

CinéFile presents

THE HEDGEHOG

(LE HÉRISSON)(12A)

A film by Mona Achache Inspired by Muriel Barbery's bestseller "The Elegance of the Hedgehog"
("L'Élégance du Hérisson" - © 2006 Editions Gallimard)

Running time: 98 min

French with English Subtitles

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About The Film

Short Synopsis:

Inspired by the beloved New York Times bestseller, *The Elegance of the Hedgehog*, by Muriel Barbery, *THE HEDGEHOG* is the timely story of Paloma (Garance Le Guillermic) a young girl bent on ending it all on her upcoming twelfth birthday. Using her father's old camcorder to chronicle the hypocrisy she sees in adults, Paloma begins to learn about life from the grumpy building concierge, Renée Michel (*FRENCH TWIST's Josiane Balasko*). When Paloma's camera reveals the extensive secret library in Renée's back room, and that the often gruff matron reads Tolstoy to her cat, Paloma begins to understand that there are allies to be found beneath the prickliest of exteriors. As the unlikely friendship deepens, Paloma's own coming of age becomes a much less pessimistic prospect.

Long Synopsis:

Inspired by Muriel Barbery's beloved New York Times bestseller, *The Elegance of the Hedgehog*, comes the touching coming-of-age story *THE HEDGEHOG*. *THE HEDGEHOG* was the winner of the Seattle International Film Festival Space Needle Award for Best Picture as well as the FilmFest DC and Col-Coa Film Festival Audience Winner. Mona Achache's feature film debut, *THE HEDGEHOG* also garnered a Best of Fest mention at this year's Palm Springs International Film Festival.

Starring Josiane Balasko, Togo Igawa, Anne Brochet and newcomer Garance Le Guillermic, *THE HEDGEHOG* is the touching coming-of-age story of Paloma, a gifted and expressive young girl bent on finding a way out of her cold bourgeois life. To accomplish this goal and achieve maximum dramatic effect, she sees no other solution but to end it all on her upcoming twelfth birthday. Using her father's old camcorder to chronicle the hypocrisy she sees in adults, Paloma begins to learn about life from her building's dour, anti-social concierge, Renée Michel (Balasko, *French Twist*). The often gruff matron keeps a secret: an extensive library, a true passion for elegance, and a habit of reading Tolstoy to her cat Leo.

The arrival in the building of a mysterious man, Mr. Ozu (Igawa, *Memoirs Of A Geisha*, *The Last Samurai*), transforms their world: Renée opens up to a renewed life, Paloma begins to understand that there are allies to be found beneath the prickliest of exteriors, and her own coming of age becomes a much less pessimistic prospect.

About the Novel

"One of the most life-affirming and, well, elegant books I've read in a long time."

-- Chicago Sun-Times

"By turns very funny and heartbreaking."

-- *Publisher's Weekly*

"This fable of love, friendship and the beauty of Art not only gives innocence a voice, but also shows what a powerful novel can do: transport, educate and ultimately console." -- The Toronto Star

"It's not beauty that provides a reason for living, but the constant search of it."

-- Time Out New York

"A new book that plumbs the astonishing ways private lives and guarded secrets can come tumbling – for better or for worse – into the open." -- *Vogue*

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THE HEDGEHOG is based upon the French novel *The Elegance of the Hedgehog* by Muriel Barbery. Its English language translation has been hailed a success by readers, critics and book clubs around the country. To name a few:

- New York Times Bestseller for over 89 weeks. - San Francisco Chronicle Bestseller for over 90 weeks. - Indiebound Top Ten Bestseller - Publisher's Weekly Top Ten Bestseller - Wall Street Journal Top Ten Bestseller - Boston Globe Top Ten Bestseller
- Chicago Sun Times Book of the Year - Christian Science Monitor Book of the Year
- Barnes and Noble Chicago Book of the Year

A Literary Phenomenon

A New York Times bestseller for over 89 weeks, *The Elegance of the Hedgehog* (*L'Élégance du Hérisson*), Muriel Barbery's second published work, has been read by over half a million people in America since its publication in 2008.

For the writing of *The Elegance of the Hedgehog*, Muriel Barbery took a deeper look into one of the secondary characters from her first novel, *Gourmet Rhapsody*, and started writing the personal journal of 54 year-old Renée Michel, the "conciERGE" of an upscale apartment-building in Paris. Renée's journal, about culture, philosophy and the wealthy people living above her found a remarkable parallel in the life of Paloma Josse, a precocious child who feels isolated from her bourgeois family. The combining points of view of Paloma and Renée introduce the reader to the universe of the „hedgehog’: life is a tale in which random protagonists overcome their social prejudices, and open their eyes to extraordinary encounters.

Muriel Barbery, a philosophy teacher from Normandy was taken by surprise with the wide commercial success of *The Elegance of the Hedgehog*, which was published in France in 2006 and became the French literary phenomenon of its decade. People's devotion to the book was such that French news magazine *L'Express* reported that some psychoanalysts advised their patients to read Barbery's life-affirming tale as a kind of cure. Why? The French magazine offers an answer: "All women, at least once, even Carla Bruni, have lived through the kind of psychological self-denigration that Renée inflicts on herself in the opening scene of the book."

