the film, the union delegate talks about her colleagues' suffering at work.

**This social and political opening then allows the film to switch, alongside Lucie, to a more personal, novel-like approach, which is your trademark.**

I don't have a trademark. I am interested in the emotional side of things, first and foremost. But the social and civic sphere is also present in my films.

What particularly captivated me here is the conflict between the personal and the civic. What is at stake for Lucie is the conflict between her job and her feelings. My main concern was to make it as concrete as possible. The theme of neighbourly relations may seem trivial and superficial, but I tried to explore it in depth with the newcomers, Lucie's neighbours, who have different beliefs and ideas. They are not the same age. As a family they are the complete opposite of Lucie, who is single and childless.

**Lucie expresses this at one point, when she says to her neighbour, Yann (Nahuel Perez Biscayart): "It's true that we don't live in the same world, but maybe we could try to get there."**

Yes, it is the moment when Lucie tells Yann, who is an activist, what she does for a living. At this point a radical opposition emerges between them, making them potentially irreconcilable enemies. From then on, their relationship shifts onto moral ground. Lucie cannot but wonder: is it better to betray one's profession or one's friendship? At a crucial point in the film, she is forced to make this choice. And for her, it is a brand new experience, a dive into the unknown. She crosses the line, and breaks the law. Do human affairs boil down to a mere criminal code? It is up to her to build her own truth. It is a free act in a clandestine and police-related environment.



**Indeed, there is a detective-film background and some suspense, but on the whole, the film is striking for its simplicity, its description of everyday life in an ordinary housing estate.**

As usual in my films, the characters themselves generate the plot. And the plot here is quite minimalist. I wanted to steer clear of the brutality and spectacular overkill that often characterize the detective genre. The film doesn't even deal with a crime, but a misdemeanour. The much talked about concept of community and social cohesion lies at the heart of this offense.

**Before Lucie tells Yann that she is a police officer, it feels like we are watching a spy film, with Lucie as an undercover agent, prying into Yann's family life, without him knowing that she is a policewoman.**

When Lucie's brother-in-law, who works for the DGSE, the French intelligence agency, offers to spy on Yann, she adamantly refuses. That being said, she may come around eventually. But I think that Lucie is mostly guided by her sense of adventure. By her curiosity. And then there is also the diversion, the sidestep, the escape route. Perhaps also a taste for danger. All these feelings blend together very naturally.



**You have carefully avoided clichés in your portrayals. For instance, people often think that the police are racist. But Lucie had a black partner.**

I didn't want the film to be all about social issues or psychological drama. The apparitions of Lucie's late boyfriend as a ghost introduce a dreamlike aspect and create a patchwork that matches my way of looking at things, by erasing intentions to preserve the mystery.

**Beyond the dreamlike touch, you remind us that there are also black people in the police, including at the top of the hierarchy.**

Yes, and in this case two black people: Lucie's dead partner and her brother-in-law. The latter is fully integrated into the police force, whereas Lucie's partner has taken his own life. As a policewoman, Lucie finds herself caught between these two masculine poles, these twin brothers, one of them depressed and the other a figure of accomplishment.

A breakthrough eventually comes for her when she meets other people. The family next door will help her break free from the straitjacket of grief and authority.

**As for the character of Yann, you also avoided clichés. Yann and his wife, Julia, disagree about the Black Blocs' mode of operation. They don't see eye to eye about this.**

Julia (Hafsia Herzi) is an intellectual, a teacher, and a walking "register of grievances." She is a strong woman. She isn't afraid to say that "Yann isn't the one who lays down the law at home." She shares Yann's ideal of social justice, but she doesn't agree with the means he has chosen to achieve it. She clearly rejects violence, especially as it compromises the life of their family. She may break up with Yann because of this...

**Does your film imply that friendship and emotions can overcome political divisions and social divides?**

These characters are immersed in a specific political context because of their jobs or their convictions. This is what I show in the film, but there is no message here. Only questions. I don't want to judge my characters. Can Lucie, Yann and Julia reconcile? The film answers yes, but it is a cinematic experience, a kind of utopia. Perhaps antagonistic beliefs are meant to stay in conflict within the framework of democracy. This fiction remains unfinished... it passes the baton to the viewers...

**Sometimes you film Julia and Yann's little girl, Rose, gracefully ice-skating. In your view, what is the purpose of these scenes?**

These are scenes of everyday life, like most scenes in the film. They give us a glimpse of the characters' lives and dreams. As it happens, Rose dreams of becoming a figure skater. These scenes are also escapes, moments to catch a breath, and a way to set their bodies free and to release them from the heaviness of their environment. There is also the scene when Yann starts to dance as he leaves the restaurant, after getting rid of the weapons in a refuse bin. As for Lucie, she doesn't dance but she often goes running, at dusk or dawn.

