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BY THE DIRECTOR OF **THE INNOCENTS** AND **COCO BEFORE CHANEL**



MOSTRA INTERNAZIONALE  
D'ARTE CINEMATOGRAFICA  
La Biennale di Venezia 2017

Orizzonti  
Competition

# REINVENTING marvin

A FILM BY **ANNE FONTAINE**

FINNEGAN OLDFIELD  
GRÉGORY GADEBOIS  
VINCENT MACAIGNE  
CATHERINE SALÉE  
JULES PORIER  
CATHERINE MOUCHET  
WITH CHARLES BERLING  
WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF  
ISABELLE HUPPERT

**TFI**  
STUDIO



# *Reinventing Marvin*

A film by  
**Anne Fontaine**

**Running Time : 115'**

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## SYNOPSIS

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Martin Clement, born Marvin Bijou, has escaped. He has escaped a little village in the countryside. He has escaped his family, his father's tyranny and his mother's resignation. He has escaped intolerance, rejection and the bullying he suffered from being singled out as "different." Against all odds, he has found allies.

First Madeleine Clement, the middle school principal who introduced him to theater and whose name he will later adopt as a symbol of his salvation.

Then Abel Pinto, his mentor and role model, who will encourage him to tell his story on stage.

Finally, Isabelle Huppert will help him get his show produced and bring it to life. Marvin/Martin will risk everything to create this show that represents so much more than success: it is his path to re-invention.

## INTERVIEW WITH ANNE FONTAINE

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**Though "Marvin" was inspired by "The End of Eddy" by Edouard Louis, your Marvin is not an adaptation of that book. Tell us how the film was born.**

I felt a very strong connection to the hero of the book by Edouard Louis, and I almost immediately felt like I wanted to make his story my own. I wanted to invent a new destiny for him. Explore the way he had to reconstruct himself after such a difficult separation from that family, and that subculture of France, socially and culturally disinherited. Dream up the crucial influences of his teenage years. In short, adapt it so liberally that "Marvin" could no longer be considered an adaptation, though the book was powerful.

**How do you explain the connection that you feel with this character?**

I like the idea that powerful people can escape what they are born into, that nothing is ever predestined or doomed, and that it's possible to transform obstacles into strengths. That is what has always guided me. How do we manage to do that? How do we succeed in transcending difficulties? Those are questions that I, as a completely self-made person, can identify with. Marvin's journey fascinated me as much as Coco Chanel's. She, too, was able to invent herself, though she came from an extremely disadvantaged background.

**Marvin also has to deal with being different. Having nothing in common with his family or classmates, he is totally alone.**

Yes. You'd think he came from another planet. He has the face of an angel, and it's as if his beauty stimulates the cruelty of others. He is an object of sadistic treatment to his classmates and an object of shame to his family. But that grace, that expression of femininity he carries within him - which is the cause of all that violence - is precisely what will feed his creativity and allow him to find his own path.

**Your characterization of the family is never insulting; it even lends them certain humanity.**

I felt it was important not to disparage those characters and pin them down like butterfly specimens. It's their subculture that gave them those often terrifying phrases they say. They do it almost despite themselves; they think from where they stand, with their close-minded languaging. My co-author Pierre Trividic and I didn't want to judge them.

**Despite his ideas, the father is almost touching.**

He says "*faggots are awful... it's a disease.*" He is obsessed with the norm, but you can tell he is not mean. He has never hit his children, which is already progress by comparison to the previous generation. He is never outright violent. He even makes an effort when he takes Marvin to the train station and gives him money to buy Coca-Cola. He tries to be interested, and that makes him moving because we know full well that he doesn't care about theater. That's somewhere else, in another world.



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**You make him, as well as the character of Marvin's mother, truly poetic.**

There is something theatrical about the father. He makes a show of who he is. He's not a hick, as his daughter points out. Strangely enough, there is love in that family. It's lively and complex. Marvin can feed off of that material.

**Which feeds them in return?**

Yes. In the end, the father manages to say the word "gay" and talk about homosexual marriage. He has opened a door.