Following the success of her work, Muriel Barbery left France with her husband to live in Kyoto, where she started working on her third novel.

About The Cast

Josiane Balasko (Renée Michel)

Josiane Balasko's career started at the Splendid, a Parisian music-hall inspired café-théâtre founded by childhood friends Michel Blanc, Christian Clavier, Gérard Jugnot and Thierry Lhermitte where they set out to create and perform their own comedies.

Josiane Balasko joined the collective along with Marie-Anne Chazel, Miou-Miou and the late legendary French stand-up comedian Coluche.

With the Splendid, Josiane Balasko starred in a series of comedies that resonated with an entire generation of the public in the late 70s and throughout the 80s. These films became box-office hits in France before achieving cult status and eventually became part of French popular culture. Among these are : *Les Bronzés* (French Fried Vacation) and its sequel, *Les Bronzés font du ski* directed by Patrice Leconte (Ridicule), and *Le Père Noël est une ordure* by Jean-Marie Poiré -- which was remade in the US by Nora Ephron as *Mixed Nuts* starring Steve Martin.

Josiane Balasko was nominated a first time in the Best Actress category, at the 1990 César awards, for playing the secretary who seduces Gérard Depardieu in a film directed by Bertrand Blier, *Trop belle pour toi* (Too Beautiful for You), and again in 1994 for *To Have Communists Parents* by Jean-Jacques Zilbermann. She wrote, directed and casted herself in *Gazon Maudit* (French Twist), a major commercial success in 1995. In *French Twist*, Josiane Balasko addressed the social issue of female homosexuality and won a César for Best Writing. In 2001, she starred alongside Nathalie Baye in the French adaptation of the famous BBC show, *Absolutely Fabulous*. She was nominated again for Best Actress in 2004 for her role in *Cette Femme-là* (Hanging Offense) by Guillaume Nicloux.

An accomplished artist who directed her seventh feature film in 2008 (*Cliente*), Josiane Balasko said that playing Muriel Barbéry's Renée, in *THE HEDGEHOG* by Mona Achache, is one of the roles of which she is the most proud in her very prolific career.

Selective filmography

ACTRESS

2010 *Holiday* by Guillaume Nicloux 2009 *Le Hérisson* (The Hedgehog) by Mona Achache 2008 *Musée Haut, Musée Bas* by Jean-Michel Ribes
Cliente by Josiane Balasko 2007 *La Clef* (The Key) by Guillaume Nicloux
L'Auberge Rouge by Gérard Krawczyk
Ruby Blue by Jan Dunn 2006 *Les Bronzés 3* by Patrice Leconte 2003 *Cette femme-là* (Hanging Offense) by Guillaume Nicloux
2004 César Award Nominee – Best Actress
2001 *Absolument Fabuleux* (Absolutely Fabulous) by Gabriel Aghion *Un crime au paradis* (A Crime in Paradise) by Jean Becker
2000 *Les Acteurs* (Actors) by Bertrand Blier 2000 *Le Libertin* (The Libertine) by Gabriel Aghion 1995 *Gazon Maudit* (French Twist) by Josiane Balasko
1996 César Award Winner – Best Writing (Josiane Balasko) 1994 *Grosse Fatigue* by Michel Blanc 1993 *Tout le monde n'a pas eu la chance d'avoir eu des parents communistes* (*To Have Communists Parents*) by Jean-Jacques Zilbermann
1994 César Award Nominee – Best Actress 1991 *Ma vie est un enfer* (My Life is Hell) by Josiane Balasko 1989 *Trop belle pour toi* (Too Beautiful for You) by Bertrand Blier
1990 César Award Nominee – Best Actress

Interview with Josiane Balasko (Renée Michel)

How did you transform yourself into the character of this very strange concierge, Renée?

With Mona we worked hard on the make-up, the costumes and the general allure. In the book Renée is described as being „ruffled“. She has very thick hair that she hardly ever brushes. In fact I don't have that kind of hair and when it's all dishevelled it gives me quite a cool look. Which of course isn't the right style for Renée! So we chose a wig and fake eyebrows to change the expression and make me look more severe.

But how did you work on capturing Renée's personality?

Purely by instinct. I didn't need to go and visit concierges and their homes. I must admit that I've certainly come across quite a few Renées in my life. I always knew

when I wasn't acting like her. "Be careful", I told myself. That's not Renée who is talking or behaving like that." I took inspiration from my mother who always walks rather quickly for the way she moves.

What convinced you to accept the part?

I hadn't read the book. I just knew that it had been a success. After I received the first version of the script I discussed certain details with Mona on the phone. "OK", she said "I'll rework it". Once I'd read the second version I was sure that I wanted to play the part of Renée and I agreed to meet Mona.

How did your first meeting go?

Mona came to my home and gave me the impression that my daughter was in my living room! I also think that she was a little intimidated. She talked about the different characters in the film with great intelligence. She's a brilliant young lady who also possesses strong powers of persuasion. I was completely seduced and from then on, it didn't matter that it was her first feature film.

You are one of the rare French film actresses who accept to be transformed and even to be made to look less attractive. Does this amuse you?

