

# Persmap



# L'ÉCUME DES JOURS

Een Film van Michel Gondry

L'ÉCUME DES JOURS is het surrealistische en poëtische verhaal van de vindingrijke idealist Colin. In zijn huis in een magisch-realistisch Parijs wordt hij omgeven door gekke uitvindingen en het goede gezelschap van zijn beste vrienden Nicolas en Chick. Het enige dat nog mist is een grote liefde. Dan ontmoet hij Chloé. Maar na een spectaculaire bruiloft wordt hun idyllische huwelijk ruw verstoord door de bittere werkelijkheid wanneer Chloé ziek wordt van een waterlelie in haar long. Colin moet in steeds absurdere omstandigheden werken om Chloé te kunnen verzorgen. Ondertussen raakt hun appartement meer en meer in verval en valt hun groep vrienden uiteen. De film is een authentiek visueel spektakel van Michel Gondry.

Land: Frankrijk – Jaar: 2013 – Genre: Drama – Duur: 125 min

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Distributie: Cinéart



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Persrubriek - inlog: cinéart / wachtwoord: film

## Cast

<b>ROMAIN DURIS</b>	COLIN
<b>AUDREY TAUTOU</b>	CHLOÉ
<b>GAD ELMALEH</b>	CHICK
<b>OMAR SY</b>	NICOLAS
<b>AÏSSA MAÏGA</b>	ALISE
<b>CHARLOTTE LE BON</b>	ISIS
<b>SACHA BOURDO</b>	MOUSE
<b>PHILIPPE TORRETON</b>	JEAN-SOL PARTRE
<b>VINCENT ROTTIERS</b>	PRIEST
<b>LAURENT LAFITTE DE LA COMÉDIE FRANÇAISE</b>	COMPANY DIRECTOR
<b>NATACHA REGNIER</b>	REMEDY SELLER
<b>ZINEDINE SOUALEM</b>	OLD MAN IN THE GUN FACTORY
<b>ALAIN CHABAT</b>	JULES GOUFFÉ

## Crew

DIRECTED BY	<b>MICHEL GONDRY</b>
SCREENPLAY	<b>MICHEL GONDRY AND LUC BOSSI</b>
BASED ON THE NOVEL BY	<b>BORIS VIAN</b>
PHOTOGRAPHY	<b>CHRISTOPHE BEAUCARNE</b>
SET DESIGN	<b>STÉPHANE ROZENBAUM</b>
COSTUME DESIGN	<b>FLORENCE FONTAINE</b>
ORIGINAL MUSIC	<b>ETIENNE CHARRY</b>
EDITING	<b>MARIE-CHARLOTTE MOREAU</b>
HEAD OF POSTPRODUCTION	<b>DORIS YOBA</b>
PRODUCTION MANAGER	<b>GILLES CASTERA</b>
LINE PRODUCER	<b>XAVIER CASTANO</b>
PRODUCED BY	<b>LUC BOSSI</b>
A COPRODUCTION BY	<b>BRIO FILMS</b>
	<b>STUDIO CANAL</b>
	<b>FRANCE 2 CINÉMA</b>
	<b>HERODIADE</b>
	<b>SCOPE</b>
WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF	<b>CANAL +</b>
	<b>CINÉ+</b>

## Director's selected Filmography

- 2012 L'Écume des Jours
- 2011 The Green Hornet
- 2008 Master of Space and Time
- 2008 Tokyo!
- 2007 Be Kind Rewind
- 2006 The Science of Sleep
- 2004 The Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind
- 2003 I've Been Twelve Forever
- 2003 Pecan Pie
- 2001 One Day...
- 2001 Human Nature
- 1998 La Lettre
- 1998 Vingt P'tites Tours



# INTERVIEW WITH MICHEL GONDRY

## **WHEN DID YOU FIRST READ “L’ÉCUME DES JOURS”, THE BOOK UPON WHICH THE FILM IS BASED?**

As a teenager. My big brother read it first, and he told us, his younger siblings, to read it in turn. No doubt he started with “I Spit on Your Graves” and Vian’s other more erotic novels which he wrote under the pseudonym of Vernon Sullivan. He then must have gone on to read the rest of his books. We didn’t listen to Boris Vian’s songs at home. There was a kind of rejection of French songs with a message. But we did listen to Duke Ellington – my father was a big fan. And Serge Gainsbourg. Without us realizing it at the time, Vian was a kind of link between the two. It’s difficult to know from the first time I read it, because it is hard to separate the real and the reconstituted memory. One image remains: the butchery at the skating rink, and the feeling that the book belonged to a tradition of novels about love in which the loved one is lost. And the vision of a movie that I had well before becoming a director – in which color gradually gives way to black and white. I read *L’Écume des Jours* two or three times afterwards, before thinking about turning it into a film.

## **DID SOMETHING OF BORIS VIAN MANIFEST ITSELF IN YOUR WORK BEFORE L’ÉCUME DES JOURS?**

He had an influence on my work with Björk. And more specifically on a project for a music video which wasn’t made, but in which the objects were like animals. The idea that things are almost more alive than people suits me well. When I was a child, I’d often take objects for people, even to the extent of believing they were ganging up on me! I must have enjoyed that when reading Vian, and when Björk pushed me to explore the recesses of my mind, it came out. And that was added to what I saw in animated movies – I remember a short film by Charley Bowers, probably from the 1920s, in which little cars hatched from eggs lined up under the hood of a big car.