**The older brother ends up being the only one in the family who is unreachable.**

That is also a possible truth of that subculture: the incredible violence that suddenly breaks out from nothing, from the fact that their little brother was hiding in the church to eat candy. Combined with alcohol and his vision of Marvin (a representation of homosexuality), it triggers in Gerald an irrepressible urge to *bash*. It's a horrible scene. Dramatically, it was important for the parents to step in. But I wouldn't say that Gerald is "unreachable." None of their destinies are set in stone.

**You have never delved into that community.**

Not being from it myself, I did question my own legitimacy. But I brushed that away pretty quickly. You don't have to be in it to talk about it. What is essential is to feel things. And I knew them, in a certain way, through one of my grandmothers, who ran a small business under very tough living conditions and who was culturally very close to the Bijou family -

anti-homo, anti-black, anti-everything. As a kid, that intellectual poverty struck me deeply. But she was also a generous woman with amazing humanity. I loved that grandma and got inspiration from her, of course. Just as I got inspiration from the families I met in the area around Epinal - people who are forgotten, living on the edge in incredible poverty and often very close to the Front National. I really settled into the region and stay put. That was the best way to understand it from the inside. Though I'm not obsessed by the documentary aspect, what I showed had to ring true.

**You never overtly refer to the attraction these people have for the Front National.**

No, because it's implied. You infer it. I preferred to insist upon the cultural poverty: the TV being on all the time, sometimes several TVs in different rooms and the radio constantly running. The sound and the hardship of that life.

**Culture becomes a part of the hero's life from the time he meets the Principal of his middle school (Catherine Mouchet), who leads him to his French teacher's acting class.**

Their meeting is the trigger that allows Marvin to break out of the fatality of scholastic stagnation. All it takes is his teacher asking him to act out something he saw - a very simple request - for Marvin to begin to break free. He discovers his calling and in a certain sense, signs his birth certificate. It's lovely to see that little boy, who hears his father saying "*I don't give a fuck*" all day long, suddenly start reciting Labiche and Victor Hugo.

**Aren't the characterizations of the principal, who follows Marvin throughout his teen years, and that French teacher who leads an acting class, a bit too ideal?**

I had already written those roles before I went scouting in the area around Epinal. I was there to look for kids for the group scenes and a middle school to shoot some of them in. I met teachers who reassured me about the positions I took, and above all, I met an extraordinary principal, Mr. Brézillon. He is the one in the film who introduces Catherine Mouchet to the class. I have endless admiration for that man, and for the way he uses culture to try to motivate his students. Watching him work with some of them, hearing him talk about their lives and the way he conceives of his profession, I sometimes had tears in my eyes. It's lucky that people like him, who are capable of really looking at others and opening up a field of possibilities, do exist. It's important to meet people who are actually involved in the subject you are working on. It's inspiring.

**Another crucial moment is when he meets Abel, his professor at the Conservatory, during a conference.**

He hears Abel use precise terms to express the exile he has experienced since childhood, and it's as if all his difficulty in owning it resurfaces all at once - like a catharsis. Up until then, he had to build his identity upon something he couldn't name. Thanks to Abel, who Vincent Macaigne has endowed with a lot of humor, irony and warmth, Marvin will learn how to use his troubled childhood. He can move forward.

**Abel appears quite early in the film. Why did you choose a structure that makes different eras of the hero's life constantly collide with one another?**

Even if I have seen, just like everyone has, some extraordinary "social" films, I deliberately excluded the idea of making a chronological and naturalistic film. I was constantly saying to Pierre Trividic: *"It has to dance!"* I was less interested in what would happen to Marvin - even if we are obviously curious to see what will happen - than I was in *how*: how the people he meets are going to change the direction he takes; how a single phrase, if you can make it your own, can reveal who you are. *"What is important,"* as Catherine Mouchet's character says to Marvin, *"is what is hidden so deep inside yourself you don't know it,"* and that is exactly the film's approach.

