

LES FILMS DU LENDEMAIN CINEFRANCE & ENTRE CHIEN ET LOUP
PRESENT

Guillaume
CANET

Charlotte
LE BON

Arctic Heart

a film by
Marie MADINIER

English Press-Kit

TFI
INTERNATIONAL

Les Films du Lendemain, Cinéfrance and Entre Chien et Loup presents

CHARLOTTE LE BON

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Arctic Heart

A FILM BY
MARIE MADINIER

ANNE LE NY

PATRICK D'ASSUMÇÃO

DAMIEN CHAPELLE

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SYNOPSIS

Professor Quignard and his research team are studying PPM, an immunizing protein produced by penguins. A slightly awkward and emotional young doctoral student, Christophine, decides to inject herself with the penguin genome, not just to help the professor with his research, but to get closer to him - possibly even become his personal experiment.



INTERVIEW WITH MARIE MADINIER

WHERE DID THE IDEA FOR THE FILM COME FROM?

I wanted to tell a unique love story with roots in the scientific field - a world that is both pragmatic and a bit crazy - where classical means of seduction aren't the norm.

THE METHOD CHRISTOPHINE USES TO WIN THE LOVE OF HER BOSS IS PRETTY RADICAL.

By injecting herself with the penguin genome and becoming his guinea pig, she sacrifices herself for him but in doing so, holds him hostage. This totally contradictory act of hers triggers equally ambiguous reactions from Quignard. Beyond the vested interest he has in doing his experiments on a human, he is struck by the responsibility he has assumed for the young woman, as well as an obvious feeling of guilt. All the typical interdependencies of a love relationship are right there.

IN A WAY, THIS DUO UNITED "FOR SCIENCE" IS AS BURLESQUE AS IT IS TRAGIC.

And that mix of genres, I hope, gives the movie its originality. Their forced cohabitation requires both characters to upend their preconceived notions and invent their own way to love each other. It is because they adhere entirely to values of research and science that Christophine and Quignard manage to form a such an atypical couple, doubting, acting and even going so far as to physically transform themselves. No protocol seems improbable to them: they follow the same quest, which makes their fate extraordinary.

CHRISTOPHINE'S ADMIRATION FOR QUIGNARD IS AS ABSOLUTE AS IT IS ABSTRACT.

For her, Quignard is an unattainable, idealized figure. She must have passed him once or twice in the hallway, but for her, those were real moments of contact; she is convinced that brief memo he leaves is addressed to her. She is frank in the beginning of the movie: her life is probably pretty empty. Christophine has such low self-esteem that she throws her life away for someone else. But the more time she spends with Quignard, the more she adopts his methods and becomes clever, and the balance of power is reversed. Getting prosaically close to Quignard during the protocol, her relationship to him becomes more tangible. The scientific world functions as a metaphor for this idea of love. How do you go from an image, from a fantasy, to a concrete "idealization-free" relationship? I like Christophine's through line: it's the path of a hopeless romantic. Her devotion is touching. She is constantly making sacrifices, which to me makes her all the more brave and moving.

HE IS MUCH LESS LIKEABLE.

He becomes likeable, little by little. During a large part of the movie, Quignard is resistant - he didn't ask for anything and he doesn't even see her. He is intellectually brilliant but not generous, given all his responsibilities, all the things he has to do and think.

Sentimentally, he's a bit autistic. Actually, the scene when she asks him to take part in the protocol is pretty amusing, since he doesn't see himself as a subject, but as a thinking head, an abstraction. It's Christophine's power of self-sacrifice and self-effacement that end up touching him and leading him to question himself. She pushes him out of his comfort zones.

THE DEVOTION THE TEAM AT THE LABORATORY HAS FOR HIS CHARACTER IS ASTONISHING.

Not at all - that's the reality of labs! Quignard is treated like a sort of god because he is charismatic, brilliant and successful. The researchers are all more or less in love with him; they dream of getting access codes to the elevator that ascends to the sanctuary his office represents. The daring part of the film is when Christophine reverses the leadership by holding him hostage. Quignard's all-powerful status is questioned.

Philippe and Nadine, played by Patrick d'Assunção and Anne Le Ny, play a kind of father and mother figure – Quignard is their beloved child. I thought it was funny that this couple who isn't really a couple would be connected through this holy-grail-child. Anne Le Ny, who comes from a family of scientists, was totally in her element in this world of mild madness.