First and foremost that's my job. We all began this way working for the Splendid (the theatre company that went on to producing movie hits in France). We loved dressing up and playing many different roles: elderly people, dorks, very bourgeois or shrews... On the contrary, it's not something that is difficult for me to do. To be honest I find it more comfortable and less stressful than having to pretend to be sexy or beautiful. I've often been told in the street "Oh! You look so much better than you do on film." And that's a real compliment because in fact films are only a small part of my life. There's still the other private side of my life which is so much more important.

How did the filming go?

It was extremely harmonious because Mona is very gentle while remaining very firm. She knows exactly what she wants and she achieves it with a lot of courtesy and good humor. She knows how to listen which is a sign of great self-assurance. The atmosphere was fun, very young, with lots of women.

What was your impression as an actress working with someone like Mr. Ozu in the film who had to learn his lines by heart phonetically? Togo Igawa is a very talented actor who understood the meaning of his phrases perfectly. He is also very courteous and charming, just like his character in the film. It was a real pleasure to be his partner.

Have you already acted with children?

Rarely. I only had a few scenes with Paloma (Garance Le Guillermic) so I discovered her when I saw the film. She is a magnificent, bright little girl, with a great deal of sensitivity.

How did you get on with the other actors?

As you probably know, the general atmosphere on a film-set is always influenced by the movie director. If he or she is tense, anxious or stressed we get that way too. This is not at all Mona's style. We all got on very easily and harmoniously, especially with Renée's cat. A fantastic partner! He played a very important role and we did many scenes together. The animal trainer found him at an antique dealer. He was amazingly unperturbed, and I think he'll always be like that!

When it is not an animal, what is a hedgehog for you?

Someone who rolls up into a ball or shuts himself out for self-protection. But someone who is useful, like the animal. The character interested me because in some aspects I think that I'm probably like Renée in real life. People don't know this about me because I prefer to hide behind the image of a funny girl.

What was your reaction when you saw the film for the first time?

It begins with scenes with the young girl which I had never seen. I was drawn straight into the story. Then, when Renée appeared I said to myself, stupidly, "It's me." Then little by little I disconnected from my character and became a normal movie viewer. To such a degree that I surprised myself by sometimes feeling like crying. Especially when Renée holds the little girl in her arms. They are very human and generous characters, just like in the book and of course like Mona.

Togo Igawa (Kakuro Ozu)

Togo Igawa is a Japanese actor and stage director currently performing in the UK. He trained in Japan at The Hiyuza Theatre Company Drama School, and the Toho Gakuen College of Drama and Music. In 1968 he joined the Theatre Centre 68 (precursor of the Black Tent Theatre), and went on to tour throughout Japan in more than 120 cities. In 1983 he moved to England. In 1986, during the opening season of the Swan Theatre in Stratford-upon Avon, he joined the Royal Shakespeare Company as its first Japanese actor. Since then, he has appeared extensively on stage, film, television and radio. In 2006, he formed the British-Japanese „Ichiza Theatre Company“. He lives in north Oxfordshire with his English wife, Adrienne Baba, a potter and Japanese cook.

Selective Filmography

ACTOR

2009 *Le Hérisson* (The Hedgehog) A Matter of Size by Sharon Maymon

2005 *Memoirs of a Geisha* by Rob Marshall *Revolver* by Guy Ritchie

2003 *The Last Samurai* by Edward Zwick 1999 *Topsy-Turvy* by Mike Leigh
Eyes Wide Shut by Stanley Kubrick

Interview with Togo Igawa (Kakuro Ozu)

How would you define Kakuro?

He is a man of wit, honest and open minded. When I got the part, my wife told me that he looked just like me! But I don't have his wisdom. That helped me to personify him. If we had been too alike, then I wouldn't have been able to embody him.

Is he deeply Japanese?

It is impossible to leave aside his culture and his origins, but his empathy and his fundamental honesty allow him to be considered, first and foremost, as a human being.

How would you explain that only with Paloma or the concierge, is he actually himself?

These three characters are all eccentrics with great sensitivity. What unites them is that they are not satisfied with the role society is giving them.

On the set, did you bring some elements for the decor of Mr. Ozu's apartment or for the dinner that he prepares for Renée? For the dinner, yes. When Mona Achache went to Japan, she was told that Kakuro Ozu would make some tempura rather than ramen or gyôzas, because they were too ordinary for the character. I was firmly against that idea. When you live outside your country for so long, you sometimes want to prepare a simple meal, because you don't necessarily find all the good ingredients you need. In a second version of the script, the tempura were finally replaced by the ramen and the gyôza. I was delighted that Mona shared my point of view!

In the film, Kakuro is dressed very elegantly. Did you select his clothes?

If he has this look, it is thanks to Catherine Bouchard, the costume designer. The only garment that I suggested was the samue of Japanese monks; it is like a short kimono with pants. Kakuro wears it when he watches the Ozu film with René.

Your filmography is impressive. Have you ever been directed by such a young director?

I think parents always learn something from their children. Mona could be my daughter, and she is a very talented director. I was very lucky to be chosen for this film.

How was the first meeting?

Michael Laguens, the casting director first met me without Mona. I liked his thoughtfulness, because I was very anxious about the idea of playing in French, a language that I don't master at all. He kindly allowed me to re-do my scene in Japanese. Mona then came, she sat in front of me, and the real audition actually started. Her beautiful eyes captivated me, from the moment I saw her. I forgot about my fear, and I simply played for Mona's eyes. It was an extraordinary experience.