## **HOW DID THE PROJECT TO ADAPT THE BOOK COME ABOUT?**

Through the producer Luc Bossi. It was a stroke of luck that the person who manages the Vian estate, Nicole Bertolt, has a more modern attitude than some surviving relatives of major authors. Luc had written a first draft of the screenplay which I liked because it was faithful to the novel. We reworked it together, but we kept his idea of having this great big workshop at the beginning of the story where the book is produced. To my mind, it shows that the book is inescapable. It is concrete and indestructible. And the workshop also shows that the story is already written. Because when you read *L’Écume des Jours*, you have the impression that the ending has already been written and there is a strong sense of the inevitable. It’s a fatalistic book. I don’t believe in fate but the novel does.

## **HOW DID YOU DEFINE THE VISUAL UNIVERSE OF THE FILM?**

My first reaction was to hang onto the images I still have from my first reading of the book, in the same way as one values the first impressions one has of a person. That first impression was a kind of basis upon which I could graft the rest. But it was impossible to imagine the complete universe. I had to take it detail by detail, inventing lots of objects and using my imagination like a kind of controlled chaos, hoping that the integrity of the work would give rise to a coherent universe. In a way, the representation of the food that Nicolas serves to Colin and Chick was a good starting point. The solutions set designer Stéphane Rozenbaum and I came up with then fed into the rest of the film. The characters eat a lot of meat, game even. I’ve been a vegetarian since the age of 12, so that didn’t appeal to me much. We looked at the illustrations in books by Jules Gouffé and in one edition, there were some very beautiful pictures that looked like retouched photos. I told Stéphane to take some pictures of poultry, transform them into other materials – fabrics, wool – and then re-photograph it all. These short stop-motion animations, which we used in the film and which are reminiscent of the work of Jean-Christophe Averty, really set the tone.

### **SO NO UNIVERSE BUT MAYBE A PRINCIPLE? THAT OF OBJECTS BEING AUTONOMOUS?**

Yes. And it's even in the book in a line Colin says: "It's things that change, not people." And once again, that applies to me, which no doubt explains the attraction I had for the book. For example, I don't think people age. I don't see them age, but I see their photos growing youthful. And you can apply that to objects. Bringing them to life by changing their purpose is something I find very exciting. As a child, I had a book that took everyday objects – that you might find in the kitchen, say – and turned them into other things. It took a bleach bottle and turned it into the Apollo space rocket. I found it enormously stimulating to take an existing object – something that had already been thought out in terms of its design – and to turn it into something else. That was the starting point for the cars – we turned them around, turned the back ends into the fronts and vice-versa.

### **SOME VISUAL IDEAS APPLY TO VIAN'S TEXT TO THE LETTER, LIKE THE EXECUTION OF THE DOCTOR'S REQUEST, FOR EXAMPLE. OTHERS TAKE MORE LIBERTIES...**

There were no hard and fast rules. For example, Vian describes a chair that curls up on itself before one can sit down on it. The first attempt at finding a cinematographic equivalent was a rubber chair. Then I got to thinking about those little collapsible toys children have, often in the shape of animals. You push up the base and the tension relaxes and the creature crumples. But some elements from the book wouldn't work today, like the references to Gouffé's recipes – how could we find a visual equivalent? Through a chef, played by Alain Chabat, who is present in the kitchen through an interactive system. The same goes for the adoration of Partre, which we decided to illustrate like a drug addiction. Without that, one wouldn't understand why Chick abandons Alise.

### **AND THE BIGLEMOI?**

For a long time, I'd had this idea I'd almost used for a White Stripes video – connecting the feet of a dancer to his or her partner's feet. In the end, we opted for something simpler, where the legs cannot be controlled by the dancer. For a moment, I was even thinking about having the music literally twist the body. It made me think of those musical animations that Disney made in the 1930s, often to big band music. They were called the Silly Symphonies and the animators used loops that repeated the characters' movements *ad infinitum*, which made them seem like nightmares.

### **THE FILM IS SET IN PARIS, BUT WHEN? THE YEAR WHEN YOU FIRST READ THE BOOK?**

No, it's set at an undefined date. Not 1947 and not 2013. There are references to the 1970s, because Stéphane Rozenbaum and I are the same age and we picked objects that reminded us of our youth. Many of my visual choices are linked to my childhood, like Colin's apartment for example. As a kid, I went to Paris every week with my grandmother and we'd go to the Printemps store. Going along that walkway that links the buildings was truly magical for me. And I linked that with the idea that Vian was a fan of American culture, although his heart condition prevented him from traveling. In the US, lots of railroad cars are transformed into diners. Then there is the construction site at Les Halles, which is truly the Paris of my youth. I grew up in a city that was a under construction.

### **THE SEVENTIES SIDE TO THINGS GIVES A MELANCHOLIC FEEL TO THE FILM. DOES IT ANCHOR THIS TRAGIC COMING-OF-AGE STORY IN YOUR OWN PERSONAL EXPERIENCE?**

The book reflects the romantic – and thus slightly morbid – imagination of a teen. That no doubt fits with my own sensitivities, memories and fantasies. I often dream that I'm going to live at my parents' house again, and in my dream, the house has shrunk. Or maybe the streets around have changed – garages have been built, and trees have grown. The decay and shrinking of Colin's apartment comes from that. I'm obsessed with the differences that exist between places of the past and those of today. I want to see layers of wallpaper that demonstrate the passage of time.



### **IT'S AS IF THE FILM DEALS WITH WHAT WOULD BECOME OF THE WORLD IF THE MECHANICAL SUPPLANTED THE DIGITAL...**

There is always something of that in my work. And in this instance, my starting point was a book written in 1947, prior to the digital age. Back then, my grandfather invented a synthesizer – the calvioline – which worked with valves. I try to avoid nostalgia but it was a time when I could still understand what was going on in technological terms. I was also keen to avoid a kind of Orwellian retro-futurism. I didn't want to show the studio where the book is being written – in a slightly ridiculous way because each worker is assigned one single sentence – in too negative a manner. When Colin is fired, his coworkers support him. In the 1970s, my father made loudspeakers in a workshop. There were lots of girls who worked with him and I have colorful, joyful memories of that.