WE ARE REALLY IN TWO TIME ZONES: ON THE ONE HAND, THE SCENES IN THE LABORATORY AND THE GLASS HALL THAT LEADS FROM ONE ROOM TO ANOTHER, LIKE A KIND OF BEEHIVE; AND ON THE OTHER, THE SCENES IN QUIGNARD'S OFFICE, WHERE TIME SEEMS TO STAND STILL.

Exactly. While the common mortals are fussing about below, Quignard and Christophine are completely outside of time. They live in Quignard's office, and actually, the whole lab's architecture revolves about them.

DOES PPM, THAT PENGUIN PROTEIN THE FILM'S HEROES ARE WORKING ON, REALLY EXIST?

It does exist, and its immunizing properties do, too.

I renamed it PPM but its real name is spheniscine. It's a stress protein produced by penguins with powerful antimicrobial properties and different active properties than traditional antibiotics. Researchers plan to use it against cystic fibrosis. I was absolutely determined to base the story on a realistic scientific hypothesis - the beginning of the plot had to be plausible, even if I later distort those facts to pull the viewer into a narrative that's like a fantasy tale. Olivier Danos, who was research director at the CNRS in Paris, helped me to construct a scientifically plausible plot.

DID HE PLAY A ROLE IN THE WRITING OF THE SCREENPLAY?

Yes, because the whole difficulty in writing it was to make the scientific aspect both believable and accessible. Olivier Danos helped me to build the scientific plot and also to grasp the mentality of researchers, who are a bit batty and live in a very special temporality, with their own unique sense of humor. He also helped me a lot by explaining experiments on mice and the different stimuli they can be subjected to: it can be electrical waves, but it can also be making them listen to Johann Sebastian Bach... or making them feel an orgasm. When he told me that, I found the idea so great that I immediately decided the key to PPM's immunity would be pleasure!

SO THAT'S WHERE THE TORTURE SCENES WITH ELECTRODES AND IN THE CYLINDRICAL WATER TANK CAME FROM.

From what Danos told me, I tried to retain the most cinematic elements, the funniest and most visual ones.

LIKE THAT VERY FUNNY LOVE SCENE WITH SIEGFRIED, THE LAB ASSISTANT.

That had a double advantage. It created a misleading plotline by making you think the immunity could only be obtained by doing all those acrobatics that Christophine and Quignard would then have to imitate. It also made for a surprising and incredible love scene. It's very hard to film a love scene. By imagining that choreography, I broke free from certain norms.

HOW DID YOU ACTUALLY FILM THAT?

It was a real challenge to direct. Every movement had to be worked out precisely before we began to shoot. We had contortionists come to the set to train the actors. Charlotte was strapped into certain positions. I chose to film the scene backlit - I wanted it to be visually stark, funny and intriguing.

WHEN HE FINALLY UNDERSTANDS THAT PLEASURE IS THE KEY TO HIS RESEARCH, QUIGNARD IS REALLY WOUNDED.

He is doubly so: he is wounded as a scientist and in his virility. The key was right in front of him and he didn't see it - his assistants found it instead. And he understands that he didn't give Christophine any pleasure. I liked the idea that on a subtextual level, the film talks about feminine orgasm and masculine impotence. But even though he has been humiliated as a person and as a professional, I think he makes up for it in the end.

AN END WITH AN EYE TO FANTASY.

To me, they really find fulfillment in that other world Antarctica is. They break free from the world of man and its ways.

THE SCREENPLAY FOR ARCTIC HEART WON THE SOPADIN JUNIOR AWARD IN 2011, THE YEAR YOU GRADUATED FROM FÉMIS. IT'S AN AMBITIOUS PROJECT FOR A FIRST FILM. WERE YOU AWARE OF THAT WHEN YOU WERE WRITING IT?

No... not really. I gave myself total liberty; I really wanted to experiment and imagine an original, audacious comedy, a little disturbing and irreverent. I love comedy, especially American screwball comedies like **BRINGING UP BABY** and **MONKEY BUSINESS**, for their snappy dialogue, mix-ups and improbable situations. It was only after the fact that I assessed the difficulty involved in terms of production, constructing the sets and bringing in animals.

HOW MANY ANIMALS?

A half a dozen real penguins from Antarctica, which were duplicated in special effects, and nearly 200 laboratory mice. Gaston the baby penguin is an animatronic.

WAS IT EASY TO GET THE FILM MADE?