You almost don't speak French but you are not dubbed in the film. How did you get past this difficulty?

Thanks to my obstinate coach, Asako Furukata! Without her, I wouldn't have succeeded.

Before the shoot, did you know who Josiane Balasko was?

I knew her by name, but I had never watched her films. When I got the Kakuro part, I bought several DVDs of her. I was both terrified by her strong personality and impatient to work with her. And I wasn't disappointed.

Was it easy working with the young Garance?

The first day, she tried, unsuccessfully, to help me with my French lines. I wanted to do the same for her Japanese lines, but she didn't listen to me. It almost stopped me from sleeping all night! The next day, however, her accent was impeccable and she complimented me – in English! – for my accent.

What is your best memory of the shoot?

Garance's smile.

And the worst?

Eating cold ramen a hundred times in a row.

What is the biggest difference you noticed working with French people?

Eating a full meal with good wine, served on a nice tablecloth, without ever having to wait in line! On an English shoot, you are always served chili con carne or spaghetti that are way past the al dente cooking time, and with over-cooked vegetables. Once the cook has finished filling your plate, he yells: "Next!" If we were served meals like yours in the UK, we wouldn't call that a canteen... The five-day working week was also a remarkable difference for an old man like me!

Mona Achache Director Biography

Mona Achache was born in Paris in 1981. After an education in theatre and literature, Mona Achache made her way into the French film industry starting out as an assistant director to Michel Boujenah for *Père et Fils* (Father and Sons) in 2003. She also appeared in the cast of *Eden à l'Ouest* (*Eden is West*) in 2009 by Academy Award® winner Costa-Gavras.

Soon after the birth of her first child, Mona Achache filmed the work of midwives to produce the 2004 documentary, *Alma et les autres* (*Alma and the others*)... She then

wrote and directed *Suzanne*, a short film, which received the Silver Bear at the Ebensee Festival of Nations in 2006. The film tells the story of a girl who witnesses the arrest and the deportation of a man by Nazi Germans. She also wrote and directed another short film, *Wawa*, in 2007.

She met with producer Anne-Dominique Toussaint, and obtained the rights to adapt *The Elegance of the Hedgehog*, a literary bestseller written by Muriel Barbery. For *THE HEDGEHOG*, her first feature film, Mona Achache decided to renew her trusted collaboration with director of photography Patrick Blossier, set designer Yves Brover, and editor Julia Grégory.

Mona Achache is now spending time with her two daughters, Garance and Romane, while also finishing the production of a TV film for Arte, *Bankable*, a comedy starring Pascale Arbillot (*Little White Lies*), Lolita Chammah (*Story of Women*), Bruno Todeschini (*His Brother*) and Olivier Barthélémy (*Mesrine: Public Enemy #1*).

Interview with Mona Achache

How would you summarise the story of the film?

It is the story of an unusual encounter in a bourgeois Parisian building between Renée, the discreet, lonely, and ill-tempered concierge, Paloma, a bright and lonely little girl, and Kakuro Ozu, a wealthy and enigmatic Japanese gentleman.

When and how did you discover the book written by Muriel Barbery?

I discovered the book just after its publication. A while before, I had met Anne-Dominique Toussaint, the producer, and made her read a script that I had written. She found it interesting but “a little sad”, and told me that when I have a more upbeat story to tell, she would like us to work together. As I really liked the idea of adapting a book, I went to a bookshop to have a look at the book back-covers. I wanted to purchase *The Elegance of the Hedgehog*, but the long waiting lines in front of the tills put me off. On the same evening, a friend told me about the book she had just finished: *The Elegance of the Hedgehog*! She lent it to me. I read it and called Anne-Dominique: “I found a story!” She told me: “It is unbelievable, the book is on my bedside table.” She read it, and liked it. We called Gallimard, and despite other film directors interested in the book, we got a meeting with Muriel Barbery. It was following this meeting that Muriel Barbery chose me and we obtained the rights.

What personally moved you in this story?

The absurdity of prejudices, the magic of improbable encounters... The building made me think of the one in which I grew up, but more bourgeois. When I was little, I was fascinated by the random superimposition of people with their different lives. The starting point was surely Paloma and Renée. This ill-tempered woman who changes by meeting the other... And this little girl, reserved, dark, with many certainties, who by meeting Renée and Kakuro, understands that life is much more complex and surprising than what she initially believed. I completely identified with the little girl and with the concierge.

The encounter between Renée and Mr. Ozu looks almost like a modern fairy tale. The story has all the elements of a fairy tale and I’ve tried to play with it that way. Renée is Cinderella, Paloma, the fairy, Kakuro, the prince charming. The love story between Kakuro and Renée has something charmingly old-fashioned to it. The gift, the invitation, the kiss on the hand, the restaurant, the promenade on the street... When Renée accepts the scarf from Kakuro, she is moved like an adolescent on a first

date. The three characters are realistic, but at the same time a little odd, timeless and unconventional. I also wanted to create a similar world to surround them.

For example?

