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FRENCH BLOOD

(UN FRANÇAIS)

A FILM BY DIASTEME

With
ALBAN LENOIR
SAMUEL JOUY
PAUL HAMY

OFFICIAL SCREENINGS

FRI. 11, 3:00 PM @ VISA SCREENING ROOM ELGIN (PUBLIC 1)

SAT. 12, 12:30 PM @ SCOTIABANK 4 (P&I 1)

SUN. 13, 8:30 AM @ CINEMA 1 (PUBLIC 2)

SAT. 19, 5:45 PM @ SCOTIABANK 1 (PUBLIC 3)

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www.IndieSales.eu

32, Rue Washington – 75008 PARIS

Tel: +33-1-4483-0227

Email: info@indiesales.eu

INTERNATIONAL PRESS

CAROLINE AYMAR

caroline.aymar@unifrance.org

MARTIN GONDRE

mgondre@indiesales.eu

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« *Diastème captures a restless, angry, violent
vibe.* » **SCREEN**

« *Impressive* » **HOLLYWOOD REPORTER**

« *French Blood is the country's first ever film to
deal in depth with this subject* ». **LE MONDE**

**Fin Août productions
presents**

FRENCH BLOOD

With
**ALBAN LENOIR
SAMUEL JOUY
PAUL HAMY**

(UN FRANÇAIS)

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97' / DCP / 2.35 / Dolby SRD



SYNOPSIS

It's the story of a Frenchman, born in 1965, on the outskirts of Paris.

The story of a skinhead, who hates Arabs, Jews, blacks, communists and gays.

An anger that will take thirty years to die out.

A bastard, who will take thirty years to become someone else. And he will never forgive himself for it.

DIASTÈME'S BIOGRAPHY

Although initially leaning towards a musical career, Diastème decided at the age of 20 to become a journalist. He wrote for the press during several years before turning towards literature, cinema and theater. His first play as playwright and director was *La Nuit du thermomètre* [*The Night of the Thermometer*], for which he received two Moliere nominations in 2003. He followed it with *107 Ans* [*107 years*], adapted from his third novel, *La Tour de Pise* [*The Tower of Pisa*]. He staged several creations for the Avignon Off Theater Festival and in 2008 he put on a production of Albert Camus' *The Just Assassins*. In 2009, he staged his own creation, *L'Amour de l'art* [*Love of Art*].

Diastème has also co-written screenplays for television (*Close to Léo* by Christophe Honoré) and for the movies (*Les châteaux de sable* [*Sand Castles*], by Olivier Jahan and *Coluche, l'histoire d'un mec* [*Coluche, The story of a Guy*], by Antoine de Caunes). His first feature-length film as a director was *Sunny Spells*, written with Christophe Honoré (2008). In 2014 he directed *French Blood* which came out in French cinemas on June 10th 2015. His third feature film, *Pimpette*, was shot during the summer of 2015.



INTERVIEW WITH DIASTEME

What prompted you to write this film?

It's quite strange. I had started writing a book called, *Un Français* [A Frenchman], whose subject was partially similar. Then, the day that Clément Méric died* I saw on TV, faces that reminded me of those I had come across in my childhood and adolescence. Realizing that these people were my age, and that they carried within them the same hatred as when they were 18, upset me terribly. Nothing had changed. I found it extremely disturbing, and at the same time I realized it made for a good story. I figured that if there was only one subject that should be dealt with today, this was it: a character that we follow over a period of thirty years, who manages to get rid of the hatred and violence deeply rooted in him. This was definitely a subject for a film, and after two days I had written twenty pages.

What about this story makes it personal for you?

The main character is my age. He comes from the same place I do. I was born towards the end of 1965. I grew up in Colombes, in a neighborhood that gave birth to the first gang of French skinheads. I knew these people; they were my early childhood friends. I was lucky, I was able to leave. I signed up for a choir that became the Paris Opera children's choir. I traveled. It was a whole other world: I left a proletarian, uncultured universe, where people were tempted by racism, for a very bourgeois, right leaning one, with fundamentalist catholic tendencies! There were also many wonderful, open-minded people. I was equally very lucky to have a big sister: very early on I would steal her books. I read Prévert and Vian when I was 10. I had access to culture; I met other people outside of my social milieu, which wasn't the case for all the young people in my neighborhood.