### **DID THE ABUNDANCE OF SPECIAL EFFECTS MAKE THE FILM COMPLICATED TO SHOOT, EVEN IF THEY ARE MORE MECHANICAL THAN DIGITAL?**

Yes. It's more complicated when you shoot on a green screen. But we were also lucky enough to be able to shoot the scenes at Colin's apartment chronologically, and to start with the burial scene. It's always tricky to finish a shoot with the denouement. Everyone has his or her own version of it, and it's too stressful. The big problem here is that Boris Vian belongs to everyone. Everyone has his or her own version of the story, including the crew. Everyone wants to bring his or her own personal touch and that's great, but sometimes it can be too much. And that's before you start to consider your responsibility to the audience. I remember what Agnès Varda said to me: "I hope you make us a good film because we all love that book..."

### **TELL US ABOUT YOUR CHOICE OF ACTORS. HOW DID ROMAIN DURIS BECOME COLIN?**

Colin isn't very well-defined in the novel. And I like that because it allows the reader to better project themselves into the narrative. I liked Romain Duris for the role because he has a manly side to him combined with a certain fragility. You believe he has the potential to break down. In the novel, Colin is more ethereal, which I think could have made him outmoded. He's also a bit dressed up and almost metrosexual, which was something we had to lose. Right from the first scene, that of the burial, Romain really impressed me. He has to shoot at water lilies with a twisted rifle, and that's not easy. Sometimes, an actor's talent isn't measured by how he or she brilliantly interprets a piece of great writing, or how they get across some amazing emotions, but by how good they are at making you believe in the simple things. In this instance, it involved making the audience believe that those things floating on the water were responsible for killing a person he loved.

In the second part of the film, Colin is worn down by his work and Chloé's illness, and everybody is yelling at him. More so than in the novel. That's because it was something with which I could identify. I have lived with a wife suffering from a serious illness – from which mine fortunately recovered – and I know that feeling of shame you have because you're lucky enough to be healthy. Romain used my experiences in order to take the character of Colin to some places that weren't particularly honorable, involving running away and cowardice.

### **AUDREY TAUTOU IS VERY MOVING IN THE ROLE OF CHLOÉ...**

I've got a big soft spot for Audrey. I like the way she is so full of life in the films she makes, but how she can also be so moving in sickness. She has an energy that was essential to the character – Chloé has to find the strength to reassure everyone else so that everyone else can reassure her in turn. With Audrey, you already know you're looking at a star. There's a clarity in her face that reminds me of actresses of the golden age like Lauren Bacall. She also has a sensitivity that evokes stars of the silent screen and those women in Chaplin movies for example. Indeed, in the second half of the film, there is something of the silent film about the movie in that the sets give way to the faces. Because the visual universe was going to be very striking and graphically very strong, we needed strong actors with whom the audience can identify.

### **WHAT WERE YOU LOOKING FOR FROM GAD ELMALEH AS CHICK?**

He doesn't act out the emotion inside him, but it is definitely there. Everyone is free to use his or her own techniques and Gad, no doubt because he comes from a stand-up background, embodies his character differently to how Romain or Audrey do theirs. It's more exterior. I think he made a great Chick because he has this look that comes from nowhere, that absent side to him that is very much in the style of Buster Keaton. It's perfect for this character who goes to the very extremes of his addiction. People who take hard drugs sometimes have a kind of protective shell in the way they look which never leaves them. It's totally out of character for him, as it was for Jim Carrey in ETERNAL SUNSHINE...

### **WHAT MADE YOU THINK OF OMAR SY FOR NICOLAS?**

Everyone wants to work with Omar! He's such a lovely guy and I thought he was pitch-perfect, even in the simple looks that conclude a scene. Like when he's fired, or when he realizes Alise is dead. He took away the snobbish side to the character, took him away from the sophistication a more theatrical actor might have given Nicolas, making him a little irritating. He gave him a humanity that I found incredibly impressive, and he makes him the guardian angel of the story.

### **AÏSSA MAÏGA IS WONDERFULLY SPONTANEOUS IN THE ROLE OF ALISE...**

I also like the way she performs without dialog, like in the segment of PARIS JE T'AIME where I saw her for the first time. She developed a kind of private agenda for the character, regarding the love Alise has for Colin.

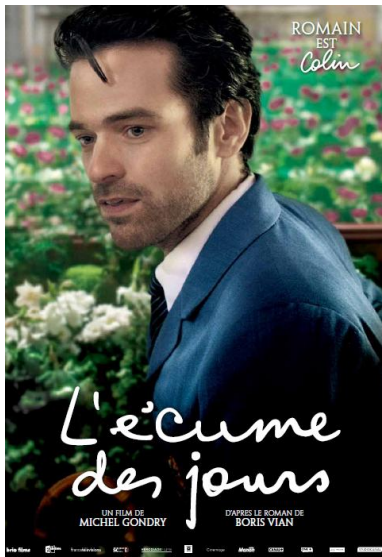
### **YOUR FRIEND ETIENNE CHARRY WROTE THE MUSIC...**

For a long time, I've been imagining orchestrated versions of Etienne's tunes, ever since we were at art school together in Sèvres and he made me listen to tapes he'd recorded of himself playing guitar. He lived in a communal residence and we called it "residence sound" and it later gave rise to his group, the Oui Ouis. I like the way he invents unique melodies. In the film, we also hear a song by Mia Doi Todd, an American songwriter. And Duke Ellington. It's August Darnell, formerly Kid Creole and without his Coconuts, who appears in the role of the jazzman. There's the song "Chloé," of course, and "Take the A Train," etc.