Right from the start, I imagined an Art Nouveau building. There is, in this architectural style, something adventurous, beyond time, poetic, but profoundly bourgeois and Parisian. I wanted to make this building a character of the story, which would fit into the shape I wanted to give to the film. I wanted to avoid the pitfall of making a satirical representation of an upper class, through a Haussman style building. I didn't want it to be too luxurious, with abundant gold and marble. I wanted the atmosphere to be more enigmatic, darker, more imposing, and stranger. The story had to be concentrated in one building, like in a huge bowl. While placing the film in a realistic setting, I wanted to infuse that Hedgehog with little touches of dream, fantasy, and poetry.

What were the difficulties you encountered when writing the screenplay?

Some works are more literary than others. The Elegance of the Hedgehog is immensely literary. The challenge of the adaptation was to render cinematic what was initially literary. In the book, Paloma writes a journal. In the movie... she films and draws. I didn't want to over-play the classical and abundant voice-over. Paloma's camera had to represent her own voice. For Renée, I favored the muteness of the character. I wanted to show her subtlety rather than making her explicitly audible. The film (like the book) is a constant alternation of points of view between Paloma and Renée. A balance had to be found, so as not to favor one character over the other.

And in the book, Paloma's journal is especially well written. The style is almost surprising for a little girl.

This is why I wanted her to film very seriously. Nowadays, everyone can film with extremely varied and ludicrous instruments. I wanted Paloma to hold an old-fashioned camera, aim directly with her eye on the camera, and focus manually without the use of a remote digital screen. She is a particularly gifted girl. I wanted to show that through her way of filming and drawing. I let her imaginary be visual.

Does the calendar that she makes throughout the movie exist in the book?

No. The idea of the calendar, a sort of countdown to her birthday, thus to her suicide, came about rather late. Each day Paloma draws something in a square, and at the end, it is a composition in which are found pieces of all her thoughts. Without being too morbid or explicit, I wanted to make her suicidal desire credible (and visual). For me, Renée's final death could only be bearable when you understand that she was stopping Paloma's suicidal plan.

When writing the script, were you thinking of Josiane Balasko for Renée's character?

Yes, but I tried to avoid that because I was afraid she might refuse! I thought of her from the first reading of the book. I love this actress, this woman and her commitment. The idea of working on a lost femininity with an actress like Josiane Balasko was a prospect that I relished.

How would you define Renée's character?

She is someone who hides a particular sensitivity and subtlety behind the stereotypes of her occupation as a concierge. She hides in her loneliness because she's afraid of being gazed at and judged by others. Renée, is a woman who takes no interest whatsoever in her appearance. By trying hard to hide and not to be seen, she ended up forgetting herself. She renounces her femininity and buries her maternal side. Thanks to the considerations of Paloma and Kakuro, all through the film she will rediscover the pleasure of being with others and with herself.

How did Josiane Balasko react when reading the script?

She hadn't read the book. When she read the script, she was very direct and commented on many aspects of it, and not only about Renée, the key character. I think it was our meeting that convinced her. For a first film by a young director my age, it was normal that we met before giving her decision.

Did she add a lot to the character?

Of course! Every time I watch the film, Josiane fascinates me. She made sure that the encounter between her and Kakuro was credible and never sappy; it had to be moving, but with no pathos. Josiane is a true blessing for a director, even more for a first film. Not only did she enrich and nourish the character, but her presence, her confidence, and her enthusiasm carried me all through the filming.

What in her seduces Mr. Ozu? It is not that evident, she's badly dressed, irritable, has an awful hair style, and she never smiles... Mr. Ozu doesn't judge by appearances. He manages to uncover a spiritual subtlety which keeps him interested in her. He wants to discover this woman who never interested anyone and with whom he shares common tastes and interests. She intrigues him, regardless of her function or her physical appearance.

The moment of the film when Renée shifts into a different world is when he invites her for dinner and she asks to go to the toilet. She smiles and the audience is seduced. When she arrives at Kakuro's, she is so intimidated and ill-at-ease that her primary reaction is to hide. She goes to the toilet. There is the strange confrontation with the Japanese environment. She sits down, and the music starts playing. She pushes a button and gets splashed with water. It is a situation that could be very humiliating for her, but she decides to laugh at it, and tells herself, "Let's go!" Her shell breaks open and she lets herself enjoy the pleasure of conversation and intimate exchanges. Before that sequence, when she agrees to go to the hairdresser for the first time in her life, it feels like something extraordinary is happening, but totally internalized. Yes, because it is the first time ever that anyone takes care of her. Suddenly, her femininity – which she had buried for so long – opens out. For me, this sequence, as trivial as it can look, is very important. The hairdresser asks her: "What would you like? What would be better for you?" By answering: "Hot water," she agrees to be taken care of. She accepts the pampering with pleasure. Josiane is an extraordinary actress. At the beginning of the sequence, it looks as if she's going to the slaughter with the closed-off face which she knows how to put on. We feel all her shyness, all her misgivings, her resignation. And, in one sentence, she opens up to sensuality.

How did you transform Josiane Balasko into Renée?

During the preproduction, we worked a lot on the appearance, which became an indirect way to talk about Renée's psychology. By working on the physical aspect with Didier Lavergne and Cédric Chami, the make-up artist and the hair stylist, we started building up the character. No make-up, only a pair of thick eyebrows and an unflattering wig. What I wanted above all, was a credible transformation coming from inside, from her expressions, from her way to relax and let go. The transformation only comes from Josiane's acting.

