



FESTIVAL DE CANNES
2024 OFFICIAL SELECTION
CANNES PREMIERE

JIM'S STORY

a film by Arnaud
and Jean-Marie Larrieu



SAÏD BEN SAÏD
PRESENTS



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a film by Arnaud and Jean-Marie Larrieu

produced by Kevin Chneiweiss

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Aymeric runs into Florence, a former coworker, one evening in Saint-Claude in the Haut-Jura. She is six months pregnant and single. When she gives birth to Jim, Aymeric is there. They spend happy years together until Christophe, Jim's biological father, shows up... It could be the start of a melodrama, it's also the start of an odyssey into fatherhood.

INTERVIEW WITH ARNAUD AND JEAN-MARIE LARRIEU

How did you come up with the idea of adapting Pierric Bailly's novel for the screen?

Jean-Marie The publisher POL sent us a copy of "Le Roman de Jim". We were concerned that the treatment of topics like fatherhood would be somehow too societal, but we were really struck by the novel's tone as well as by its characters. Only later did we learn that it had been Pierric Bailly's idea to send us the novel, because he liked our films.

Arnaud Beyond the theme, what gripped us about the novel was the fanciful storytelling. The writing is "true to life," but at the same time it is not realistic. An epic dimension is being woven through the everyday lives of characters, across a large time span. Real destinies are delineated beyond individual personalities.

JM The story also involved people who felt familiar to us but who are seldom talked about. This is also about class, with folks that are making do with odd jobs, often part-time jobs. We really like the way they all navigate through existence with no sense of what's around the corner. A proximity of sorts was also generated by how parental or love relationships are woven in the novel. The central character resonated with our own films. *Tralala* for instance is about someone who finds himself in a town that is totally unknown to him and yet a family welcomes him. In *Summer's End* and *Roland's Breach*, we had also interrogated, within the family, the kind of ties that are built outside strictly blood ties.

A: Therefore, we decided to adapt the novel. It was also our wish to keep Pierric's novel's title. Jim's "story" is really what makes Jim who he is, beyond his biological origins.

The central character, Aymeric, never reacts brutally to the events befalling him, even when the boy he regards as his son is taken away from him. This suggests a peculiar vision of masculinity.

JM We really appreciate the way Pierric depicts men in the novel. Very seldom do we get, these days, stories about the proverbial "nice guy"!

A We do believe that this character has his place in today's cinema.

JM Arguably, the main character could have been more reactive. We've been asked why he didn't go to Canada to look for his son. This is to forget that there is a very experience-based realism in Pierric's work, that we've been faithful to. With some people, within certain social classes, there is like a both mental and financial hurdle, making it impossible to go to the other side of the world. It's like an Everest unimaginable to climb.

A Not to mention that to be more reactive often means to be more violent. More often than not it is the struggle between good and evil that spurs the drama. What we tried to excavate from the novel was a way of telling a story where everyone has his or her reasons to do things, where one is driven neither by the need to do wrong nor the need to triumph over evil. Instead, people go through life in the best possible way with the precious little that's available to them.

JM We prefer characters that don't anticipate their own actions. Sometimes, you don't realize that you should have acted differently at some point, and this gets you into an inextricable mess. This is what we wanted to talk about.

There is a real fluidity to *Jim's Story*, although the narrative spans some 24 years.

A In our previous films, we were used to the main action taking place over a few days. Here, the story required many ellipses, but we have constantly strived for fluidity and continuity.

JM We don't experience ellipses very often in life. Only afterwards when we "look back," do we realize that time has passed, brutally.

A We played with these two dimensions with our characters: Aymeric evolves imperceptibly, while the others, who may come and go, mark the passage of time more physically. This brings us back to the pleasure of ellipses: we try to fathom what has happened, and to guess what will happen next.

JM In a novel, there are various, indirect ways in which to unfold a narrative. Not so much in film, which is imbued with a kind of inaugural violence. You have to say: on that day this character did this, and then nothing remained the same. In our film, there is no daily reality, no succession of breakfasts, and the main character only takes his child to school once.

A We worked on generating harmony between the voice-over, the film score and the sequences, so that we may never feel that the story really settles down. At the same time, it was important that events in the film do not "slip away," as it were. Decisive moments do exist, but they are rapidly caught up by the passing of time.

JM In this sense I'd say that the film is very musical. And we have managed to fit the film into 100 minutes, thus making this movie one of our shortest ones. Editing, with Annette Dutertre, has been key: we have kept almost all the sequences we had shot, but keeping sometimes only a few shots, finding new cuts, new associations.

