



THE MUSICIANS

A FILM BY GRÉGOR Y MAGNE

LES FILMS VELVET AND BAXTER FILMS PRESENT

THE MUSICIANS

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FRANCE | 2024 | 1H42 | DCP | 5.1 | 2.35 | COLOR

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Astrid Thompson finally succeeds in fulfilling her father's dream: to bring together four Stradivarius for a unique concert, eagerly expected by music lovers around the world. But Lise, George, Peter and Apolline, the four virtuosos recruited for the occasion, are incapable of playing together. The rehearsals are one ego crisis after another. With no solution in sight, Astrid decides to go and find the only person who, in her eyes, can still save the event: Charlie Beaumont, the composer of the score.



INTERVIEW WITH GRÉGORY MAGNE

BY ANNE-CLAIRE CIEUTAT

After *Perfumes*, which revolved around the sense of smell, how did you come to place music and hearing at the heart of this new story?

Perfumes was released between two lockdowns. At the time, there was serious concerns about the public ever returning to movie theatres. I had just begun to write about the dialectics of conflict and reconciliation, and I was wondering what good reason I could give viewers to come and watch my next film in a cinema. As I was taking a walk near the Conservatoire National de Musique, I remembered a very specific emotion I had experienced there. Twenty years earlier, a cellist friend of mine had invited me to come and listen to the piece of music she was going to perform as an audition to enter the Opéra de Paris. It was a part for cello from an orchestral piece, so it was a bit bare and abstract. We were alone in this big white room, and there, beyond music, I could hear her fingers on the fretboard, the hair of the bow on the strings, but also the high standards, the precision, the hours of work. That moment had left a lasting impression on me... So I thought: this is it, in a movie theatre, with high-quality sound, maybe I can allow everyone to experience that.

The film features a string quartet. Why did you choose this type of musical ensemble in particular?

When I went to see quartets rehearsing and I stood in the middle, for instance between a viola and a cello, I realized how different the way musicians experience and hear the piece they are playing is from what the listener or the concert-goer experiences. In terms of sound, it was a brilliant material to make

the most of shots/reverse shots, angle shifts and cuts. And also, in a string quartet, questions of balance and harmony between the instruments are so paramount that it was the ideal ensemble to tell the story of a group of people who are struggling to get along.

How did you immerse yourself in this specific milieu and that of period instruments?

I met dozens of virtuosos and a number of stringed-instrument makers. As for *Perfumes*, I discovered people who are totally absorbed and obsessive. For example, my cellist friend only knows Madonna by name. She doesn't know any of her songs, because she only listens to classical music. In this milieu, people often have firmly fixed ideas on how to play such and such piece. This can easily lead to conflicts. One of the challenges was to make it understandable and explicit that such musicians might not necessarily play "perfectly" when they have to play together. I had to find a way of deconstructing and conveying, even to laypersons, the various stages of work, adjustments, compromises and renunciations involved so that the encounter may take place and the quartet find harmony.

What kind of contribution did composer Gérgoire Hetzel make to your writing process?

He had a major input. And so did the actors of the quartet; they are real musicians, so I couldn't possibly have asked them to say or play anything they didn't agree with musically. At the heart of the script is a piece for string quartet from the early 1990s. Grégoire Hetzel was the ideal person, since he had all the culture

and talent of a composer of so-called “serious music,” and all the flexibility of a film composer. We started out by figuring out what was at stake between the characters in each rehearsal sequence. One musician tries to steal the limelight, two others won’t agree on the rhythm, the intention, and so on. Therefore we conceived these musical scenes as dialogued sequences. Then Grégoire translated this into notes, while respecting the style of the times, the standards of the quintet, traditionally composed of four movements, and overall coherence. It was impressive. His music already prefigured the characters’ facial expressions and looks, the way we would shoot, and even the rhythm of the editing.

When he was done, the actors began rehearsing. Frédéric Pierrot, who is also a musician, a great jazz enthusiast and a clarinet player, attended the rehearsals and became totally immersed in the words and images used by Grégoire when he explained his score to the musicians. That is how he got into character as Charlie Beaumont, with a score in his hand. Frédéric is an actor with a constant concern for accuracy and authenticity. He carries the script around with him, constantly annotating, highlighting, and correcting it. For every scene, he knows exactly where his character stands story-wise, and where he must go. It is a real delight to work with him, even more so since he trusts you completely.

How did you cast the musicians?