When I returned to Colombes from time to time, I could see how the youth were developing. Other gangs came into being: and then the first skinheads. I saw them again when I was a student at Nanterre university in 1985. Symbolically, the building we see in the background of the movie's first scene is the student housing building at Nanterre University, where I lived at the time. I myself was chased down by extreme right-wing guys. I was participating in an anti-racist movement, even if I wasn't an active member. Later when I became a journalist, one of the first articles I wrote for *7 à Paris* was about youth movements within political parties. I went to visit the Front National (France's far right political party) as early as 1990. I've always been interested in politics, but from a distance, and with a bizarre mix of irony and anger. As a result, this is a deeply personal film. All the more so because I have a violent side; I'm aware of it, I fight against it. The work of becoming an adult is about knowing when to give up the anger and violence.

It what circumstances was the screenplay written?

I asked my agent to read those twenty pages I'd written, and he told me to show them to Philippe Lioret. I didn't know then that he produced other movies than his own. So we met, and he said that I could count on his support. I wrote the screenplay in four months, digging into the destinies of the people I had known: I did a lot of research, met some people, and thanks to internet looked up a number of things that otherwise I wouldn't have been able to access. I imagined three characters around a hero that seemed to me to be representative of what became of this generation of young extreme right-wingers who were in their twenties in the mid-80s. From the beginning, I decided that there wouldn't be a counterpoint; no moral lesson, no comments on Marc's actions.

* Clément Méric was a young far-left anti-fascist activist who was killed in a fight with a group of extreme-right skinheads.



I wanted the audience to follow this story from the inside. I tried not to treat any character like the “villain”, not to fall into caricature, even if there is no doubt about what one end’s up thinking about Braguette’s development. The story itself illustrates my personal perspective well enough. And through Marc, first a participant and then a spectator, we follow thirty years of the extreme right-wing movement in France. The papers teem with stories of communist blue-collar workers who today vote for the Front National, and their paths are quite easy to understand. Taking someone who went in the opposite direction was a challenge that I found very exciting.

How did you come up with this elliptical narrative?

I had already written a “biopic” about the French comic COLUCHE. The first version of the screenplay was 220 pages. The narrative covered thirty years. When Antoine de Caunes was chosen to direct it, we compressed the action. To avoid being too lengthy and to stay with Marc, I had to pick key moments: thirty years of his life in fifteen or twenty sequences. Within each stage, we are always in motion with sequence shots, very little cutting, and a lot of handheld camera work. From the beginning it was evident that the film called for this type of stylistic choice. It was the best way to recount: “Marc Lopez eighteen times.” What I like about this way of telling a story, is that there are gaps and everyone can fill them as they envision them. A little like when you bump into a friend you don’t often see and you imagine what their life must have been like in the interim.

Why did you choose Lopez for Marc’s last name?

I like to play games when I’m writing. I like to drop small pebbles that some people will notice, and others won’t. Few members of the audience will make anything of it.

Yet I found it very interesting that his name would be Lopez instead of Dupont**. I imagine that his family came from Spain. My own parents were French colonials born in Algeria. This said, I didn’t want to highlight anything in particular.

What about the group attracts Marc?

They are his childhood friends, his brothers. He’s not the group’s theorist, that’s Braguette’s role. Marc is a follower; he repeats what he’s heard, and just like in other gangs, when people fight, they fight together. He’s rather stupid at the beginning of the film. The real problem with these people stems from ignorance. The schools of the Republic didn’t do their job with them, much like, sadly schools today. Maybe one day, one of them will accidentally pick up a book and discover another world. Or perhaps share a job with a black person and find him to be really nice guy. They’ll find interests in common, they’ll laugh together, and his thinking will change. Unfortunately, this hatred of others, this plague, has grown over the last thirty years.