For the role of Paloma, what had you in mind when you were looking for a girl?

I was thinking of a girl who is not particularly attractive but with a lot of charm. A self-willed and determined little girl. Not vulnerable. And I don't know why I thought of a blonde. When I was writing, I just had seen Little Miss Sunshine. The girl I was looking for had to have this very singular way of seeing the world, very lucid, with almost a deep understanding of the adult world. However, the physical aspect of the

character still remained imprecise.

The casting director showed me more than 200 girls on video. When I saw Garance, I instinctively recognized that she was the one, and I didn't need to see any other actresses after her. I wanted to cut her hair, make it curly, and make her wear glasses. Now, I realize that Garance/Paloma looks just like me! And, in real life she has the same name as one of my daughters! In retrospect, I realize how much I identified with this little girl. I dug out from my own childhood a lot of memories to write Paloma's character.

Did it seem difficult to direct an 11 year-old actress?

No, because in both of my previous shorts, there were already children. Especially because Garance is very talented, particularly at ease, focused, precise, and mature. During the filming, our relationship was very tender, very complicit. While having fun, we defined the character together: the little twitches, the way of bringing her glasses to her nose, of sticking them into her hair, pushing her chin down to look upwards. Together with Jean-Pierre Duret, the sound engineer, we worked a lot on "Paloma's voice", more deep and steadier than her own voice. Before every scene, she had fun getting back that voice. She often asked very pertinent questions about the character. When she was supposed to cry, we did sobbing contests. I always wanted acting to be a pleasure for her, an amusement, even when she had to say or do darker things.

Did you have any difficulty finding the actor to play Mr. Ozu?

We were looking for a 60 to 70-year-old man, extremely elegant, with a very sharp eye. The casting director, Michael Laguens, organized three scouting sessions: in France, in Japan, and in England. After my first meeting in London with Togo Igawa, even though I went to Japan to meet 5 other actors, I had for him the same feeling as for Garance. He looked exactly like the Kakuro that I had imagined when writing! The fact that he spoke English helped us to communicate without an interpreter, but he had to learn all the lines of the script phonetically, which was a huge amount of work for him. I knew we could work it all out in post-synchronization. However his word flow during shooting had to be fast enough, and his efforts to articulate well had to be unnoticeable. His French-Japanese coach, Sakura Furukata, also had to make sure that he didn't speak French with an English accent!

How would you define his character?

He is an intellectual, but I really wanted to remain as mysterious as possible concerning his actual job. We understand that he has a passion for France, since he arrives in Paris at retirement age. He is a curious man, respectful, and observant. He goes to meet Paloma and Renée with determination, which in someone else's case would be taken for intrusion. Not with him, because he does it with courtesy and elegance.

Before talking about the supporting roles, let's talk first about...the goldfish. He didn't have that much importance in the book, did he? He wasn't in the book at all! There was only one sentence from Paloma, stating that the world felt like a fish bowl in which adults spend their time banging their heads against the glass. I liked the image and I wanted to develop the metaphor. I initially placed the goldfish in the kitchen, and it progressively became a full character. Then, I came to realize that this suicidal little girl, with her singular theory about the fish bowl, had to do something with this goldfish. In a way, she had to get her hands dirty! She thinks she killed it with a pill, and decides to flush it down the toilet. Finally, it reappears with Renée. □SPOILER ALERT!□ Similar to the story of the film, it is the death of one that pushes the other to fight for life, I liked the goldfish that dies at one end, and revives

at the other end.

Anne Brochet plays Paloma's mother. Wladimir Yordanoff plays the father. Also, Ariane Ascaride plays Manuela, Renée's friend who loves baking. How did all these talents come about?

For Manuela, I was looking for an actress who would form an original couple with Josiane. Ariane came to me as the right choice rather instantly. I very much liked the idea of uniting these two actresses. I was dreaming of Anne Brochet (Cyrano de Bergerac, 1990) in this role of a neurotic and slightly erratic bourgeois mother. She's an actress who has always fascinated me. When I was younger, I enjoyed imagining myself playing the exact Roxane that she played in Cyrano! Wladimir has the elegance and the charisma that I wanted for Paul. It is hard for me to remember clearly the thought process that led me to choose these actors, but I know that they all seemed perfect to me almost immediately.

Other than the Art Nouveau style for the building, did you have any other precise ideas for the setting?

The set designer Yves Brover understood my desire to not really set the story in a particular time. We are in 2009 but there is no mobile phone, no computer, and no technological link with the world outside the building. It is a timeless closed-door arena. In Paloma's room, there is no poster, no brand, no reference to our time, but only her drawings and objects of her own. However, I didn't want any gimmick or any superficially aesthetic setting. I wanted to remain realistic but with a touch of a dream. I had an image of the Mary Poppins film in my head. The one where the two children, entering into their father's bank, seem squashed under the heavy bourgeois conservatism. As abstract as it was, the memory of this bank was the cornerstone to build up the atmosphere I wanted to give to this building: a realism that is a little unsteady, offbeat.

Is this the reason why you wanted to shoot in a studio?