Nobody would believe in these characters if they didn’t actually play their instruments. And it would have been a nightmare to film so many musical sequences using stand-ins or special effects. So I teamed up again with casting director Antoine Carrard who looked, in France and abroad, for actors who played an instrument and for musicians who could act. Marie Vialle had already played the cello on a theatre stage. I had written the character of Lise with her in mind. Emma Ravier, who

plays the violin and the viola, had no previous film experience. Her audition was perfect, and her personal journey mirrored that of her character, in the sense that she was determined to prove to herself and to others that she could be an actress. Daniel Garlitsky is a well-known figure in the music world – in classical music but also in gypsy jazz. It definitely gives him more flexibility and open-mindedness: from the outset, he was less rigid than most of the musicians we met. His character is visually impaired, which gives him a mystery and mannerisms that had to be embodied in a way that was both precise and physically accurate. As for Mathieu Spinosi, he is an actor who comes from a large family of musicians. He excels in both fields, and this role embraced his entire personal history.

His character brings a comical aspect to the film. You play with various registers, including burlesque, with a certain number of falls!

Musicians is first and foremost a comedy. It was important to me that viewers could smile or laugh at various situations and at the characters. What might be unsettling is the fact that the subject matter and our approach to music are really serious. So we had to somehow allow the viewers to consider what they are seeing with an amused look, and to let them know that they have the right to smile or laugh. Viewers may experience this differently, depending on how caustic their humor is.

As for the falls, they offer some comedy relief in tense or serious situations. They immediately and mechanically instill a certain tenderness for the character. They also have a musical aspect through the sound effect they bring and the way they punctuate the rhythm of the narrative.



Why did you think of Valérie Donzelli to play the part of this daughter devoted to her late father?

Making the heir of a multimillionaire instantly likeable and touching was no easy task. I felt that Valérie Donzelli embodied all the refinement associated with this social class, but without an ounce of pretentiousness or spite. And above all, with a great sense of imagination and silliness. Immediate and constant. A constant ability to surprise us. When Valérie starts a take, you never know where she is going to go. She likes to suggest things, to go ahead and see how it plays out. The awkwardness of the character also has to do with a certain stage in the grieving process. When, after several months, everyone around you gets back to their normal lives but you go on, deprived of something essential. The way she restrains her emotions, the way she tries to smooth things out so that the concert may happen, or the way she suddenly loses it... Valérie perfectly conveys this emotional frailty.

The jacuzzi seems anachronistic in the middle of this garden frozen in time, reminiscent of the one in *Last Year at Marienbad*...

Director of photography Pierre Cottureau, production designer Valérie Faynot and I immediately liked this castle. Its Art Deco architecture avoided the “tone-on-tone” effect of the classical instruments. The openings allowed us to extend or reduce the depth of the sets and to move around freely. And it is true that, in the middle of this formal garden, the jacuzzi is quite out of place. When we were location scouting, we came across many crazy ideas like that, like conservatories, garages, or works of art completely at odds with the castles we were visiting. I liked the idea of Georges wearing a bathrobe, taking offense even at a jacuzzi that dares to resist him! A power struggle ensues between them... leading to a power cut.

Which in turn leads to this moment by the fire, when the relationships between your characters cool down...

This calming down is the prerequisite for them to play together beautifully. In order to be able to listen to each other, to find harmony, people have to be at peace – whether it is Georges with Emma, everyone with Georges and Emma, or Peter with Lise. This is what begins to happen when they play by the fire. The mood, the fact that they are not playing classical music, the pleasure they are suddenly taking in it, it all shows them that the essential thing they had been lacking until now can actually flow between them.

Your opening shot takes us right at the heart of a violin, which you film like a cave on whose walls shadows are reflected...

While I was researching Stradivarius instruments, one day I came across some pictures by Charles Brooks, who photographed the inside of many musical instruments. Of course, I was interested in the mysterious aspect, but also in the hidden reality of these priceless instruments, which have often suffered many accidents throughout centuries, as evidenced by repairs that can only be seen on the inside. And the soundbox enabled us, through the treatment of outside noises, to show the viewers right away that the film is also meant to be experienced by ear. This shot was the very first that we did with Pierre Cottureau’s team, a little ahead of the shooting. They had found a very small lens that could be inserted into the chamber, but we weren’t at all sure that it would work as hoped. When the image started to appear, it was magical.

You film the musical scenes with ever increasing sensuality, reaching a state of grace in the final concert...