# ROMAIN DURIS IS COLIN



## WHAT DREW YOU TO THE PROJECT?

Firstly, the universe of Michel Gondry and the magic of his imagination. We are from the same generation and I'd seen his music videos and his early work. You might say he's an exceptional artist in French cinema, world cinema even. I studied the visual arts myself, and I'm very interested in "handcrafted" projects that involve interesting ideas. So getting involved in that world and meeting Michel were very important to me.

## BUT WITH MICHEL GONDRY, THE VISUAL DIMENSION IS OFTEN MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE ACTORS...

That's true, but it is much nicer for an actor than working on a film where you act against a green screen or where special effects are predominant. Granted, Michel sometimes gives more importance to a visual effect – and he's always careful to explain why – but it's OK because the effect in question is real and is there before our eyes. Sometimes, he literally cobbles stuff together – we're not talking about effects that are created during post-production. It's both charming and captivating. However, one must neither try to go beyond the effect because otherwise, one risks overdoing things, nor must one stand back and allow the effect to take up all the space. I feel that as actors, we must bring even more humanity and emotion to the movie. Then it's up to Michel to do what he wants with that during editing.

## THE SET IS ALMOST SURREAL...

Yes, but it's an almost mathematical surrealism because everything has its own logic. You understand what is happening on the set: for example, when there is a projection of our faces on a screen behind a life-sized walkway, the projection is really happening, live. As a consequence, the fact that our faces on the screen are blown up a lot makes the mouse running along the walkway seem so much smaller.

## IS THE MOUSE A STANDALONE CHARACTER IN THE FILM?

Sometimes it was created using visual effects, and sometimes it was portrayed by Sacha Bourdo. To me, the mouse is a friend of Colin's who shares his apartment and who embodies a spirit of freedom.

## DID YOU REHEARSE TO FAMILIARIZE YOURSELF WITH THIS UNIVERSE?

No. The rehearsals didn't help us ease into this world, but they did help us actors get to know each other and understand how to work together. This was all the more important as we were going to be thrown into a world where fantasy reigned. So we met up and rehearsed a few scenes to observe the relationships the characters might have with one another. That was especially important for us as people.

## WHO IS THIS COLIN YOU PLAY?

He's essentially an inventor who is constantly researching, which gives him a special place in the world of Michel Gondry. For example, Colin developed and made the famous "piano cocktail" which makes cocktails as you play. At the start of the film, he says it's not normal to be alone, especially as all his friends have girlfriends. Then he meets Chloé, and falls madly in love with her. Because he is a devoted kind of person and extremely attentive to others, he gives himself totally to her. But he is also a man who is detached from material concerns and is quite innocent. So when Chloé falls sick, he is totally overwhelmed by something very dark that is an obstacle in the course of his life. He's suddenly gripped by this deep sadness. I hope that despite this, he will inspire a modicum of hope.

### **THE FILM FLUCTUATES BETWEEN GLOOM, TENDERNESS AND HUMOR...**

I think it paints a wonderful picture that moves from optimism to despair. *L'ÉCUME DES JOURS* deals as much with what one loses as with what one gains. At the start, Colin is a sunny kind of character with his head in the stars, who is then brutally confronted with the trials of life. It makes him lose his carefree attitude, but he grows in terms of how he understands the world.

### **WHAT IS WRONG WITH CHLOÉ?**

I don't know exactly what Boris Vian had in mind but it's very evocative of cancer. Chloé has a water lily in her right lung and it grows bigger and infects her left one. To me, it's similar to a tumor that spreads. Colin must bring her flowers to frighten the water lily, to make it wilt and lose its aggression.

### **COLIN AND NICOLAS ARE ALMOST LIKE BROTHERS...**

Yes, and I like that. I like the fact that the film doesn't dwell on the bourgeois origins of my character. Especially as in the book, you might really think that this guy has got it all: a big apartment, money, and a butler who takes care of everything for him. You almost want to give him a slap and tell him that's no way to live. But his relationship with Nicolas, who is a chef, is much deeper than you might at first think. When Michel filmed Omar and me, he captured the humanity that comes from our exchanges and didn't reduce it to a master-servant relationship. To my mind, Nicolas becomes a guide and mentor for Colin. He is a man with perspective who steers Colin onto the right path in order to succeed.

### **HOW DID YOU GET ACCLIMATIZED TO THE APARTMENT?**

I was immediately struck by how it was so tastefully decorated, both in terms of colors and materials. Moreover, it's a place that isn't set in a specific time; it's neither stuck in the 1950s or 1960s, nor is it set in today's world. Michel was determined that the film wouldn't be shut in the period during which the book was written. And I also really liked the fact that the apartment is filled with all kinds of inventions, like the periscope linked to a Minitel terminal, like an historical version of Google Maps!

### **THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COLIN AND CHLOÉ IS WONDERFUL...**

It was great working with an actress who gives so much to the performance. I am very sensitive to human relationships, so much so that when I don't get along very well with my acting partner, it requires a lot of effort to make it seem like I do. But when you're working opposite someone simple, who is constantly working with you and who is totally open to you, you can go far in your exploration of emotions. Audrey Tautou is like that. She is very generous, she gives and she takes. As such, we can play out all kinds of human relationships including lovers, enemies, brothers and sisters.