All that back-and-forth between different eras of Marvin's life seemed to be the ideal method of showing the double process that leads him to build his identity and create a work of art based on his own existence. It creates a dynamic that viewers can play with and lightens up the film.

**We hardly notice it when we switch from one era to another. What did you do to create that impression of fluidity?**

We had to find the right tie-ins and sometimes dare to break away, or on the contrary, make the different periods mix together and almost overlap. Like accepting that Marvin's child voice covers Marvin's adult voice, even though it is totally unrealistic. Finding secret webs that link different eras to one another. Another challenge was switching so quickly from one state to another, without doing it systematically, either. Those were fascinating mechanics to invent.

**By playing the characters of his parents, Marvin relives scenes from his childhood. He draws them out and develops them to the point of making the mind-blowing work of art that he performs with Isabelle Huppert at the Bouffes du Nord.**

The story works interactively. As Marvin puts his play together, he gains distance from the events he is revisiting. He isn't inventing anything; he is transcribing what he experienced. *"Sometimes, things exist only for those who feel them,"* he says to the journalist who interviews him. The suffering is still there, but he rises above it and gives it a theatrical existence, which liberates him.

**The text he creates from his mother's description of his birth is absolutely incredible.**

Yes. All that reinterpretation work was really needed to assess his development as an author.

**This was the first time you collaborated with Pierre Trividic.**

I knew Pierre's work and his penchant for complex narratives, especially in the films of Pascale Ferran and Patrice Chéreau, so he seemed to be the appropriate screenwriter. I enjoyed working with him enormously.



**The body is an embarrassing subject for Marvin at first, then an experimental subject when he kisses the girl in his acting class. It becomes taboo again when he sees a dance performance as a student. It plays a very important role throughout.**

Discovering your sexuality is quite a strange adventure when you grow up in a place like he did, when you feel different and you are constantly stigmatized because you look like a girl. Marvin is constantly confronted. By people who cheer him on or torture him. By shows such as the strip tease scene at the fair or the dance performance (choreographed by Richard Brunel, Director of the Comédie de Valence). Or later on, by the arrival of the homosexual character played by Charles Berling, whom he meets in a gay nightclub. Right from the opening credits, the body is present. It was essential to dramatize it and show the sensuality it arouses in this young man. That is also the reason I didn't want to make him a writer.

**It is only after he meets Roland, played by Charles Berling, that Marvin finally owns his homosexuality. You don't insist upon that theme very much.**

I didn't want the film to be centered on that alone. Not that I don't find it interesting, but because I preferred exploring how he is different in a larger sense.



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**In his relationship with Roland, Marvin could, as Abel tells him, sink into "the throes of agony of the little low-class fag who finds an easy way out." He doesn't, though. Instead, he takes a crucial step forward.**

He could lose himself in that universe full of rich and famous people, where he doesn't know the rules. Roland makes his head spin and reminds him where he comes from, which he is ashamed of. It's not very pleasant to hear yourself say you need to get your teeth fixed. And yet, Marvin succeeds in transcending his circumstances without brushing his background away with the back of his hand, and without feeling a need for revenge. That is very important. He no longer judges things the way he did when he was a kid. He has distanced himself. When he sees his father again, we feel a dialogue beginning for the first time.

Charles Berling, who I have made two films with – "Dry Cleaning" and "How I Killed My Father" – doesn't appear much, but he gives the character of Roland a lot of depth, brilliance and freedom. And he is the one who puts Isabelle Huppert on Marvin's path.

**How did you get the idea of offering her the part of playing herself?**

I thought it was interesting for Marvin to meet a woman from the theater, and Isabelle was an obvious choice from the earliest writing stage. It seemed self-evident. I didn't know if she would say yes, but I couldn't see anyone else in the role, which is small but very important - she literally reverses Marvin's destiny. I think she was very touched by the film.

**Tell us about Finnegan Oldfield and Jules Porier, the two actors who play Marvin.**

I discovered Finnegan in "Bang Gang" by Eva Husson and "Les Cowboys" by Thomas Bidegain. I had him do several screen tests – with Gregory Gadebois especially - and didn't hesitate long. Finnegan is an exceptional person. His story is exceptional, and his beauty is, too. I liked his indecisive relationship to femininity and virility, and the way he walks, almost like he's levitating.

And I was completely love-struck by Jules Porier. I started looking for him way ahead of time. The role was complex, and the actor playing him had to be able to express a lot of emotions as well as a certain vulnerability - all with very little dialogue. He also had to have a certain physical resemblance to Finnegan. Jules was already in improvisation classes and responded on his own to the ad we posted on the internet. He really wanted to get into film work.

**How did you prepare for the film with the two Marvins?**

First by trying to build up their physical resemblance in the most subtle way possible: I dyed their hair red, I worked on their flesh tones and freckles, and I filmed them together a long time. Making the resemblance work was of the utmost necessity - the viewer shouldn't have the slightest doubt about their identity.

Next, I asked Finnegan to prepare physically, with dance and gymnastic classes, to perfect the body awareness he already had naturally. He and I worked a lot on his character,

especially the scenes where he is alone in his student housing and the ones where he is on stage at the Bouffes du Nord. He needed direction - it reassured him.

One month before shooting began Jules, Grégory Gadebois, Catherine Salée and I left to do rehearsals in the Bijou family home. For four weeks, we tested the dialogue, worked out the violent scenes and did a lot of real searching. I had already used that method making "The Innocents" and I've become attached to it. It allows you to create connections between the actors, get right into the subject matter and explore possibilities without the obligation of producing results. It gives you freedom.



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**There are a lot of characters in the film.**

And a lot of actors with important roles. "Marvin" probably has the most out of any film I've made.

**You had already worked with Vincent Macaigne on "The Innocents," but it's your first time directing Grégory Gadebois, Catherine Salée and Catherine Mouchet.**

More and more, I like mixing together well-known and lesser-known actors. I liked Grégory Gadebois so much that we are going to be on another film together very soon. And I love the friendliness Catherine Salée projects. Even though she doesn't understand her son at all, I wanted the audience to feel empathy for Marvin's mother.

As for Catherine Clément's character, she couldn't be a run-of-the-mill principal. She's not your Mrs. Everywoman. I envisioned a few different actresses for the role, but when I met

Catherine Mouchet, I couldn't resist. She has a fire in her eye, the same one she had in Alain Cavalier's "Thérèse." With the poetry, uniqueness, and above all, mystery that she brings to the role, as small as it may be, she succeeds in making a powerful impact. She is a rare actress.

**There are also many non-professional actors in "Marvin" - a lot of children.**

Including the young girl who does a scene with Marvin, and who is really great. I was very attached to having them interact like that with the other actors. When I chose them and learned about their lives, they brought me even closer to my subject.

**You filmed in the Vosges Mountains. Why that particular region?**

I didn't want to go to Northern France, where most films that touch upon social hardship are shot. I was somewhat familiar with Belfort, from making "Dry Cleaning." Epinal wasn't far from there. I like the landscapes in that region, their kind of raw beauty. It adds something to the film.

**Tell us how it was shooting the film.**

For reasons linked to Isabelle's schedule, I began with the scene at the Bouffes du Nord. The next day, I was in the Vosges Mountains with the kids who bully Marvin in middle school. In two days, I had gone from one extreme to the other: the stylized version and the brutality of action. That immediately gave me the film's keynote - the right chord to strike.

**It was your first time working with Yves Angelo.**

I didn't want naturalistic cinematography. On the contrary, I wanted the image to be very subtly stylized. It was fairly complicated to define. Like me, Yves likes to explore and try different things.

**Did you give him any references?**

I told him about the trilogy in black and white by Bill Douglas ["My Childhood," "My Ain Folk," and "My Way Home" -- Ed.], which takes place in a community of Scottish miners and has an extremely pure vision of childhood. I saw a truth in it which inspired us enormously. We had to avoid the traps of satire and pessimism.

