



THE MAD KINGS

A Film by LAURENT LAFFARGUE



Jour2Fête presents
A Mezzanine Films Production

SERGI LÓPEZ **CÉLINE SALLETTE** **ÉRIC CANTONA**
ROMANE BOHRINGER **GUILLAUME GOUX**

THE MAD KINGS

A Film by **LAURENT LAFFARGUE**

2015 - SCOPE - 100 MIN

INTERNATIONAL SALES

JOUR2FÊTE

9, rue Ambroise Thomas, 75009 Paris

sales@jour2fete.com

+33 1 40 22 92 15

Synopsis

In Casteljaloux, a town in southwestern France, friendship, drunken nights, heat and tall tales set the pace of daily life. And here, men are Kings of the World.

But when Jeannot gets out of prison, he has only one thing in mind: to win back Chantal, the love of his life, who moved in with the village butcher while he was serving time.

A Greek tragedy that soon takes on the feel of a Western...



INTERVIEW WITH LAURENT LAFFARGUE

You're generally known as a man of the theatre and the opera. When exactly did you become interested in making films?

Laurent Laffargue : I've always wanted to make films. Cinema has always played an important part in my theatrical creations. And in my discussions with my technical crew and with actors, my references are first and foremost cinematic. In the late 90s, I even had a feature-length film project with Jean-François Lepetit, who produced *Trois Hommes et un Couffin* as well as Catherine Breillat's films. I was 28 and I wanted to make an adaptation of Hubert Selby Jr.'s *The Demon*. Lepetit was ready to come on board but had explained to me, and rightly so, that if I wanted to make this film, I'd have to throw myself into it one hundred percent and put everything else on the back burner for several years. At the time, I was already working quite a bit with the theatre and was about to start directing operas, and I didn't want to give up the bird in my hand for another in the bush. Let's just say that I put it off in the hopes of finding a solution. And it finally came in the form of *The Mad Kings* – the ultimate episode in a triptych beginning with two plays.

Tell us how the project got started...

L.L. : In 2010, I wrote a play, *Casteljaloux*, loosely based on my childhood spent in the village of the same name, located in the Lot-et-Garonne region, and some of its inhabitants. I played all of the characters. It was the very first time I had written and I immediately saw the project as a trilogy including two plays and a feature-length film. In 2011, I created *Casteljaloux II* on stage in Mulhouse – a play written for ten actors this time and which I only directed. Then, I got to work writing the film.

What were you trying to say with this story, which is so largely based on your own life?

L.L. : *The Mad Kings* is obviously a work of autobiographical fiction. Nevertheless, almost none of the characters actually exist as such in "real life": they are the fruit of a mixture of various men and women I have come across since childhood - even if Romain, the teenager who dreams of the theatre and getting out of the village, obviously most closely represents me. I chose the area of auto-fiction because I always believed that, for a first film, I should talk about events, people, feelings and places that are close to me. I know the region I come from and its inhabitants by heart and I wanted to transform these so-called ordinary people into tragic heroes. Jeannot, Jacky and Chantal truly are the heroes of a tragedy that takes place in blazing sunlight. Hector and Achilles revisited, in a way...

Your three main characters have one thing in common: they prove themselves incapable of leaving the very village in which they will inevitably meet their downfall...

L.L. : Yes, and that is precisely why I see the film as a roundup or a bullfight. A cousin to the series *Le Prisonnier*, which, incidentally, I talked a lot about with my writing partner Frédérique Moreau when we first started working together.

How did you go about the writing?

L.L. : I wrote the first two versions of the script before Frédérique joined me. She helped me structure the story by pushing me to my limits.

What was the biggest challenge for you at that time? The transition from writing for the stage to writing for the screen?