### **WHAT MAKES MICHEL GONDRY A UNIQUE DIRECTOR?**

He has a way of creating films that is all his own. For example, if you look at his schedule for the week, you would think there's no way he can stick to it. Not only does Michel manage it, but he finds new things every day! It's rare to meet a filmmaker nowadays who allows himself such freedom – he created what he wanted, as long as it was coherent with the universe of Boris Vian, and the direction in which he wanted to take the film. As such, you feel that his spirit is constantly on the lookout and that it doesn't stop at the screenplay or production schedule. As soon as he has an idea, he tries to make it work – and he does it! It's magic.

### **MIGHT ONE SAY THAT *L'ÉCUME DES JOURS* IS A LOVE STORY?**

Yes, but it is not limited to that. Everything is linked: love, money, an intellectual passion bordering on addiction through Gad Elmaleh's character, the police who embody authority, and death. The film offers a real overview of society and many different images and comparisons on the world of work. Boris Vian was indignant that society crushes the individual and therefore, at the heart of the book and the film, there is a rebellious and anarchistic spirit that refuses to be enslaved by work.

# AUDREY TAUTOU IS CHLOÉ



## WHAT WAS YOUR REACTION WHEN YOU WERE OFFERED THE ROLE?

I jumped at the chance because I'd read the novel when I was young and it was my favorite book. When I was asked to play Chloé, directed by Michel Gondry – whom one might think is perfect for this universe – I was very enthusiastic. I never had the chance to play Juliet but I'd be able to catch up with Chloé!

## HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR CHARACTER?

To me, she evokes something poetic and filled with sunshine. She's the embodiment of kindness, purity and delicacy. They are the qualities I felt I had to bring together in order to get into the role. In the same way as the relationship between Chloé and Colin, there is nothing dark there. She is like Shakespeare's Juliet because there is a lot of purity and romance in their story and, of course, an impossibility. To me, it's the meeting of two soul mates. There's

also a certain naivety there, but not in the pejorative sense of the term. In the beginning, I was afraid that Romain and I would be too old to play Colin and Chloé, but Michel's idea to give the roles to actors who are a little older than the characters in the book allowed us to escape that candor and give the narrative a more mature approach.

## WHAT WAS YOUR APPROACH TO THE ROLE?

I didn't seek to analyze or rationalize the character. On the contrary, I forced myself to not explore her mystery. There is something that I can't fathom in her, and I didn't necessarily want to control everything, preferring to trust in the story, trust in Michel and trust in myself. Normally, I like to control everything and leave nothing to chance, but with Chloé, I decided to leave things to chance and not be afraid of going with the moment or with whatever happened on the day we were shooting, without trying to predict everything. I think I needed to have the same faculty for improvisation and the same freedom as Michel, and to not be afraid of imperfection.

## WAS THAT DISTURBING FOR YOU?

In the beginning, it wasn't at all how I'd imagined it to be: when I tackled the character, I had some very precise ideas for certain scenes, then in the end, nothing that I'd had in mind ever came to life because Michel's artistic approach, the relationship with the other actors and the atmosphere on set didn't lend itself to them. So there was no point reassuring myself by clinging onto anything I might have prepared. Moreover, I think that my way of acting changed radically between the first day of shooting and the last. The will to forget every acting technique was very liberating, but at the same time, I had no idea of what we'd shot.

## SHOOTING WITH MICHEL GONDRIY MUST BE A PRETTY UNIQUE EXPERIENCE...

It was so amazing and surreal and full of unimaginable experiences! Also, in an era of digital and 3D technology, Michel's determination to create visual effects in a handmade way and without using technology was very impressive.

## HOW DID YOU SHOOT THE WALK IN THE CLOUD?

We were in this little structure suspended from a crane by a cable with our feet hanging out the bottom, and we went up into the Paris skies. It was just one strange day in a very strange shoot.

### **HOW DID YOU GET ALONG WITH YOUR ACTING PARTNERS?**

I was delighted to be working again with Romain Duris, Gad Elmaleh and Aïssa Maïga, and to meet Charlotte Le Bon, to name just four. Between working with them and the Vian-Gondry cocktail, I couldn't have asked for more.

### **CHLOÉ IS STRUCK DOWN BY A STRANGE ILLNESS...**

Very soon after she marries Colin, they discover there is a water lily growing in one of her lungs. Colin does everything he can to cure her. The treatment involves some horrible pills that are dreadfully painful, and she has to be surrounded by flowers to make the water lily wilt. But this illness touches everything in her life, even the apartment. She leads us into a kind of dark and fatal craziness.

### **...WHICH GIVES THE FILM A MUCH DARKER SIDE.**

Yes, because *L'ÉCUME DES JOURS* deals with a love that might seem a little sentimental but which, in fact, is hopeless. That also explains the success of the book, which is so important to young readers. To me, it's essentially a book for young people. When I reread it for the film, it didn't have the same effect on me as it did when I discovered it as a teenager.

### **DO YOU FEEL THAT MICHEL GONDRY IS A UNIQUE ARTIST IN THE FRENCH CINEMA LANDSCAPE?**

He has this unique universe and creativity. He has many talents that he manages to express and combine to come up with unique projects in his own inimitable style. As such, Michel has not only a very personal vision of the world and an abundant imagination, but he manages to call on his different skills – music, drawing, animation, directing – and use them all for one project. He's driven by this incredible energy that feeds into his creations. That's surely why he stands out from most other directors.

## **GAD ELMALEH IS CHICK**

### **WHO IS CHICK, THE CHARACTER YOU PLAY IN THE FILM?**

He's first and foremost Colin's best friend. I really love the character because he's quite dreamy and poetic. And, of course, he's addicted to Jean-Sol Partre, the transposition of Jean-Paul Sartre in Boris Vian's novel. He has this intellectual depth because he's addicted to this philosopher, but he behaves like the fan of some pop star. He even has posters of Jean-Sol Partre on his walls!