Aymeric takes pictures, the film even begins with negatives of his snapshots. Is this actually a metaphor for the figure of the filmmaker?

JM Aymeric inherited his father's film camera. Taking pictures makes him special somehow, but prints are too expensive, so he accumulates negatives. We are not suggesting that Aymeric is a great artist, we don't even explain why he takes pictures. It is a way for him to keep his distance, while still being engaged in what is going on around him. He is looking for his place.

A Aymeric has a feeling that someday he will have to tell his own story, put it in order, weave a narrative out of it. Photos in this sense are like the pieces of jigsaw puzzle. The problem is that the landscape can't be ordered anew, can't be fixed, for time will always add new layers to it. In the form of negatives, photos are not the objective traces of what really happened, for a dreamlike coloring imbues the past.

JM Ultimately, the film is really about Aymeric trying to tell Jim where he is from, by telling his own story.

When Aymeric can finally digitize his photos, he is unable to put them in order.

JM Then he chooses to capture the happiness of others instead, by becoming a wedding photographer.

A In the novel, Aymeric can finally afford a small photo lab. But we preferred to show the way he gets overwhelmed by this digital maelstrom, like so many of us with our computers and cellphones. What is the meaning of all these thousands of pictures documenting our lives? How do you order these? This is not the past, really, but rather a present that does not register.



JM This is when Aymeric has to reappropriate for himself what he's been through. This is the return of the son. This is all about the now. Aymeric and Jim will now have to talk to each other.

A And set the record straight.

The film toys with the codes of melodrama, but between a father and his son. Did you think about this melodrama heritage when shooting?

JM When the project finally got afloat, we were working on a western, traces of which are noticeable in *Jim's Story*. Melodrama is not really a genre that we are comfortable with.

A This is a direction we wouldn't have taken had the novel itself not followed this path. We watched some Vincente Minnelli films again, such as *Some Came Running*.

JM Also *Terms of Endearment* by James L. Brooks. We were quite disturbed by this film, especially the female character's decades of existence on screen. As movie-lovers, we have taught ourselves to beware of emotion when emotion is used to manipulate the audience. But we also felt mature enough to tackle emotion head-on. When Jim as a child says to Aymeric "you are my real daddy," we are in the realm of melodrama. But emotion comes from the actors themselves, from how they respond to a situation. This is about human material, gestures, this is a certain "truth" that they make happen, and that ultimately is beyond their control.

By the way, the actors are magnificent, starting with Karim Leklou, a newcomer in your universe.

JM A few days before the end of a complex casting process, we had coffee with Karim Leklou, whom we had never met. Three minutes into the meeting, Arnaud and I looked at each other: it was him.

A We decided on the spot!

JM We hadn't watched *Vincent Must Die* yet, a film in which Karim's character takes blows, literally. In *Jim's Story*, he takes emotional blows, and puts up with it incredibly well. The way Karim talked about the script that day only validated our choice. He didn't want the character to rebel. It didn't even cross his mind that the father might cross the Atlantic to get his son back. Some may consider him a passive character, but Karim also exuded strength. He isn't just a nice and melancholic guy. He isn't a yes-man, he hears, he listens, and he reacts in his own way. And he grows as a person... In the end, Aymeric manages to find Jim. It only happened because he knew how to listen to others. And act at the right moment.

A Physically, Karim conjures up an expressionist imagery, close to silent film. For us, he is like Peter Lorre in a film by Murnau. We were searching for this kind of discrepancy with realism. Karim's make-up and lighting were chosen with this in mind, especially in the first part of the film. We also added this line to the voice-over about him as a young man: "I was twenty and I don't really remember what I looked like."

JM We started the shooting by filming the sequences at the Nuit Sonores, an electronic music festival in Lyon. So basically, from the end! It was a risky move, but Karim nailed it. We are into rugby, and Karim showed us right away that he had "front-row" energy! From the very first takes, he struggled to find words in a very touching way. He was really the character. It's hard for Aymeric to get out of his shell and talk to his son. Yet he also exudes a profound gentleness in that moment. He's a very "feminine" prop!

A In real life, Karim defines himself as a physically clumsy man, but he has an amazing ability to tune in and focus right before a take. He dives into the shot and immediately magnetizes the viewer's gaze.

Laetitia Dosch plays Florence, a character with atypical life choices, which she stands by unapologetically.

JM Laetitia Dosch has this amazing quality of being a great performer who can give the illusion that she isn't even performing. She sets her own tone. It is even more impressive since Laetitia arrived on set long after we started shooting. She put her heart and soul into her monologues. She was able to breathe emotion into a character who says to a nice guy that he needs to make way for another man. We always thought that Florence deserved some support.

A Defending her didn't mean that we had to make her soft, but rather that we should work on her "tough" side. She had to have real convictions. Laetitia agreed with that. Each time the viewer might wonder whether Florence is manipulating Aymeric for her own good, the film answers no. In these decisive scenes, the camera often gets close to Laetitia's face, to check for signs that she might be lying, but there aren't any, because Florence always tells the truth, her truth. Laetitia understood this and conveyed it perfectly.

JM When Florence explains her decision to move to Canada, Laetitia told me: "With Karim in front of me, it was so hard to keep explaining the dirty tricks I played!" As an actress, she could tell that he was breaking inside. But she held steady, in line with the film's content. For us, Florence's convictions have nothing to do with malice. Florence reminds us that "everyone has their own reasons." She isn't conniving. Her character embodies melodrama. Melodrama is when people are overwhelmed by something.

A Hence Florence's violent reaction when her friend Cécile (Sabrina Seyvecou) disagrees with her wish to invent a "shared fatherhood," and urges her to stick to the "natural order of things"... Flo's reaction is disproportionate, she won't admit

that her plan might not be well thought out, and her anger is the moving testament to her distress. Laetitia plays the scene literally and her character shows her true colors.

JM We're not far from tragedy: something is afoot that will shake them all. To embody this tension, Laetitia really went for it, physically.

Sara Giraudeau makes a dramatic entrance in the film.

JM We really wanted to make a film with Sara. It was an interesting coincidence: Olivia's character loves dance and electronic music, and so does Sara. At first, she even thought that was why we had called her in the first place! We were able to use her particular way of dancing. She radiates gentleness at the most unexpected moments. In the first scene, at a party, she had to convey the idea of a little love at first sight with Aymeric. Neither Sara nor we were really convinced by the scene at that time. She had to raise her voice to be heard because of the music, the dialogue was mundane... But in the editing room, it all came together! Sara looks a little tomboyish, covered in sweat. She has danced all night, yet her gestures are beautiful, her eyes shiny... The camera captures this underlying grace. Sara settles into the film as Olivia settles into Aymeric's life.

Music is paramount in the film. You worked with two composers: Bertrand Belin, and Shane Copin for the electro part.

JM Shooting *Tralala* has shown us that it is possible to mix several sources. So, we didn't have reservations anymore about working with two composers. Since Bertrand Belin was already on board as an actor, it only seemed logical to ask him to write some music as well. He found the main theme rather quickly, on the set. We had to play along with the idea of a melodrama



based on the passing of time, childhood, separations and reunions, but also the opening of new chapters in Aymeric's life. We wanted to steer clear of nostalgia.

A The orchestration conjures up a musical landscape that we like very much. It involves a mix of violins, electric guitars, piano, bells, Indian drums... so that the sentimental aspect suddenly finds itself under the sky of western-like wide-open spaces. The Haut-Jura plateaus start to look like Montana. The small "tribe" is struck by a drama of universal scope. The rural and the intimate take on an epic dimension.

JM The ending scenes we had planned to shoot at the Nuits Sonores, the electronic music festival in Lyon, required a different approach. We recorded sound during the event, and then we asked 23-year-old Shane Copin to write pieces that would be compatible with the dramaturgy - seemingly "live" music but actual film score. What he proposed knocked our socks off. It had the kind of edgy obviousness of raw inspiration.

A An element of great significance set in, but we became aware of it only later: Bertrand Belin's music embodies both the main character, Aymeric, and our generation, middle-aged men, fathers. And Shane's electronic music is more like Jim. It is the son's music. Not only because of the genre, electro, but also physically: it is a "heartbeat" that pulses very fast, in the midst of trippy and melancholic sound layers.

In the film, you talk about bonds that aren't necessarily blood ties, but as brothers you have been making films together since the beginning.

JM We are still working together precisely because we are now done with the fusional aspect of brotherhood. We behave like colleagues or friends, we listen to each other, even though we do share a special bond and common experiences from childhood.

A We keep this initial core-duo and add up all the other people we work with. The emotion of working collectively on a film set is essential, as well as through postproduction, editing, mixing... Powerful bonds are formed when we pursue a goal together.