L.L. : Not really, because I think all of that sort of escaped me. And by the way, in the film, there is absolutely nothing theatrical in my eyes, including the scenes in the theatre with the teenagers. The biggest challenge was actually working on the basic material with different means and actors to embody it. And also to bring the numerous characters in the story to life without having them suffocate it. For each one to have his or her own

existence – in addition to interactions with all of the others – and obtain a choral film, in the true sense of the term, that didn't exceed 1h45min. Believe me, that isn't easy.

Did you have specific actors in mind when you were writing the script?

L.L.: Yes, Sergi Lopez and Céline Sallette... It was immediately clear that Céline would play Chantal because she is obviously a fantastic actress. But also because, as my partner, she was involved in the adventure every step of the way. Whenever I was writing, she was there and I asked for her opinion. And once we were shooting, she knew everything by heart as well as I did. Her comments were pertinent throughout the process. In a way, she helped write this film.

What gave you the idea to cast Sergi Lopez as Jeannot – a man just out of prison with only one thing on his mind: to win back the love of his life who has become involved with another man?

L.L.: Jeannot is bipolar. He's constantly going from one extreme to another. When I started writing the story, I was thinking of Patrick Dewaere in *Série Noire*. And when I started to look for one of today's actors that would have that same ability to switch from a state of gentle protectiveness to one of disturbing violence in a split second, Sergi immediately came to mind. He's perfect in the role of this man utterly possessed by his impossible love for Chantal. Because *The Mad Kings* is in no way about jealousy. Jeannot is not at all jealous of Jacky - no more than Jacky is of him. *The Mad Kings* tells a triangular love story in which the central character is the one, out of the three concerned, that we see the least on screen: Chantal. She is at the heart of every conversation. Chantal represents the link between the adult world and that of the adolescents she directs on stage in her theatre workshops, but also – and above all – the one between Jeannot and Jacky. She is a woman torn between two men.

And in the role of Jacky, you cast Eric Cantona...

L.L.: Once again, it was an obvious choice. For Jacky, I needed someone built like a brick house, because physique is an essential element of this

character that is constantly clashing with Jeannot. And the idea of using Eric came to me because of his resemblance to Sergi. Choosing him allowed me to demonstrate the continuity in Chantal's romantic choices. Sergi and Eric could be brothers. And, incidentally, that was my guideline when working with Eric. In the beginning, he instinctively tended to take the offense and attack. But, for me, he had to demonstrate a great softness and talk to Jeannot not like an enemy but, on the contrary, like a brother and never put his physical strength on display on screen.

Among the actors surrounding this trio, we take particular notice of Romane Bohringer and Guillaume Gouix. Why did you use them?

L.L.: I know Romane very well and think she's as magnificent as she is underemployed in films. The seduction she emanates gave me the chance to create a kind of ambiguity in the story – particularly in her connection with Jeannot. Is she his sister? His ex-wife? I liked this potential questioning. As for Guillaume, he embodies the young homosexual of the village – the only character in the film who actually really exists. The ambiguity between his very masculine side and his feminine side is wonderful. In what was yet another very physical role, he played the character with sensitivity and subtlety in each and every moment.

Alongside these adult characters are teenagers that symbolize the freedom to leave the village that their elders deny themselves...

L.L.: I cared a lot about these characters. Throughout the writing process, it was regularly suggested that I choose a side: to either tell the story about the adults or the one about the teenagers. But choosing between them didn't make any sense to me. On the contrary, I wanted to play on the mirroring effect between the two generations and, in doing so, move toward the double ending that I had planned from the beginning: tragic for some and hopeful for others. It's no accident that the first titles developed for *The Mad Kings* were *Partir* (Leaving) then *Sauver* (Saving). In this film, the adults are incapable of escaping the village. They're weighed down by past loves, or because the dream they've always had – in Jacky's case, taking over the family butcher shop – is about to become reality. The teens, on the other hand, aren't weighed down at all and can leave without the slightest regret or remorse. The adults are agitated and when

it comes to passion, completely fools - whereas, contrary to the usual clichés, the teens are calm. At least, until the MDMA moment...