Yves is an extremely cultured individual. You can talk with him forever about meaning. We opted for a 1.6 crop factor, a format no longer in use, to make the framing tighter and bring in more characters. We did quite subtle work on the color and the grain, which differs depending upon whether we are in Marvin's past or present. We also chose to use older lenses, which are more "vulnerable" than the ones currently used.

**We are with the character all the time.**

We stick with him at every age. The story is really told from his point of view. Even when he is not on screen, we need to feel that he is both the subject and, in a certain sense, the author of the film we are watching. That requires special filming methods, such as shooting

hand-held, but done with finesse so that it fuses with the character, the framing always slightly offset. You don't see that it's slightly off - the viewer has to feel it in his bones.

**There is a lot of invention in the film. Those projections on Marvin's bedroom wall when he is writing, for example.**

Yves and I were looking for a way to represent the imaginary, and the act of creation, without necessarily using the text. We imagined projecting images of Marvin's childhood on the wall of his small room - images from different generations, which we feel like we are seeing a bit backwards - by filming them live, as if he were physically in contact with his childhood. The result borders on special effects but blends well with the structure of the film, which is constantly playing with poetic allegory. It was a very exciting experiment for us to try out.

**With such a sophisticated structure, were there any particular issues in the edit?**

I had carried the film's structure around inside me during the writing and the filming. I would have been devastated if we had needed to re-edit everything according to a classic dramatic structure at that point. But except for a few adjustments, we remained very faithful to the original plan.

**From pop music to opera, there is a lot of music in the film, but none of it is original.**

The music had to give the film energy, rhythm and movement. I wanted it to be modern and varied, and correspond to Marvin's generation. It works like a sugar rush: we should never at any time feel like Marvin is going to get bogged down.

**"Marvin" is truly an ode to art and culture.**

That is what guided me throughout the film, from the choice of subject to its final form.

# FILMOGRAPHY

## ANNE FONTAINE

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**Les Innocentes (2016)**

Agnus Dei /The Innocents

**Gemma Boveri (2014)**

**Perfect Mothers (2013)**

**Mon pire cauchemar (2011)**

My Worst Nightmare

**Coco avant Chanel (2009)**

Coco Before Chanel

**La Fille de Monaco (2008)**

The Girl From Monaco

**Entre ses mains (2006)**

In His Hands

**Nouvelle chance (2005)**

Oh La La!

**Nathalie (2004)**

**Comment j'ai tué mon père (2001)**

How I Killed my Father

**Augustin, roi du kung-fu (1999)**

Augustin, King of Kung-Fu

**Nettoyage à sec (1997)**

Dry Cleaning

**L'amour est à réinventer (1996)**

Love Reinvented

**Augustin (1995)**

**Les Histoires d'amour finissent mal... en général (1993)**

Love Affairs Usually End Badly

# CAST

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Marvin (adult) .....	<b>Finnegan Oldfield</b>
Dany .....	<b>Grégory Gadebois</b>
Abel Pinto .....	<b>Vincent Macaigne</b>
Odile .....	<b>Catherine Salée</b>
Marvin ((Kid) .....	<b>Jules Porier</b>
Madeleine Clément .....	<b>Catherine Mouchet</b>
Roland .....	<b>Charles Berling</b>
<b>With the participation of</b>	
Isabelle Huppert .....	<b>Isabelle Huppert</b>



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# CREW

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Director ..... Anne Fontaine  
Screenplay..... Anne Fontaine & Pierre Trividic  
Director of Photography..... Yves Angelo  
Sound..... Brigitte Taillandier & Jean-Pierre Laforce  
Editor..... Annette Dutertre  
Costume Design..... Elise Ancion

## **Producers**

Ciné@ - Philippe Carcassonne,  
P.A.S. Productions - Pierre-Alexandre Schwab  
F Comme Film - Jean-Louis Livi

## **Sales agent**

TF1 STUDIO – Sabine Chemaly

## **French distributor**

MARS FILMS

## **French release date**

November 22, 2017