The building I was dreaming of doesn't exist. Anne-Dominique Toussaint understood that it wasn't an unnecessary luxury; it was going to serve the story. In this way, I had the chance to write the script with a specific apartment configuration in mind. It was very important for me that Ozu's apartment was built upon the same floor plan as Paloma's apartment; that they would differentiate themselves only through the furnishing. For the Josse family, I had in my mind the apartment of an open left-wing family, friendly, and warm, with parents suitably neurotic but not unbearable straight away. I wanted to avoid falling into the cliché of the nasty bourgeois, and I didn't want a stiff setting.

What about Renée's space?

It fits her: the main room and the kitchen constitute the perfectly impersonal facade of the stereotypical Parisian concierge. Neither too much, nor not enough. Hidden at the back of her space there is a nice room in which are installed books and other precious objects.

For the costumes, were your ideas as precise as for the setting?

Yes. The discussions with Catherine Bouchard about the costumes have helped to develop my thoughts for each character. Like with Yves for the set, I sometimes found these discussions to be as rich as those with the talent. For instance, a lot of work went into Renée's costumes. When Kakuro invites her for dinner for the first time, it's her friend Manuela who lends her a fancy dress. For Renée's second visit, I wanted her to be dressed casually and that he'd wear a samuë, a sort of kimono: they already share a kind of intimacy. For the third date, when Kakuro offered her clothes, I first thought of a dress. It is Catherine who convinced me (And she was absolutely

right!) that Kakuro had to give her a suit. In a dress, Renée felt as if she was disguised and Kakuro understood that. He wants to make her look better but not transform her. The suit designed by Catherine fits perfectly: it is elegant and feminine while remaining true to Renée's character. As with the sets and the lights, I've pushed Catherine concerning the colors of the costume: only two different shades of grey and brown!

By the way, what particular attention did you give to lighting?

The work process with the director of photography, Patrick Blossier, was a little different because he is my partner in life. So it is a unique and privileged collaboration that has grown over the years, and with *The Hedgehog* it began with the script. I wanted each set to have a very particular atmosphere that also matched each other: the light enters like in a cave in Renée's apartment, something more luminous for the Josse's home, tamed and intimate at Kakuro's. With Patrick Blossier and Yves Brover, we also worked a lot to create a harmony of colors, a general tone. I wanted a very dense image, elegant, but not unrealistically graphic. The story is straightforward, so I wanted the look to be simple.

After what you told us about the sets, the costumes and the lighting, it is obvious that, for the music, you also had a very precise idea of what you wanted.

Yes. And also of what I didn't want! For instance, always favoring timelessness, I didn't want any additional score, but only original music. I believe, and even more after *The Hedgehog*, that a good score must be attuned with the overall film. And it really depends on the right chemistry between a composer and the director. This happened with Gabriel Yared. Talking about score is always so theoretical, but he understood what I wanted. He also brought me to a place where I was a little afraid to interfere, and that's really good.

What is your best memory of the production ?

The day when Anne-Dominique called me a December evening to tell me: "Merry Christmas! We have the rights for *The Hedgehog*!" And a year later, when she called me to say: "Merry Christmas! Josiane Balasko read the script and wants to meet you!" But I have many more like these... The small morning ritual: taking my girls to school; take the car to Epinay with Patrick and the assistant director, while listening to dorky music! Arriving in the studio, the coffee, the croissant, then the hour of work everyday with Patrick, the script supervisor, and the assistant director, to prepare the shoot before the arrival of the talent and the rest of the crew. I experienced so many privileged moments. We were all living together for many months behind closed doors at the Epinay studios. Even the editor, Julia Grégory, set up in one of the studio offices during the shoot. This established a very nice team atmosphere, which I think helped the film.

Finally, who's the hedgehog?

I think we are all in some ways a hedgehog in life... with more or less elegance!

Anne-Dominique Toussaint Producer Biography

Anne-Dominique Toussaint was born in Brussels and earned a Master in Medieval History from the Sorbonne in Paris. She produced her first film in 1989, *Monsieur*, directed by her brother, established writer Jean-Philippe Toussaint. This was the birth of her production company, Les Films des Tournelles.

Collaborating with Alain Sarde, she then co-produced Nicole Garcia's *Place Vendôme* starring Catherine Deneuve.

Anne-Dominique Toussaint later launched the Belgian production company Les Films

de l'Étang, through which she developed European co-productions such as: Mina Tannenbaum by Martine Dugowson, Violence des échanges en milieu tempéré (Work Hard, Play Hard) by Jean- Marc Moutout, and Odette Toulemonde by Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt.

She also took a particular interest in non-French art-house movies such as Respiro (Winner of the Cannes 2002 Critics Week Grand Prize) by Emmanuele Crialese, and Gespenster (Winner, Best Film, 2006 German Film Critics Awards) by Christian Petzold.

In France she developed ongoing relationships with some of the most respected directors. In 2003, she produced Le Coût de la vie (The Cost of Living) by Philippe Le Guay (Service Entrance), which sold more than a million tickets at the local box office. She then produced La Moustache (Winner - Europa Cinemas Prize, Cannes 2005) by Emmanuel Carrère, and *J'attends quelqu'un* (Waiting for Someone) by Jérôme Bonnell.