**You shot the film in one of those undefinable suburban areas, between town and country. Lucie says to Julia that there is nothing for young people there.**

In this type of outlying areas, you don't really know where you are any more. They make up a web of shopping centres, housing estates, industrial estates, all intermingled. It is a suburban life with the inevitable fence defining the residential space. The idea of the film was to have Lucie and Julia, and then Yann, meet in this kind of environment where people usually don't meet. It seemed to me that these places are hardly ever shown in films. Yet they deserve to be looked at, to be brought to life, and I feel like these suburban areas, neither urban nor rural, contribute to keeping people apart.



**After *Soul Mates*, it is your second film with cinematographer Georges Lechaptois. What were your main options?**

Quite simply to film these spaces as they are. And then to film as closely as possible the emotions of the actors, their gestures, their looks, their tremors in these places which are both strange and familiar.

**How did you cast the couple?**

I thought about Hafsia and Nahuel very early on, and I wrote the script like a score with them in mind. Nahuel seemed like the perfect physical match for the Black Bloc's mode of operation: frail and agile, with the ubiquitous ability to slip anywhere. In order to play this trashy, tormented character, he took all the risks. At times dirty, clownish, or stoned, he rose to all the challenges of a perilous role. As for Hafsia, I really wanted to work with her. She has an amazing gift for improvisation, she is almost the co-author of



the dialogues, she changes them from one take to the next, she is always coming up with new ideas, she has a spontaneous imagination and an unerring instinct.

**Did Isabelle Huppert surprise you, all these years after you shot *The Bronte Sisters* together?**

She is incredibly rigorous in her acting, she gets straight to the point, and at the same time she

remains inscrutable. You never know what is going on in her head. She stands her ground and casts her shadow. I don't know how she manages to deliver such precise yet mysterious performances. I particularly like her relationship with the little girl: Isabelle isn't at all maternal with her, she is more like a big sister, and she seems to have kept the ability to see the world through a child's eyes, which gives her a lot of freshness.



**ANDRÉ TÉCHINÉ** was born in 1943. A renowned director of actresses, he has worked with some of the greatest: Isabelle Adjani, Catherine Deneuve, Isabelle Huppert... Life in the countryside, marginalized sexuality, the bonds of love and family are themes close to his heart. His latest body of work includes *The Wild Reeds* (1994), *Thieves* (1995), *Witnesses* (2006), *The Girl on the Train* (2009), *Being Seventeen* (2015) and *Farewell to the Night* (2018). His latest film, *My New Friends*, stars Isabelle Huppert, Hafsia Herzi and Nahuel Pérez Biscayart.

# CAST

LUCIE	ISABELLE HUPPERT
YANN	NAHUEL PÉREZ-BISCAYART
JULIA	HAFSIA HERZI
ROSE	ROMANE MEUNIER
SLIMANE / SERGE	MOUSTAPHA MBENGUE
POLICE LIEUTENANT	STÉPHANE RIDEAU
LOLA	EMMANUELLE HIRON
ODETTE	ELISABETH PUIG
REGIS	ANTOINE MAURIEN
YOUNG GYPSY	ZIA LEBOT
MARC	ELYJAH TIMERA
MOSSANE	ELIANE UMUHIRE
POLICE AGENT	ALBANE DESMARTIN
CAPTAIN QUILLARD	RÉGIS DE MARTRIN-DONOS
CHLOÉ	MAMA PRASSINOS
ICE-SKATING COACH	PAULINE PELTIER
UNIONIST POLICE OFFICER	PHILIPPE LAVENU
GYM COACH	MARIE-CHRISTINE FABRE
PRISON WARD	ALIZÉE DESMET

# CREW

DIRECTED BY	ANDRÉ TÉCHINÉ
PRODUCED BY	SYLVIE PIALAT AND BENOÎT QUAINON
IMAGE	GEORGE LECHAPTOIS
EDITING	ALBERTINE LASTERA
MUSIC	OLIVIER MARGUERIT
SOUND	VINCENT GOUJON, LOÏC PRIAN, CYRIL HOTZ
PRODUCTION DESIGN	LISE PÉAULT
COSTUMES	KHADIJA ZEGGAÏ
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR	MICHEL NASRI
SCRIPT SUPERVISOR	CÉCILE RODOLAKIS
GENERAL MANAGER	CHRISTOPHE VIALARET
PRODUCTION MANAGER	BRUNO BERNARD
POST-PRODUCTION MANAGER	GEOFFREY DAHM

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