A moment that, incidentally, symbolizes the powerful presence of addictions of all kinds in *The Mad Kings*...

L.L.: From MDMA to Pastis 51, you could even say that addictions are at the very heart of my film. They allow my characters to escape the day to day and allow me, the director, to create the most surreal, dreamlike moments.

And in the teen roles, you introduce three new faces that are absolutely remarkable: Victorien Cacioppo, Roxane Arnal and Jean-Baptiste Sagory. How did you find them?

L.L.: I met Victorien during a debate in front of 250 students from a theatre class in Aquitaine. A group of them came up to me just afterwards because they were fans of Casteljaloux – to the point where they'd memorized all the lines! My attention was drawn to one of them that reminded me a little of myself. It was Victorien, and his face came back to me later when we started casting. As for Roxane, I met her in the street one Sunday. She was riding a bicycle and I stopped her to explain that I was a director. We talked for a while and I discovered that she was a singer-musician and I instantly knew I was going to hire her! I gave her a number to call so she could come and audition and she got the part. As for the third member of the group, I discovered him in a normal audition.

How do you work with your actors?

L.L.: The same way I do in the theatre: by showing them a lot of what I want from them and in great detail. Words aren't enough for me. I know some actors hate this method. But on the contrary, Sergi was extremely demanding in this sense. In any case, I think I am extremely precise in terms of what I want and in my directing style. And I don't need a lot of rehearsals or a ton of takes. Showing things enables you do without them. Apart from that, nothing is obviously more beautiful than letting yourself be surprised. And my actors have often given me that pleasure on set.

We don't know exactly when the events take place in *The Mad Kings*. Why did you decide to do this?

L.L.: That was essential to me and I really fought for it. When I wrote the play, the story was set in 1984. While I didn't want to set the film at precisely the same time, but still wanted to keep some of the same atmosphere. Like in the two films that had a big influence on my creative process - *Mud* and *The Place Beyond the Pines* – where no one bothers to try and date the story. So in *The Mad Kings*, I purposefully make it unclear. On screen, you see landline telephones and cell phones, the latest Clio and a pick-up truck that looks like it dates back to Methuselah. I insisted on this uncertainty because the story I'm telling isn't dated. It could have happened 30 years ago, like *L'Ete en pente douce*, or - and I'm certain of this - 20 years from now. The time at which it takes place has absolutely no influence on the story. Especially not in small towns like this one where the strata of the past are always present.

How did you create the visual atmosphere of your film?

L.L.: Like when directing actors, I have my film in my head down to the last detail. That's why I frame my shots personally, for example. I love photography. It's something visceral that I learned on my own, particularly through being lucky enough to visit a lot of movie sets and observe people like Tony Gatlif or Bertrand Bonello while they worked. There is no better school. And for my director of photography, I called on Fabrice Main, who made a documentary in which he followed me around for six months when I directed *The Marriage of Figaro*. Before shooting, we both studied the making of *The Place Beyond the Pines* and *Mud*, the films I mentioned earlier, in great detail. We also talked a lot about colors. I wanted red and yellow to be the dominant tones in *The Mad Kings*, and they can be seen in both the costumes and the sets: Jeannot's red pickup or Chantal's jacket and dress, for example. I wanted to make a colorful film where the tragedy takes place in full daylight and avoid any kind of pleonasm.

There's also a Sergio Leone western kind of aspect to *The Mad Kings*, right down to the music...

L.L. : Yes, a western with a touch of bullfight... I worked with Jo Doherty,



an Irish musician I've worked with for 16 years. Among the instructions I gave him was to create an atmosphere like the one in Leone's westerns. Like in my work with actors, I need to show him what I want or, in this case, to make him hear what I want. I gave Jo examples of music or pre-existing songs to inspire him – the Arctic Monkeys, for example... Anyway, I lay on the pressure (laughs). I know some composers can't stand that but, with Jo, we've always worked that way.

It's often said that a film rewrites itself during the editing process. Was that the case for *The Mad Kings*?

L.L.: That was by far the most painful and most complex phase of the entire process. Cutting the tiniest scene was heartbreaking. Just like it was, in a larger sense, to go outside of the precise framing I had decided on as soon as I'd started writing. Knowing full well I was going to succumb to that fault, I asked my film editor Marie-Julie Maille to present me a version of her choice, after giving her the information I judged necessary. I didn't want to be involved in this first phase because, had I been, I wouldn't have been receptive to her suggestions. I wanted her to follow through on her own idea and go from there. That first version was interesting. And we worked on it so that we could follow all of the characters and insert the flashback smoothly. Our objective was to not get scattered.

Did this first experience directing a film inspire you to do more?

L.L.: Yes, it's a drug... a healthy one! I love the machinery of the cinema, which is both more flexible and more complex than that of the theatre. Throughout the entire adventure and particularly while we were shooting, I was obsessed with keeping things light. If the director doesn't set that rhythm, the technical side sets in and slows everything down - because the machinery hates emptiness and can take up all of the space. I was constantly telling my film crew: "You're butterflies in perpetual movement". That's why I didn't need ten takes of every scene. It was a euphoric experience for me. I already have a second film in mind in which I'll tell the story of a man who swindles forty women – a new exercise that I can't wait to take on.

BIOGRAPHY

LAURENT LAFFARGUE

A director of both theatre and opera and an actor, Laurent Laffargue directs all productions by the Compagnie du Soleil Bleu, which he created in 1992. Loyal to classical and contemporary French theatre, he is also drawn to Anglophone writers (Harold Pinter, Edward bond, William Shakespeare, Daniel Keane...).

In May 2002, Laurent Laffargue won critical praise for his work and received the Jean-Jacques Gautier award. The Compagnie du Soleil Bleu was nominated for the "Molière de la Compagnie" at the Molière Awards in 2006, and then chosen for the ADAMI Prize at the 2007 Molières. Passionate about opera and music, Laurent Laffargue also directs operas. Associated with the Bordeaux National Opera, he directed the 1999 production of *The Barber of Seville* by Rossini. In September 2002, he directed *Don Giovanni* by Mozart (also performed in Caen at the Opéra National de Lorraine, then again in Bordeaux in June of 2006 and at the Opéra de Rouen in April of 2009).

As an artist associated with the Théâtre de la Commune d'Aubervilliers for three seasons, Laurent Laffargue wrote, in collaboration with Sonia Millot, directed and acted in a one-man performance of *Casteljaloux* (1st version) in Aubervilliers in March 2010. A second version with ten actors on stage was created at La Coursive de la Rochelle in January 2011. In August 2012, he directed a short film entitled *Le Verrou*, based on the famous painting by Fragonard and starring Céline Sallette.

FILMOGRAPHY

2013 : **Le Verrou** (short film)

2015 : **The Mad Kings** (full-length feature)

CAST

Sergi López	Jeannot
Céline Sallette	Chantal
Éric Cantona	Jacky
Romane Bohringer	Marie-Jo
Guillaume Goux	Jean-François
Victorien Cacioppo	Romain
Roxane Arnal	Pascaline
Jean-Baptiste Sagory	Thibault

CREW

Director	Laurent Laffargue
Screenplay	Laurent Laffargue and Frédérique Moreau
Director of Photography	Fabrice Main
Original music	Joseph Doherty
Sound	Philippe Welsh
	Philippe Deschamps
	Olivier Guillaume
Assistant Director	Nicolas Aubry
Film Editing	Marie-Julie Maille
Sets	Pierre Moreau
Costumes	Sarah Meriaux
Hair and Make-up	Bénédicte Trouvé - Sarah Mescoff
Production Director	Ludovic Leiba
General manager	Louis Lemoine
Script supervisor	Virginie Cheval
Production	Mezzanine Films - Mathieu Bompont





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