In 2005, for the production of Nadine Labaki's first feature film Caramel, she created a production company in Lebanon, Les Films de Beyrouth. Anne-Dominique Toussaint successfully produced many films by first time directors, including Le Hérisson (The Hedgehog) by Mona Achache, and Les Beaux Gosses (The French Kissers) by Riad Sattouf, which won the 2010 César award for Best First Work. This year, Anne-Dominique Toussaint produced Nadine Labaki's new film, Et maintenant on va où ? (Where Do We Go Now ?), which was part of the 2011 „Un Certain Regard“ selection at Cannes.

During her career, Anne-Dominique Toussaint has produced or co-produced more than 20 feature films.

Selective Filmography

2011 Et maintenant on va où ? (Where Do We Go Now ?) by Nadine Labaki 2011 Cannes Film Festival – Un Certain Regard Selection

2010 La Solitudes des nombres premiers (Solitude of Prime Numbers) by Saverio Costanzo 2009 Le Hérisson (The Hedgehog) by Mona Achache

Les Beaux Gosses (The French Kissers) by Riad Sattouf 2010 César Award Winner – Best First Work (Riad Sattouf)

Caramel by Nadine Labaki *J'attends quelqu'un* (Waiting for Someone) by Jérôme Bonnell Odette Toulemonde by Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt La Moustache by Emmanuel Carrère

2005 Cannes Film Festival – Label Europa Cinemas Gespenster by Christian Petzold 2006 German Film Critics Awards – Best Film Retour à Kotelnitch, documentary by Emmanuel Carrère

2003 Venice Film Festival – City of Rome's Special Mention Violence des échanges en milieu tempéré (Work Hard, Play Hard) by Jean-Marc Moutout Le Coût de la vie (The Cost of Living) by Philippe Le Guay

Respiro by Emmanuele Crialese 2002 Cannes Film Festival – Critics Week Grand Prize

Slogans by Gjergj Xhuvani 2001 Cannes Film Festival – Award of the Youth, Best Foreign Film

Le Battement d'ailes du papillon (Happstance) by Laurent Firode *Everybody's famous!* by Dominique Derudder

2001 Academy Award ® Nominee – Best Foreign Language Film Place Vendôme by Nicole Garcia

1999 César Award Nominee – 12 Nominations 1998 Venice Film Festival – Volpi Cup, Best Actress (Catherine Deneuve)

Gabriel Yared Composer Biography

Gabriel Yared was only 7 when he first realised his consuming passion for music. Determined to know more about the art of music, he learned to play the piano and organ and started to study on his own the compositions of the classical masters. As a preteen he wrote several pieces, including a trio for piano, violin, and violoncello. At 18, he left his native Lebanon to settle in Brazil, a life-altering experience for the classically trained composer.

Soon after moving to Paris, he became a well-known arranger and orchestrator, collaborating with the greatest names in French variety shows. While enjoying relative success in his work, Gabriel never lost his lifelong passion to become a composer. He continued studying the music of a wide range of artists, from Bach and Ravel to Julian Falk and Stevie Wonder. He composed numerous jingles, one of which has been the opening theme of the daily evening news broadcast on TF1, France's main network, for more than 20 years. In 1976 he worked closely with Françoise Hardy on her album *Star*, before collaborating with French artists Michel Fugain and Michel Jonasz.

It is with Jacques Dutronc, however, that Gabriel was able to write his first score for the movies, quickly becoming an internationally recognized composer. In 1997, he won the Best Original Soundtrack Oscar® for Anthony Minghella's *The English Patient*. In 2000 and 2004, Gabriel received another two Academy Award® nominations for Anthony Minghella's *The Talented Mister Ripley*, and *Cold Mountain*. Other scores have included *The Lover* by Jean-Jacques Annaud, as well as Academy Award® winner *Das Leben der Anderen* (*The Lives of Others*) by Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, and *Polisse* by Maiwenn which just won the Jury Prize at the 2011 Cannes Film Festival.

Gabriel Yared has also composed ballet music for Carolyn Carlson and Roland Petit. He often gives public performances in Rio (Brazil), Valencia (Spain), Cardiff (UK), Paris or Gent (Belgium). He was granted the coveted France Music SACEM Prize during the 2008 Cannes Film Festival.

Selective Filmography

Polisse by Maiwenn 2011 Cannes Jury Prize Winner

Amelia by Mira Nair *Le Hérisson* (*The Hedgehog*) by Mona Achache *Coco Chanel & Igor Stravinsky* by Jan Kounen *Le Bal des Actrices* (*The Actress' Ball*) by Maiwenn *1408* by Mikael Håfström; *Breaking and Entering* by Anthony Minghella *Azur & Asmar* by Michel Ocelot *Das Leben der Anderen* (*The Lives of Others*) by Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck

Cold Mountain by Anthony Minghella 2004 BAFTA Award Winner – Best Music
2004 Academy Award® Nominee – Best Original Score

Bon Voyage by Jean-Paul Rappeneau *The Talented Mr. Ripley* by Anthony Minghella

2000 Academy Award® Nominee – Best Original Score *City of Angels* by Brad Silberling 1999 Grammy® Nominee – Best Original Score *The English Patient* by Anthony Minghella

1997 Academy Award® Winner – