



Locarno Festival
Official selection

Wonders in the Suburbs



A Comedy by
JEANNE BALIBAR

FILM(S) and VITO FILMS present



Locarno Festival
Official selection

**EMMANUELLE
BÉART**

**RAMZY
BEDIA**

**JEANNE
BALIBAR**

Wonders in the Suburbs

WITH

**MATHIEU AMALRIC • ANTHONY BAJON
JEAN-QUENTIN CHATELAIN • FRANÇOIS CHATTOT
ALASSANE DIONG • VALÉRIE DRÉVILLE
FLORENCE LOIRET CAILLE • MOUNIR MARGOUM
DENIS MPUNGA • BULLE OGIER • MARLÈNE SALDANA**

WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF

FRANK CASTORF and PHILIPPE KATERINE

A Comedy by

JEANNE BALIBAR



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After a long separation, Joëlle and Kamel finally divorce, but both are on the staff of Emmanuelle Joly, the newly elected mayor of Montfermeil, an underprivileged town on the outskirts of Paris. The mayor's team gets to work implementing the wonders she promised on the campaign trail: naps for all; crops on rooftops; sexual assistance in the home; harmonization of humans' breathing; Montfermeil International School of Languages, and so on. But dangerous enemies resolutely sabotage these fine policies as Paris plans its expansion, and Madam Mayor slowly slips into depression. Will we have a wonderful Brioche Day this year?



Interview with JEANNE BALIBAR



/ The originality of tone of *Merveilles à Montfermeil* and the precise whimsicality of the writing and directing suggest that this project is the fruit of a long thought-process, an idea that has been nurtured and refined. There is a sense that the film, the idea, goes way back.

Oh la la, absolutely. The original idea dates back to 2012, but the origins go even further back. Around the mid-2000s, actor-director Rabah Ameur-Zaïmeche offered me a part in a film he was going to shoot in Algeria. The working title was *Bled Zero*. I was slated to play a high-class hooker in a hotel in Constantine, but when I flew in, Rabah's creative juices were in full flow and he told me he'd changed the whole story. I would in fact play an attorney, Joelle, who is having a love affair with his character, Kamel. I said, sure, no problem. I love it when things veer off at a tangent, and I think that the totally improvised scenes we shot in the following ten days were truly extraordinary. Toward the end of the shoot, however, when we broke for lunch one day, I shared with Rabah something that suddenly struck me with full clarity: despite

the extraordinary quality of what we had shot, the film wouldn't accept it and Rabah would not manage to cut the scenes into his film. Either he didn't believe or didn't grasp what I was saying, but he called me six months later to say I was right. What we had shot was super strong but the film had switched perspective, and the title had changed to *Bled Number One (Back Home)*. I had sensed it. But I never forgot how magnificent everything we had shot seemed to me. One day, I thought I could write a film that would take up the story of those two characters and use the footage we had shot to show their relationship in the past, but I soon gave up on the idea because Ramzy quickly became the obvious choice to play Kamel. Rabah, however, contributed the setting, because the choice of Montfermeil is linked to him. That was where I did research and workshops with local people.

/ What were the other decisive moments in the film's conception?

The first thing that comes to mind was the urge to make something verging on a

personal form of musical. I always pictured it as a musical comedy, whose songs would be languages: different languages, different registers of language—business speak, jargon, school poetry. It's not a musical in the standard form. But without playing on words, it is literally a comedy founded on the principle of musicality. My mind also went back a lot to Lubitsch and *The Shop Around the Corner*, from which I allowed myself some literal translations. They are not quotes, but interpretations. I like the term (and practice) of translation. In music, for example, I have translated lots of jazz standards, mostly for my own pleasure. I like transpositions. I translate without translating. I adapt. And the process moves me.

/ In actual fact, the comedy turns out to be a romantic comedy revolving around your character's (Joelle's) relationship with Ramzy Bedia as Kamel.

That was the other thing at the forefront of my mind: the remarriage comedy, a classic Hollywood subgenre that expertly deploys conjugality as a way to take an in-depth look at serious issues. I like the idea of the two lovers reconciling through their takes



on the world as it is and how it could be. That interests me and is important to me: reconciliation and new beginnings. Not from a strictly personal or psychological point of view but because it is a politically optimistic outlook.