### **WHAT IS HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH COLIN?**

There is great fraternity and solidarity between them, but this is threatened by a certain rivalry in terms of their love lives. I think that Chick is lucky because quite unintentionally, his dreaminess makes him very appealing. You feel that things come to him, without him even asking. And inversely, Colin is much more determined and willing, and he goes after things much more.

Moreover, he's pretty jealous when Chick says he's met a girl. You can sense it annoys him and he shows it. It's a lovely relationship.



### **COLIN AND CHICK SHARE THE SAME OBSESSION WITH FALLING IN LOVE...**

Relationships are very important in this story, including through the words and conversations of the two men. I think their relationship is also about money because Colin is very rich and Chick is not. To me, the film offers a reflection on work, not just love, and raises questions about what one must do to earn a living. It's a very rich oeuvre.

### **WHAT DO YOU LIKE ABOUT THE WORLD OF MICHEL GONDRY?**

To be honest, I knew I'd do the film before I'd even read the screenplay. The interesting thing about working on a Michel Gondry film is Michel Gondry himself! I was intrigued by the idea of meeting him because I thought that beyond being a great director, he must be an exceptional person. I wanted to know who was behind the films he makes. So we met for two hours and during that time, we talked about the project for five minutes and then about all kinds of other stuff for the rest of the time. We share a language that is about humor through words and I really like that.

### **WHAT WAS THE SHOOT LIKE FOR YOU?**

Once on set, it was important not to try and understand or control what was going on. That was something I really liked because I get my inspiration and energy from letting myself go and I am inspired by surprises and the unknown, even if it's sometimes exhausting. I don't need to intellectualize things. And that's exactly how Michel Gondry works.

### **DID THAT APPROACH GIVE YOU MORE FREEDOM?**

Absolutely. It's a real freedom that has nothing to do with that fake freedom when a director makes you believe they are listening to you but only follows their own inspiration. With Michel, I was able to truly abandon myself and I thank him for that.

### **YOU WERE WORKING IN SOME FABULOUS SETS...**

It was crazy because each new scene was a surprise. I really liked turning up on set and allowing myself to be taken over by completely unexpected details. They weren't necessarily amazingly significant or sophisticated things, just unique elements that were clever and fun. It's more about absurdity than being spectacular.

### **WAS THE SHOOT SURREAL?**

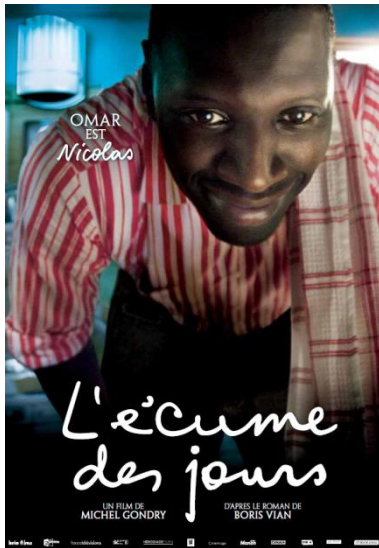
I worked to feed into the surreal scenes but in a concrete manner. Surrealism is like the absurd – it has to be logical so the surreal situations had to be realistic and concrete. For example, when Colin's tie won't lie still and first I try nailing it to his neck and then by steadying it with hairspray, I had to take it very seriously in order to make it work and to stop it descending into something ridiculous. That's how to ensure that such situations are surreal and funny, and how to give the audience some escapism.

### **WHAT WAS IT LIKE WORKING WITH ROMAIN DURIS?**

He has a lot of experience as an actor and he is very solid. He's much less "freestyle" than I am and that helped and reassured me. I tried to draw on his rigor in the scenes we shared. The funniest thing was that sometimes, I adopted his rigor and then I'd come back down to earth while he was just letting fly! I think that the combination of our two styles threw up some interesting results.



# OMAR SY IS NICOLAS



## HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED IN THE PROJECT?

I was due to go off on vacation when the film was being shot and Michel Gondry called me up to talk about the role of Nicolas. Initially, he'd offered it to Jamel Debbouze but Jamel wasn't available because he was about to do his own project. I was so keen on the idea of getting involved in a Michel Gondry project that I put off my vacation.

## DID YOU READ OR RE-READ BORIS VIAN'S NOVEL IN ORDER TO PREPARE FOR THE ROLE?

I did things backwards. I hadn't read the book at school so first I read the screenplay. Then I started on the book, but I didn't finish it. Instead, I focused on the screenplay, figuring it was that which was going to feed into my work.

## HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE NICOLAS?

He's Colin's lawyer, cook, driver and mentor. To sum him up, you might describe him as Colin's nanny or his Swiss Army knife because he's useful in every situation and he takes care of him. He also has to take care of Chloé at one point because Colin has a certain childishness that means he can't handle everything that happens. In the end, Nicolas looks after the two protagonists.

## NICOLAS IS ALSO COLIN'S CONFIDANT...

Yes, although Nicolas doesn't need to be told much in order to understand. He's omnipresent in the house and has a relationship with all the characters that is so strong, he understands what's going on without needing to be told. Colin nonetheless confides in him and Nicolas anticipates certain problems in order to better resolve them. As I said, that's his "nanny" side – he's there to stop the child from tripping on the stairs.