There was so much enthusiasm for the screenplay, but paradoxically, it was hard to get the movie made. I was lucky Kristina Larsen at Films du Lendemain believed in it. I'd only shot one short film. She asked me to make another one to get my sea legs, get to know director of photography Pascal Marti and some other crew members, and get closer to the actors.

PASCAL MARTI ON CAMERA AND STÉPHANE ROZENBAUM FOR THE SETS - YOU REALLY HAD A ROYAL SELECTION.

I think they were convinced by the originality and poetry of the project. It was a challenge for Stéphane Rozenbaum, Michel Gondry's production designer, to imagine Quignard's office dominating that very stark and poetic artificial Antarctic landscape.

a haven for the penguins but also a reflection of Quignard's clinical and very methodical spirit.

I was very spoiled. I was also very spoiled by the choice of actors. Guillaume Canet and Charlotte Le Bon were immediately enthusiastic about the movie. Guillaume Canet said yes as soon as he finished reading the screenplay. And Charlotte immediately came over from Quebec to meet me.

HOW DID YOU WORK WITH THEM?

Charlotte worked with a coach to find Christophine's posture and awkward, self-effacing body language. She had to be able to hide her femininity. I also asked her to watch Noah Baumbach's *FRANCES HA*, with Greta Gerwig, and Steven Shainberg's **SECRETARY**, with Maggie Gyllenhaal, one of my favorite films. Guillaume had to get familiar with the body language of research technicians. He brought so much to the character of Quignard, who is so full of resistance. He made him subtle, touching and more fragile than he seems.

WEREN'T YOU AFRAID TO GIVE THAT ROLE TO AN ACTOR WHO IS ALSO A DIRECTOR?

Yes, and I told him so before we started shooting. Guillaume immediately reassured me. On the set, he never got involved in directing issues.

TELL US ABOUT THE SPECIAL EFFECTS.

The hardest part was de Charlotte's transformation: we had to flock her whole body with hair, which required 12 hours of preparation during which she had to remain standing and not move.

For the shots on the icefield, we used blue screen. The actors did their scenes on salt. Technically, that was a pretty difficult sequence to set up.

DID YOU HAVE FILM REFERENCES IN MIND WHEN YOU SHOT THE FILM?

Howard Hawks' *BRINGING UP BABY* for its quick, fluid and witty dialogue. I have a huge love for the comedies of Lubitsch and Manckiewicz. *SECRETARY*, by Steven Shainberg, which I mentioned earlier, definitely influenced me as well. In terms of visual influences, I was probably inspired by certain films by Michel Gondry – **HUMAN NATURE**, **ETERNAL SUNSHINE OF THE SPOTLESS MIND** and **THE SCIENCE OF SLEEP** – and the films of Wes Anderson.

WHAT KIND OF DIRECTOR ARE YOU?

I don't know yet, it's my first film. Even if I think I stick to what I want, everyone has the right to talk on my set.

DID THE STORY CHANGE A LOT IN THE EDIT?

No, not really. The set-up was a lot longer in the screenplay. Head editor Guerric Catala and I decided to speed that up to get into the story of the Quignard/Christophine relationship quicker.

A WORD ABOUT THE MUSIC BY STEPHEN WARBECK...

I really liked his work on *POLISSE*, by Maïwenn. Stephen has a very intelligent way of reading into a scene and always has thoughts that work with the dramatic direction. He came to the editing room often. We worked very closely together. He contributed a lot to the movie.



CAST

Charlotte Le Bon	Christophine
Guillaume Canet	Professor Quignard
Anne Le Ny	Nadine
Patrick d'Assunção	Philippe
Damien Chapelle	Siegfried

CREW

Director	Marie Madinier
Director of Photography	Pascal Marti
Sound	Olivier Le Vacon, Paul Heymans, Thomas Gauder
First Assistant Director	Luc Bricault
Production Managers	Albert Blasius, Aude Cathelin
Script	Christelle Meaux
Production Designer	Stéphane Rozenbaum
Costume Designer	Anaïs Romand
Editor	Guerric Catala
Original Music by	Stephen Warbeck
With the support of	Sacem
Delegated Producer	Kristina Larsen
In coproduction with	Diana Elbaum, Sébastien Delloye, François Touwaide, Tanguy Dekeyser
A Franco-Belgian coproduction	Les Films Du Lendemain Entre Chien et Loup
In coproduction with	Cinéfrance, France 2 Cinéma, Proximus
With the participation of	France Télévisions, Canal+, OCS, Centre National du Cinéma et de l'image animée
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