/ So there was also, necessarily, a desire to make a political statement?

The film clearly puts forward a definite political agenda that is ironic yet benevolent. I wanted the story to have at its core this new team taking power in City Hall full of good intentions but badly affected by the complete disarray engulfing the newly elected mayor, Emmanuelle Joly, who has ultimate responsibility and is played by Emmanuelle Béart. A dizzying whirl of difficulties sucks her in and nearly drives her to madness and totalitarianism, and even a suicide attempt.

/ Did you want to wake people up? Shake them up? Or make fun of things?

I believe as strongly in the power of satire as in that of films to help us change the world. My way of thinking, however, is more tuned into how we all play a part or



live or are free together—even more than wondering what liberals or conservatives could do to get us out of this situation. There are some very good ideas in the film, such as teaching mathematics in Arabic, which would radically cut school dropout rates, or the Montfermeil International School of Languages, which could be rolled out in many, many cities in France. But above all I wanted to create a satirical, positive and accepting utopia. I wanted to tell the story of people coming together to create their own safe space from a world that drives them crazy. But perhaps the most political aspect is an idea that I hold very dear: keep spreading the news that it is very easy to do things together if you want—much easier and more joyful than you might imagine. Joy is something we need. It's something we all need. First of all, to counteract hate

speech, to impose joy as a tangible reality to counteract the morbidity and hatred that permeate all that is spewed out at us every day.

/ The whimsical aspect does not stop your film from being powerfully rooted in the raw reality of the modern world, with its urban and human landscapes, backdrops and faces.

I was very keen to have that double dimension. I wasn't consciously aware of the template being Italian comedies, such as *Down and Dirty* or *The Scientific Cardplayer*, but Martine Marignac pointed out to me the proximity to a strain of 1970s political Italian comedy. Then, of course, it became self-evident. Yes, I think she was right. There is a blend of theatricality and powerful intrusions of real life, which lay



down the reality of the world, just like in some Shakespeare comedies, where you find yourself in an imaginary, fantasy environment, and then the world comes crashing in.

/ “After all we endured, what do we want? Reassurance,” says Kamel, your love-interest in the film. And it’s a line that may be less simple or naive than it seems.

Recently, I showed *Merveilles à Montfermeil* to a little girl I know well. She enjoyed it, I think, but she felt bad for me because Joelle my character was too naive. In some ways, she’s right, but I’m comfortable with a level of naivety. In fact, I advocate it. I’m one of those people who think that it’s not smart never to be taken for a ride! It reminds me of the famous Lacan quote, “The non-dupes err.” If you are too lucid, you become cynical. You need to be

slightly simple, dopey or gullible not to wander off track and get completely lost. That’s a real issue in the fields of love and politics, where there is also the question of faith and belief. If you don’t trust your need for assurance, you miss out on something: that is partly what that line and the characters are expressing.

/ Talking of the craziness that sometimes overwhelms us, how does one go about guiding an actress like Emmanuelle Béart into the extraordinary display of pyrotechnics that you obtain from her in what one might call her big scene, the meltdown?

Ah ha! Trade secret. I won’t say a word. All I can say is that I have methods that Philippe Katerine tagged as “special.” Often these methods surprise people, and that amuses them, but they are all tried-and-



tested methods that I myself use as an actress. For that particular scene, all I can tell you is that, as for every other scene, I never ask the actors to do what’s on the page, always something completely different.

/ With regard to the casting of Emmanuelle Béart, you were her last-minute replacement on Jacques Rivette’s *Va Savoir*. Is there a form of reparation, or at least an amicable loop, in the fact that you are directing her today?

There are two answers to that. First, it was a professional choice to write the role for her from the start because she possesses a unique combination as a magnificent actress with comic range, which means she is made to play this character precisely because she takes the world’s political realities so seriously while also capturing the comedic, offbeat or downright absurd

dimension of the character. For something to be funny, it must be taken very, very seriously, which is true of Emmanuelle with regard to politics. Only she could make the character possible. Great actors are not cast to play roles; they make films possible. I suppose I did settle unfinished business we had with Rivette. Before he fell ill, Jacques told us both, Emmanuelle and I, that he wanted to write something for us, make a film with us both together. We never got the chance to make it, and most likely that film contributed extra impetus to mine.