Each rehearsal sequence explores a particular aspect of the relationship between the characters. And yet, each time we shot the same place, the same action - a quartet playing music, fixed character positions... So we had to figure out the grammar we would use to differentiate the tone and spirit of the scenes. Wide shots or close-ups? Short focal length or long focal length? From the musicians' point of view or from Charlie's? We played with the lights, the over-the-shoulder shots, the backgrounds, the more or less pronounced curve of the circle formed by the musicians, so that no two rehearsals are alike. All this also had an influence on sound and on the way we hear the music. For the final concert, we wanted to get very close to the musicians, to linger on their fingers and strings, to film the wood of the instruments, to play with sometimes very long shots in which the focus shifts from one musician to the other, all the while with the sound giving the impression of being with everyone and with each individual at the same time. And, as is the case with good quartets, you end up not knowing who is playing what.

And how exactly did you work on the sound of the film?

What the script required sound-wise was a real challenge. I was fortunate enough to find first-rate technicians who were excited about this challenge. Nicolas Cantin and Daniel Sobrino for the shooting, Fanny Martin during editing, and Olivier Goinard for the mixing. The first few times we sat around a table with a dozen people or so to try and figure out how we were going to create this sound, we had far more questions than solutions. We had to record the live sound, but we needed to be able to mix the level of each instrument independently later. We had to record the music, but also the dialogues, the sounds of

fingers and the handling of the instrument. The actors had to play, take after take, exactly the same music at the same tempo, and so on. Right from the writing stage, I hoped that the high requirements of the music would give us all a boost. And it was the case, both on set and during post-production. From start to finish, we were in total harmony. Maybe telling the story of characters who fail because of their egos is actually a good way to harmonize egos.

Your title is as simple as can be...

I like explicit titles. I also wanted to reassure viewers who might think that they know nothing about music. The film is first and foremost a human comedy and, since anyone can relate to such stakes, many people will be surprised at how they instinctively sense what is going on musically. Grégoire Hetzel's music is phenomenal in this respect. It sweeps you off your feet from the very first note, then it reveals its subtlety, its nuances, and ends up never leaving you.



GRÉGORY MAGNE



Grégory Magne grew up in Burgundy. In 2007, he set off to cross the Atlantic solo from La Rochelle to Salvador de Bahia, on a 6.5-metre sailing boat with no means of communication. He took a camera on board to tell the story of his daily life, from which he made his first film, *Vingt-quatre heures par jour de mer* (*Twenty-four hours a day at sea*). Since then, he has sailed between documentaries and fiction, between scriptwriting and directing. In 2012, with Stéphane Viard, he wrote and directed his first feature film, *L'Air de Rien*, a gritty comedy starring Michel Delpech as a debt-ridden Michel Delpech. The film revealed Grégory Montel in his first leading role. In 2018, he reunited with the actor for his second feature film, *Perfumes*. This time Montel co-stars with Emmanuelle Devos, Gustave Kervern and Sergi Lopez... For *The Musicians*, the director uses real musicians who, along with Valérie Donzelli and Frédéric Pierrot, play the members of a string quartet whose egos struggle to find harmony.

CAST

VALÉRIE DONZELLI

ASTRID

FRÉDÉRIC PIERROT

CHARLIE

MATHIEU SPINOSI

GEORGE (1ST VIOLIN)

EMMA RAVIER

APOLLINE (ALTO)

DANIEL GARLITSKY

PETER (2ND VIOLIN)

MARIE VIALLE

LISE (CELLO)

CREW

DIRECTOR
SCREENPLAY
ORIGINAL SCORE
CAST
IMAGE
SOUND
EDITING
SETS
COSTUMES
LUTHIER
MUSIC SUPERVISOR
1ST ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
CONTINUITY GIRL
PRODUCTION MANAGER
PRODUCERS
LEGAL & FINANCE

CO-PRODUCED BY
WITH THE SUPPORT OF
WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF
IN ASSOCIATION WITH
WITH THE SUPPORTS OF

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ANTOINE CARRARD
PIERRE COTTEREAU
NICOLAS CANTIN, DANIEL SOBRINO, FANNY MARTIN, OLIVIER GOINARD
BÉATRICE HERMINIE
VALÉRIE FAYNAUD
BÉNÉDICTE MOURET
FRANÇOIS ETTORI
DANIÉL GARLITSKY
LUCAS LOUBARESSE
CÉCILE RODOLAKIS
CLAUDIA CHEILIAN
FRÉDÉRIC JOUVE and PIERRE-LOUIS GARNON
MARIE LECOQ

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