## WHEN WE MEET HIM FOR THE FIRST TIME, NICOLAS IS IN THE MAGICAL WORLD OF THE KITCHEN.

For an actor, it's a huge pleasure to work in sets like those, especially as that's where my most interesting scenes happen. I felt like I was playing in the true sense of the word. It's like you're six years old and you just want to play with all the props. In terms of the location scenes, something else happens because you just immerse yourself in Michel's imagination and as such, it's even more exciting. I think it's linked to the fact that the elements of the sets are palpable and for me, that's more comforting.

## WHAT WAS IN THE KITCHEN?

It was an amazing room! Firstly, it had all these TV screens through which Nicolas receives instructions from his master and model, Jules Gouffé. There was also the "Google Maps" periscope that Colin uses, and eels popping out of the faucets! I'll never see another kitchen like it!

## THERE IS SOMETHING BOTH RETRO AND FUTURISTIC IN THE SETS...

Absolutely. You feel like you're being projected into the past, and at the same time, you discover these strange objects that make you think you're in the future! In fact, the film is set in no particular era and it borrows from different periods.

### **WHAT ROLE DOES NICOLAS PLAY IN COLIN'S MEETING WITH CHLOÉ?**

Nicolas understands that Colin needs to meet someone, especially as everyone around him has a fulfilling love life. So he tries to find a situation where his friend can meet Chloé at the party. But the most important thing is the role he plays after they meet: he organizes their second encounter and makes sure it goes well. For all that, we still don't really know what my character's relationship is with that of Romain Duris. Is he Colin's employee? Or has Colin allowed him to come and crash at his place and in return, is Nicolas trying to do all he can to pay him back? Those are the things I discussed with Michel Gondry.

### **HOW DID YOU PORTRAY THIS VERY TENDER RELATIONSHIP WITH ROMAIN DURIS?**

It is a relationship that combines affection, respect and masculine modesty, so we had to find a way to express their mutual affection while preserving the distance that imposes itself between two men. From time to time, they use the more formal "vous" to address each other, then they use "tu," as if they don't really know where the boundary is between friendship and an employee-employer relationship. In the end, it is through what they actually do that we understand they are friends and that there is even love between them, because right from the start, Nicolas is there for Colin.

### **WHAT SETS MICHEL GONDRY APART FROM OTHER DIRECTORS?**

He is very atypical and has this childlike approach which I love. He creates some handmade visual effects, which, on most films made these days would require hundreds of computers. You can tell he started out making movies at home. Now, even though he's got the budgets and the crews, he still wants to get his hands dirty and construct the effect himself. It's very impressive how he has hung onto that freshness and desire to actually do things himself. Sometimes I couldn't even understand his creative approach. I tried to follow it but failed. I struggled on for two or three weeks, and then I gave up. He's the only person who knows where he's going and there's no point trying to follow him. From the moment you put your trust in him and let go, things go much better. I say that for everyone who wants to work with him in future!

### **WHAT KIND OF A DIRECTOR IS HE?**

The great thing about Michel is that despite his genius and his incredible filmography, he is very humble. Nothing is ever set in stone with him and he is constantly looking out for new discoveries.

### **WHAT IS THE ATMOSPHERE LIKE ON A MICHEL GONDRY SET?**

It's a very playful atmosphere, in the childish sense of the term. In general, when you do comedy for a film, it's a serious business that you do as an adult and which flatters the ego. With Michel, we went back to "playing" like kids. We were there because we love to play a part and we love to play because we're kids.

### **DID YOU FIND IT HARD TO GET INTO THE SURREALIST UNIVERSE OF THE FILM?**

It is indeed surreal, so much so that it's hard to find anything concrete to cling to. But the sets help, even if they are unique to Michel's universe and are pretty crazy. They are there, they exist, and you can touch them with your finger. Even if they are a little mad, they exist and they act as reference points for us. In any case, there is no point searching for the "reality" of the situations and characters – it is our acting partners, along with Michel of course, who guide us.

### **HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE THE FILM'S GENRE?**

It's very difficult to define a film by Michel Gondry, and it's even harder when it's an adaptation of a Boris Vian film. To me, it's a film that deals with love, friendship, disappointment, failure and death. In the end, it's a film about life, transcended by Michel's grace and poetry. To me, Michel has a fairly feminine sophistication in his approach to movie-making.

## INTERVIEW WITH LUC BOSSI (writer)

### HOW DID YOU COME TO CO-WRITE AND PRODUCE *L'ÉCUME DES JOURS*?

I read the book as a teenager but it was only later that I realized how much *L'Écume des Jours* was one of the most visual books in French literature. Its fantastic approach and the tragic love story it tells offered some wonderful cinematographic material. In 2007, I contacted Nicole Bertolt who represents the rights-holders including Ursula Kübler, Boris Vian's second wife who died in 2010; and Patrick Vian, the author's son. Naturally, they were very keen that we respected the novelist's work. One of the conditions was that we were faithful to the book. I wrote a first version of the screenplay to show them how I saw it. Nicole was also convinced that it needed a leading director and very early on I suggested Michel Gondry. I couldn't say that I offered the project to Michel: as soon as I met with him, he told me he'd always wanted to make the film and would always be looking to do the project. It was a meeting of desires. Michel had just finished a major Hollywood movie, *THE GREEN HORNET*, and he wanted to make his next film in France. To him, *L'ÉCUME DES JOURS* was like a summary of his career because a part of what he does is influenced by Boris Vian.

### CAN YOU DESCRIBE THE WRITING PROCESS?

I had written a first adaptation, and then we worked on it together. Michel added another more "Gondryesque" layer with additional dialog, scenes and personal visions, whilst remaining in the spirit of the novel. By May 2011, we had a screenplay which meant we could talk to potential financiers, including StudioCanal. The combination of Vian and Gondry opened quite a few doors for us. Michel was able to choose the actors he really wanted for the film and they, in turn, were really keen on the project so they agreed to make an effort in terms of the money. Then the third stage was Michel drawing the whole film, in his own way, not like an American-style storyboard but by adding a huge amount of visual ideas. Lots of people thought *L'Écume des Jours* wasn't adaptable because there's a pun on every page. But many of the chapters of the novel were naturally cinematographic because Boris Vian was so impregnated with pop culture and influenced by movies, science fiction and jazz. That's also why the French literary intelligentsia rejected the novel when it was published.

### WHAT IS IT LIKE SHOOTING WITH MICHEL GONDRY?

The thousands of ideas that Michel has can present some complex logistical problems! For example, Michel was determined to reconstruct part of Colin's apartment on the roof of the offices of French daily *Libération*, to ensure some real views of Paris to add to those we'd already come up with in the studio. Assembling a set on a roof would significantly add to the budget and some of the crew were skeptical, but Michel was determined. And the roofs of Paris on the screen really do bring something extra. Generally, even when you had trouble keeping up with his inventiveness, you can see in the finished film that Michel was right and he never lost hold of his global vision of the film. He also has an amazing ability to motivate people. This was the only film set where I have seen every single person busy from the first second to the last. And it was real teamwork. He consults people a huge amount, he listens and he delegates, all the while taking his own path with this obstinacy that is really stimulating for everyone around him.

## ABOUT THE FILM

You can find all the latest news about the release on Facebook at [facebook.com/lecumedesjours](https://www.facebook.com/lecumedesjours); Twitter, by following [@LecumeDesJours\\_](https://twitter.com/LecumeDesJours) and on the website at [www.lecumedesjours-lefilm.com](http://www.lecumedesjours-lefilm.com)

The transparent “**Limovian**” limousine will be on show from April 10 at the Peugeot showroom at 136 Avenue des Champs-Élysées, Paris. Peugeot’s designers worked with Michel Gondry on the production of the car.

The Institut National de la Protection Industrielle (INPI) is celebrating **Boris Vian and Michel Gondry** on a specially-created website at <http://aupaysdesinventions.inpi.fr/> and through a series of events.

The Musée des Lettres et Manuscrits is showing **texts by Boris Vian, storyboards and drawings by Michel Gondry** and various objects and photos from the film from mid-April. You can find out more at <http://www.museedeslettres.fr/>

On 13 March, Livre de Poche published a **special edition of the novel with a 64-page booklet** containing photos from the film and a long interview with Michel Gondry, and sent an educational dossier to teachers at junior highs and high schools in France.

Éditions Fayard is reprinting a large-format edition of the novel **with a new preface written by Frédéric Beigbeder**. Here is an extract:

[...] It is his best book, by far. The reason we discuss Vian now because he dashed off this undisputed masterpiece: a cosmetic lotion, an elixir of youth. Reading *L'Écume des Jours* makes one grow younger. It does, however, mean different things to different ages. Reading *L'Écume des Jours* at 14 can be considered a rite of passage. At 40, the sadness is no longer the same – it is his sham naivety, his fake innocence that is striking. One almost suspects its author of cynicism in transforming his own cardiac dyspnea into the water lily on Chloé’s lung, herself named thus in homage to a melody by Duke Ellington. The more one goes through life, the more this novel becomes like a [Proustian] madeleine. When I return to it at 60, 70, 80 or 90 years old, it will make me 14 again. Some authors age quickly. Others prevent us from doing just that.

But Vian’s seriousness must be underlined, because he neglected to do so himself. The dreadful André Breton called *L'Écume des Jours* a “masterpiece of playfulness and poetry.” That is key. Remember that the same tyrant said in 1924 in the first Surrealist Manifesto that “the marvelous alone is capable of making fertile those works which belong to a lesser genre such as the novel.” Vian’s approach makes Breton right and Sartre wrong in opposing the novel with poetry (the novel alone is capable of facing up to the world, poetry is about escaping it): Boris Vian is the man who, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, brought the two together. Let us take a random phrase from the novel, “The kitchen mice liked to dance to the sound of sunbeams striking the faucets, and run after the little bubbles the rays created as they struck the floor, like splashes of yellow mercury.” The fun prose of a centrist joker? The beauty of Beaudelairian synaesthesia? An absurd humor worthy of Lewis Carroll? The silliness of a nitwit schoolboy? It is none of that. The sentence merely describes the sun’s rays reflecting on a kitchen sink, and animals playing with light reflecting on the floor. We’ve all seen a cat trying to catch a reflection from a window, but Vian turns that into a dance and adds the chemical metaphor of “yellow mercury.” His surrealism is also a hyperrealism. It’s not surprising that his few paintings are reminiscent of those by Salvador Dali or Yves Tanguy.

Another example is Isis’s dress “of almond green wool with buttons of gilded ceramic and a wrought-iron back panel.” I have yet to see Michel Gondry’s film but this dress in the style of Paco Rabanne does not seem to me to be so complicated to bring to the screen. Unrealism is not the opposite of

naturalism. When Colin is combing his hair and “divides the silky mass of long orange strands into furrows like those the happy farm laborer plows through apricot jam,” one can see the metaphor, albeit far-fetched, whereas it is simply a macroscopic snapshot of what happens when anyone tidies their hair. It’s less original than drilling a hole in one’s bathtub to empty it, but it is nonetheless logic to make a hole in one’s tub and if we don’t do it ourselves, that’s only because a plumber has taken charge of doing it for us. Off-the-wall writing? It’s not just that – Boris Vian wanted to tell us that reality is a game.

This text by Frédéric Beigbeder was taken from the new edition of *L’Écume des Jours* by Boris Vian from Fayard, publisher of Vian’s complete works.