/ More generally, the film showcases the actresses of Rivette’s movies.

Yes, and the most Rivettian of them all is undoubtedly Florence Loiret-Caille, who appears to develop clear affinities and even an intimate, personal connection with Juliet Berto, even though she didn’t know her!

/ You mentioned your producer Martine Marignac, another “Rivette woman.” What was her influence on your project?

Decisive at every turn. If some producers have a body of work, it is certainly true of Martine Marignac. There is a kind of logic to her filmography, a connection between the films she has produced, which do not need to resemble each other to resonate with a sense of forming one human community and expressing the same desire for freedom. Martine was behind *Merveilles à Montfermeil* all the way, constantly supporting it, never giving up, despite all the delays that nearly made me abandon the project. She knew exactly how to keep me from being disheartened. That sums her up. Come what may, she is for the film, even if it means being against me!

/ Kamel is played by the beguiling, airy Ramzy Bedia.

To my mind, and not only mine, Ramzy is as unique an actor, in terms of quality of performance, as James Stewart. He possesses class and style to such a degree that he naturally embodies a sort of ideal citizen. He has the nobility of the eternal everyman, and the sex appeal that goes with it. As a result, he also makes films possible. More particularly, in France, he makes possible comedies about the dark side of the world in the vein of *It's A Wonderful Life*. On set, I didn't tell him he reminded me of James Stewart. I kept telling him to think of Robert Mitchum, in the knowledge that it would bring out his dazzling James Stewart side. “Special methods!”

/ The casting seems to mix and match different generations of actors, with the icon Bulle Ogier reigning over them.

Whatever the actor's age, their casting is determined by my taste both for individuals and diversity. On this film, Bulle had the halo of Lillian Gish, a benevolent icon, a fairy godmother, watching over us. The best thing about her is that in her performance, she completely escapes any sort of predestination: she is no longer an icon. She has that unique talent, an art that is both real and singular, of making the implausible possible. For the film, it was very important that she succeeded in making a reality out of a quantity of nonsensical things. She turns incoherence into a work of wonder. And she is the only one performing this service for the film.

/ A documentary about you by Pedro Costa has the very beautiful title *Ne change rien (Don't Change a Thing)*. How did you understand that?

The title always moved me. And it always brought to my mind, in reverse, a line said by the old leopard Lancaster in Visconti's adaptation of *Lampedusa*, “Everything needs to change, so everything can stay the same.” Pedro is telling me the opposite: don't change a thing, so everything can change. Not easy to abide by, but flattering. And stimulating. ■

Interview by OLIVIER SÉGURET





CAST

Emmanuelle JOLY - **EMMANUELLE BÉART** • Kamel MRABTI - **RAMZY BÉDIA** • Joëlle MRABTI
JEANNE BALIBAR • Benoit SURVENANT - **MATHIEU AMALRIC** • Guillaume DESSAILLY
 - **ANTHONY BAJON** • Jean-Michel DUPIN - **JEAN-QUENTIN CHATELAIN** • Denis
 JAFFRET - **FRANÇOIS CHATTOT** • Jim - **ALASSANE DIONG** • Virginie JAFFRET - **VALÉRIE**
DRÉVILLE • Juliette BEDOULT - **FLORENCE LOIRET CAILLE** • Selim BOUAZZI - **MOUNIR**
MARGOUM • Souleymane N'GON M'BA - **DENIS MPUNGA** • Delphine SOURICEAU
 - **BULLE OGIER** • Marilyn BOUAZZI - **MARLÈNE SALDANA** • With the participation of
FRANK CASTORF and **PHILIPPE KATERINE**