JM The mountain guide who accompanied us when we shot the scenes on the via ferrata found it moving to watch thirty people work together like that. And on that day, with everyone hanging off the cliff, it's a good thing that he was one of the thirty!

A Bertrand Belin told us that our shootings felt like living in a commune to him. In our lives, we've always brought people together. As teenagers, our mother raised us alone most of the time. We bonded with several other boys. There were seven of us in our little group. She was OK with it. She became a kind of second mother to our friends, and a new kind of friend to us, we even started calling her by her first name.

You shot *Jim's Story* in the Jura. In your films, we often get the impression that the feelings of your characters change like the weather in the mountains: showers, sunshine, clouds, heat and cold come one after the other...

JM It sounds like life, doesn't it? But it's true that we enjoy this kind of dramaturgy. For us, everything plays out at every moment, just like the weather. Each sequence is like a little film in itself, a new territory to invent, especially in a long narrative. We have never been big fans of what they call "artistic direction" in film. Repainting everything in the same color just doesn't appeal to us.

A We are really fond of the final scene in the film, which says a lot with so little: the characters eat sandwiches on the bank of the Rhône. As if they had just returned from a long climb and weathered many storms.

JM Working alongside cinematographer Irina Lubtchansky is what inspired us to create this type of sequence. It was wonderful to work with such an artist who has grown up on film sets, from Rivette to Godard by way of Losseliani, thanks to her father, William Lubtchansky. Cinema is intuitively a second language to her.

A During the takes, Irina shows exceptional sensitivity to the frame. She senses the right movements, while complying with our vision.

JM On set, she often says: "So what should we do now?" Things aren't set in stone, and that's fine by us.



ARNAUD AND JEAN-MARIE LARRIEU



2021 *TRALALA*

With Mathieu Amalric, Josiane Balasko, Mélanie Thierry, Maiwenn, Bertrand Belin, Denis Lavant, Galatée Bellugi, Jilil Lespert

CANNES FILM FESTIVAL, MIDNIGHT SESSION

2015 *21 NIGHTS WITH PATTIE*

With Karin Viard, Isabelle Carré, André Dussollier and Sergi Lopez

SAN SEBASTIAN FILM FESTIVAL, BEST SCREENPLAY

2013 *LOVE IS THE PERFECT CRIME*

With Mathieu Amalric, Karin Viard, Maiwenn, Sara Forestier and Denis Podalydès

TORONTO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

2009 *HAPPY END*

With Mathieu Amalric, Catherine Frot, Karin Viard and Sergi Lopez

LOCARNO FILM FESTIVAL, PIAZZA GRANDE

2008 *THE TRIP TO THE PYRENEES*

With Sabine Azema and Jean-Pierre Daroussin

CANNES FILM FESTIVAL, DIRECTORS' FORTNIGHT

2005 *TO PAINT OR MAKE LOVE*

With Sabine Azema, Daniel Auteuil, Sergi Lopez and Amira Casar

CANNES FILM FESTIVAL, OFFICIAL COMPETITION

2003 *A REAL MAN*

With Mathieu Amalric and Héléne Fillières

2000 *ROLAND'S BREACH*

With Mathieu Amalric and Cécile Reigher

CANNES FILM FESTIVAL, DIRECTORS' FORTNIGHT

1999 *SUMMER'S END*

With Philippe Suner, Pia Camilla Copper, Marie Henriau and Pierre Maguelon

CANNES FILM FESTIVAL, ACID SELECTION

CAST

Karim Leklou – **Aymeric**

Laetitia Dosch – **Florence**

Sara Giraudeau – **Olivia**

Bertrand Belin – **Christophe**

Noée Abita – **Aurélie**

Andranic Manet – **Jim 23 YEARS OLD**

Eol Personne – **Jim 7 AND 10 YEARS OLD**

Mireille Herbstmeyer – **Monique**

Suzanne de Baecque – **Léa**

Sabrina Seyvecou – **Cécile**

Robinson Stévenin – **Titi**

CREW

Directed by
Screenplay by

ARNAUD and JEAN-MARIE LARRIEU
ARNAUD and JEAN-MARIE LARRIEU

based on the book by **PIERRIC BAILLY** *LE ROMAN DE JIM* © P.O.L EDITEUR, 2021

Produced by
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Editing
Sound
Original score

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IRINA LUBTCHANSKY
ANNETTE DUTERTRE
OLIVIER MAUVEZIN, MARGOT TESTEMALE, CYRIL HOLTZ
BERTRAND BELIN, SHANE COPIN

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