What makes Marc change?

Small things: meeting certain people, an awareness that develops over time. I didn’t want a “miracle” scene with a decisive moment, when, pardon the expression, he would “see the Virgin Mary”, be transformed and abandon violence. I did have him see a Statue of Mary on a hike in the Cirque de Navacelles, an ironic allusion. But when someone is obtuse, they don’t change overnight. Within the gang, Marc is perhaps the most dangerous. But when he is in a fight with a redskin on the hood of a car, he is surprised by the violence he harbors within. He realizes that he could kill someone with his bare hands, for no good reason, and it terrifies him. I read accounts by former skinheads explaining this kind of salutary shock, which had beneficial consequences.

** like Smith in English.



What differentiates Marc from the others is he never finds any pleasure in violence. He isn't very interested in pleasure and that protects him as well.

So he ends up being disgusted by the violence in others?

Yes, one of the times when he has a moment of awareness is on May 1st 1995, the day when the Front National were marching and a young Moroccan man, Brahim Bouarram, was thrown into the Seine river and drowned. For many years – but it is no longer the case- the Front National's security, the DPS, was ensured by skinheads. Marc doesn't understand how you can be delighted over killing a man. When someone wants to toast the men who committed this murder, he finds it unbearable. Marc can't take it any longer because he has finally outgrown the whole thing.

What is the role of the pharmacist (played by Patrick Pineau) in raising his awareness?

Sometimes chance places strangers on our path that end up playing an important role in our lives. This pharmacist, whom he met accidentally, doesn't consider him to be a monster, or a friend, but someone who needs help. He doesn't get hung up on appearances and strangely, it works both ways. It isn't he alone who makes Marc change, but he does participate in his metamorphosis. Marc's problem is that in shedding his ideas, he is also getting rid of his friends, who are his family. He's alone. His "happy ending" is awful. It's the story of a rotten bastard who becomes a good guy, but never gets over it.

Have there been transformations as radical as Marc's?

Yes, notably a former skinhead, one of the most dreaded back then, who is a Buddhist monk today, living near Rouen, and who opened a youth center for problem teenagers. And another skinhead, from my neighborhood, who returned to Colombes and became a social worker for poor inner-city children.

What he has to say now about peace and respect is quite different from what he was professing at an earlier time in his life. These aren't isolated examples, and it makes you hopeful in a world where there is a serious lack of hope, where events lead us to think that violence and human folly are inevitable, and that we'll never see the light. They made it out, and their behavior today is exemplary. I don't like the word "redemption," because it is a religious term, and I didn't want my character to go from one ideology to another, even one based on love and altruism, but this idea of becoming someone better, we can even say someone good, was a fundamental concept for the script. It applies to Marco meaning that it also applies to all of us.

What about the lives of Marc's friends makes them typical illustrations of people attracted to this kind of path?

Braguette is the theorist. He brings the fuel that feeds the gang's violence. Like many who play this role, he is noticed by the extreme right-wing party's upper hierarchy who will try and attract him to politics. Later, the Front National will try and get rid of this wild group that draws too much negative attention to the party. Today, the party's candidate lists are filled with people who are trying to redeem themselves after being sentenced for violence. Braguette refuses to redeem himself. Today, he would no longer belong to the FN. Grand-Guy belongs to those who go too far, who throw one punch too many. Many have been to prison, some lost their sanity, others left France to live elsewhere – they are found in Greece in the Golden Dawn right-wing party or within Belgium's extreme right-wing movements. Marvin is lost, someone who should have never been involved with this group. He's too fragile, he didn't have a taste for violence; like many of this time period, he started using drugs in order to hold himself together – and many like him are dead.

And what about the girls?