CREW

Directed by **JEANNE BALIBAR** • Written by **JEANNE BALIBAR** and **CAMILLE FONTAINE**
 Cinematography **ANDRÉ CHEMETOFF** • 1st assistant director **JULIE GOUET** • Editor
CAROLINE DETOURNAY • Sound designer **MATHIEU VILLIEN** • Casting Director
MARION TOUITOU • Set Designer **DAMIEN RONDEAU** • Costume Designer **MARION**
MORICE • Production **FILM(S) | MATHIEU AMALRIC, MARTINE MARIGNAC - VITO**
Films | ISAAC SHARRY • Production Manager **CHRISTIAN LAMBERT** • Original score
DAVID NEERMAN • In coproduction with **LES FILMS DU CAP, LES FILS DE, RECTANGLE**
PRODUCTIONS • In association with **CINEMAGE 13, CINECAP 2** • With the participation
 of **CINÉ +, CENTRE NATIONAL DU CINÉMA ET DE L'IMAGE ANIMÉE ET DU**
FONDS IMAGES DE LA DIVERSITÉ – COMMISSARIAT GÉNÉRAL À L'ÉGALITÉ DES
TERRITOIRES • French distribution & international sales **LES FILMS DU LOSANGE**

EMMANUELLE BEART *(Selective filmography)*

L'Étreinte by Ludovic BERGERY • **Bye bye Blondie** by Virginie DESPENTES • **The Witnesses** by André TÉCHINÉ • **Family hero** by Thierry KLIFA • **The Art of breaking up** by Michel DEVILLE • **Nathalie...** by Anne FONTAINE • **Strayed** by André TÉCHINÉ • **8 Women** by François OZON • **Replay** by Catherine CORSINI • **Sentimental destinies** by Olivier ASSAYAS • **Marcel Proust's time regained** by Raoul RUIZ • **Season's beatings** by Danièle THOMPSON • **A french woman** by Régis WARGNIER • **Nelly and Monsieur Arnaud** by Claude SAUTET • **The torment** by Claude CHABROL • **A Heart in winter** by Claude SAUTET • **The beautiful troublemaker** by Jacques RIVETTE • **Jean de Florette** and **Manon de Sources** by Claude BERRI

RAMZY BÉDIA *(Selective filmography)*

Battle of the classes by Michel LECLERC • **Taxi 5** by Franck GASTAMBIDE • **The Lords** by Olivier DAHAN • **Porn in the hood** by Franck GASTAMBIDE • **Halal state security** by Rachid DHIBOU • **Bacon on the side** by Anne de PETRINI • **The Concert** by Radu MIHAIELANU • **Neuilly yo Mama!** by Gabriel JULIEN-LAFERRIÈRE • **2 Alone in Paris** by Éric JUDOR and Ramzy BEDIA • **The Daltons** by Philippe HAÏM • **French spies** by Gérard PIRÈS • **Don't die to hard!** by Charles NEMES

BULLE OGIER *(Selective filmography)*

Belle always by Manoel de OLIVEIRA • **Boomerang** by François FAVRAT • **Bed and breakfast** by Claude DUTY • **Confusion of genders** by Ilan Duran COHEN • **The Color of lies** by Claude CHABROL • **Don't forget you're going to die** by Xavier BEAUVOIS • **See how they fall** by Jacques AUDIARD • **Mistress** by Barbet SCHROEDER • **The Third generation** by Rainer WERNER FASSBINDER • **The Discreet charm of the bourgeoisie** by Luis BUNUEL • **The Salamander** by Alain TANNER

MATHIEU AMALRIC *(Selective filmography)*

Sink or swim by Gilles LELLOUCHE • **Struggle for life** by Antonin PERETJATKO • **Families** by Jean-Paul RAPPENEAU • **My golden days** by Arnaud DESPLECHIN • **The Blue room** by Mathieu AMALRIC • **The Grand Budapest Hotel** by Wes ANDERSON • **Love is the perfect crime** by Arnaud et Jean-Marie LARRIEU • **Jimmy P. Psychotherapy of a plains indian** by Arnaud DESPLECHIN • **On tour** by Mathieu AMALRIC • **Mesrine part 2 : Public enemy #1** by Jean-François RICHET • **Quantum of Solace** by Marc FORSTER • **A Christmas tale** by Arnaud DESPLECHIN • **Kings and Queen** by Arnaud DESPLECHIN

FLORENCE LOIRET CAILLE *(Selective filmography)*

The Aquatic effect by Sólveig ANSPACH • **The Bureau** (TV Serie) by Eric Rochant • **Queen of Montreuil** by Sólveig ANSPACH • **The Queen of clubs** by Jérôme BONNELL • **A Real Life** by Sarah LEONOR • **Someone I loved** by Zabou BREITMAN • **Let it rain** by Agnès JAOUÏ • **Waiting for someone** by Jérôme BONNELL • **The Little Bedroom** by Stéphanie CHUAT, Véronique REYMOND • **Only the night** by Xavier GIANNOLI • **Time of the wolf** by Michael HANEKE • **Olga's Chignon** by Jérôme BONNELL • **Trouble every day** by Claire DENIS • **Code unknown** by Michael HANEKE