There are always girls in gangs. I knew girls like Kiki in the apartment buildings where I grew up. There was always a girl who was a little older, and more or less the girlfriend of a guy in the gang. Very early on it is clear that she and Marc could have a thing together, but she's going out with his friend, so there is no question of it becoming anything. Yet you can tell that they really have feelings for one another. Corinne, who arrives in the second half of the film is another story altogether. She's Braguette's mentor's niece. She's one of those Catholic fundamentalists, highly racist and intolerant, who show up for anti-gay marriage protest marches. And unfortunately he falls in love with her.

How did you go about choosing the actors?

When I met Philippe Lioret, I spoke to him about my affinity for British social cinema, filled with unknown actors who are all impeccable no matter the size of the role they play. He accepted the idea of making the film without any big name leads, and encouraged me to go in that direction. For Marc, the casting director, Michaël Laguens, met eighty actors, both known and unknown. I myself saw twenty. And in a very simple way, we ended up choosing the person who was closest to the character I had created on paper.

Alban Lenoir's screen tests were fantastic. He corresponded physically to the character I had in mind. Not only was he perfect for the role, but the fact that he wasn't well known made sure the audience wouldn't identify him with another role outside the film. He's a very physical actor, who also does a lot of stunts. I was very impressed by him despite the fact that as an audience member I find fight scenes rather distasteful. What he had to perform physically was very difficult and I wanted a certain type of fight scene, one that would disgust the audience. But I am just as impressed with his acting in the second part of the film.

When in the end, he simply puts his glasses on and watches the anti-gay marriage march on television, I am overcome with emotion.

What type of preparation work did you do with the actors?

I didn't give them a lot of historical information. We very quickly spoke about the characters, their physical demeanor. And we rehearsed - this is something I hope to be able to do with every film I make, and it comes from my theater experience. We rehearsed for ten days or so. We got together in a warehouse, with a few chairs, some accessories, and we took the time to rehearse, to discuss things, even with the actors who only have a line of dialogue or so.

This preliminary work validated another choice that was very important to me: shooting the film from the end to the beginning in reverse chronology. I can't stand false mustaches and wigs in movies. For two months I had the actors grow their hair and put on weight: we could then start with the end scenes and in a very natural way make them younger-looking, since at the beginning they all have shaved heads. Each actor was intimately aware of his character's trajectory because of the rehearsals. And their physical transformation also told a story of what was happening. When Grand-Guy is in prison, we see that he has gained weight, and that his nose isn't the same, because it was probably broken in a fight.

Who are the actors who play Marc's friends?

I saw Paul Hamy, who plays Grand-Guy, in SUZANNE, where he was very good. He has a remarkable physical presence, and possesses at the same time an enormous strength and great gentleness. There is something of a crazy child within him and we worked on that. Samuel Jouy, who plays Braguette, is one of the leading actors in the TV series *Ainsi soit-il* [The Church men] where he also has scenes in a wheelchair.

His screen test was exceptional: he seemed to enjoy playing a “bad guy,” but just like British actors, and I’m thinking, for example, about Tim Roth in Alan Clarke’s *MADE IN BRITAIN*, none of this implies in any way judging their characters or even commenting their own work as actors. Olivier Chenille, who plays Marvin, has everything his character has: he is gentle with a certain fragility. There’s something broken within him that I find very touching.

And the others?

Jeanne Rosa and I have already worked on four plays together and two films. I know her talent and we are always trying to impress each other. I gave her a challenge: shave your head, play a skinhead. I knew she could do it, she can play anything. But she had to show me she had it in her! Lucie Debay, who plays Corinne, is a young Belgian actress who’s worked a great deal in the Theatre National in Brussels. She was incredible in the casting process. It was a truly difficult role to play and she gave it her all, with an unbelievable precision and strength. Patrick Pineau, who plays the pharmacist, is an amazing actor and theater director. I very much enjoy having actors who come from different worlds and with a different set of acting codes play together. I’m not sure that the young actors in the film saw a lot of his work in subsidized theater! There are fifty-five speaking parts in the movie and I didn’t want to neglect any of them. Many of the minor roles are played by actors with whom I worked in the theater, like Frédéric Andrau. But there are also real cops playing cops, and real undertakers playing undertakers, etc.