ANTHONY BAJON

You deserve a lover by Hafsia HERZI • **In the name of the land** by Edouard BERGEON • **Sweetheart** by Jérémie SEGUIN • **The prayer** by Cédric KAHN • **You deserve a lover** by Hafsia HERZI • **The children of chance** by Malik CHIBANE



JEANNE BALIBAR

• BIOGRAPHY •

Jeanne Balibar studied at the Conservatoire Supérieur National d'Art Dramatique in Paris. After being part of the Comédie Française for a time, she has been directed by the greatest stage directors in France and abroad.

She also worked with the greatest film directors : *Pedro Costa, Pierre Léon, Pia Marais, Arnaud Desplechin, Bruno Podalydès, Laurence Ferreira Barbosa, Mathieu Amalric, Olivier Assayas, Jean-Claude Biette, Benoît Jacquot, Jeanne Labrune, Raoul Ruiz, Jacques Rivette, Diane Kurys, Olivier Dahan, Pawel Pawlikowski...*

Thanks to these roles, she has been nominated at the César Awards Academy four times (1997, 1998, 2001 et 2009) before winning the Best Actress Award in 2018 for *Barbara* directed by Mathieu Amalric, the Best Actress Award at the 1997 Thessaloniki Film Festival and the 1998 San Sebastian Film Festival, as well as the Best Actress Award at the Buenos Aires Film Festival (BAFICI) in 2009.

In 2018, she directs her first feature film, *Wonders in the Suburbs*, in which she stars alongside Emmanuelle Béart, Ramzy Bedia and Mathieu Amalric.

• ACTRESS •

2018 - **Les Misérables** by Ladj Ly • **Wonders in the suburbs** by Jeanne Balibar • 2017 - **Cold war** by Pawel Pawlikowski (*Best Director Award – Cannes Film Festival 2018 / Nominated for Best Foreign Language Film – César 2019 / Nominated for Best Foreign Language Film – Academy Awards 2019*) • 2016 - **Barbara** by Mathieu Amalric (*Best Actress – Prix Lumières 2018 / Best Actress – César 2018*) • 2009 - **At Ellen's age** by Pia Marais (*Best Actress – Bafici Festival, Buenos Aires*) • 2008 - **Change nothing** by Pedro Costa (*Directors' Fortnight – Cannes Film Festival 2009*) • **L'Idiot** by Pierre Leon • 2007 - **All about actresses** by Maïwenn • **The joy of singing** by Ilan Duran Cohen • **Sagan** by Diane Kurys (*Nominated for Best Supporting Actress – César 2009*) • 2006 - **Don't touch the axe** by Jacques Rivette (*Official Selection – Berlin Film Festival 2007*) • 2003 - **Saltimbank** by Jean-Claude Biette • 2001 - **Who knows?** by Jacques Rivette (*Official Selection – Cannes Film Festival 2001*) • **Le stade de wimbledon** by Mathieu Amalric • 2000 - **Comedy of innocence** by Raoul Ruiz • **Tomorrow's another Day** by Jeanne Labrune (*Nominated for Best Supporting Actress - César 2001*) • 1999 - **Trois ponts sur la rivière** by Jean-Claude Biette • 1998 - **Late august, early september** by Olivier Assayas (*Best Actress Award - San Sebastian Film Festival 1998*) • **Only god sees me** by Bruno Podalydès (*Best Actress Award – Thessaloniki International Film Festival , Greece*) • 1997 - **Mange ta soupe** by Mathieu Amalric • **I can't stand love** by Laurence Ferreira barbosa (*Nominated for Most Promising Actress - César 1998*) • 1996 - **My sex life... Or how i got into an argument** by Arnaud Desplechin (*Official Selection – Cannes Film Festival 1996 • Nominated for Most Promising Actress - César 1997*)

• WRITER / DIRECTOR •

2018 - **Wonders in the Suburbs**