What does *FRENCH BLOOD* reveal about the French far right-wing movement?

I have no pretense of revealing any truths about anything whatsoever. I’m telling a story, inspired by true events, that I find edifying, and which helps to better understand what is happening today. In 1985, people marched for; in 2013 people marched against.

And in passing I’d like to remind you of something the press and media seem to have lost sight of: The Front National is a party which has blood on its hands.

The talking heads on television have forgotten – I haven’t. This party was created by French Nazis – they cannot be treated like other political parties. This historical side cannot be dismissed and should not be forgotten. Today still, a number of Marine Le Pen’s collaborators are former GUD (a violent French extreme right-wing political student group) members.

Is it a politically committed film?

This film is in no way a provocation. It’s a film without hatred, because I am trying to eliminate the hatred that remains within me. You cannot do away with intolerance and racism through violence, only through dialogue and through example. Every work of art is necessarily a political act. And the contemplation of political commitment, of whether violence necessarily accompanies this commitment, is a subject that has always interested me. That is why I staged Albert Camus’ play *The Just Assassins*.

It seems that the French title *UN FRANÇAIS [A Frenchman]*, concerns the heart of French Identity.

The movie’s initial title was *Colère [Anger]*, to distinguish it from the literary text I had started writing, and because the idea for the film was an angry gesture, a gut reaction. But it was obvious that *UN FRANÇAIS* was a better title. I’ve always had the impression that there are two Frances: one of “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity,” and another “Work, Family, Fatherland.” The France of human rights and culture, alongside that of the France of Vichy and Patrick Buisson. These two countries probably have co-existed since the mid-19th century, but with increasing difficulty over time. And my “hero” is someone who is going to cross over from one France to the other.



CAST

ALBAN LENOIR	Marco
SAMUEL JOUY	Braguette
PAUL HAMY	Grand-Guy
OLIVIER CHENILLE	Marvin
JEANNE ROSA	Kiki
PATRICK PINEAU	The Chemist
LUCIE DEBAY	Corinne
BLANDINE PÉLISSIER	Marco's mother
RENAUD LE BAS	Bartender Nanterre
ALEX MARTIN	Caribbean Redskin
MICHAËL TROUDE	Redskin Canal
FRÉDÉRIC ANDRAU	Police Inspector
FRANCK M'BOUÉKÉ	Bouncer
JULIEN HONORÉ	Calou
ANDRÉA BRUSQUE	Hermione
ERIC CARUSO	De Barzy
ANNE BOUVIER	Woman in the meeting
NICOLAS WANCZYCKI	Skin Bartender
MICKAËL VANDER-MEIREN	Bartender Guadeloupe
BERTRAND COMBE	Doctor
CLÉMENCE AUBRY	Marco's Co-worker
DJEMEL BAREK	Volunteer
ALICE BUTAUD	Lawyer

CREW



DIASTÈME	DIRECTOR
PHILIPPE LIORET	PRODUCERS
MARIELLE DUIGOU	
STÉPHANE CÉLÉRIER	COPRODUCER
PHILIPPE GUILBERT	DOP
CHANTAL HYMANS	EDITOR
RITON DUPIRE-CLÉMENT - ADC	ART DIRECTOR
FRED CAMBIER	COSTUMES DESIGNER
LAURE MONRRÉAL - AFAR	ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
MICHAËL LAGUENS	CASTING
OLIVIER HÉLIE	PRODUCTION MANAGER
JEAN-MARIE BLONDEL	SOUND
THOMAS LEFÈVRE - GERMAIN BOULAY	SOUND EDITORS
THIERRY DELOR	MIX
TECHNICOLOR	LABORATORY
MAC GUFF	VISUAL EFFECTS
RODOLPHE CHABRIER	VFX PRODUCERS
MARTIAL VALLANCHON	

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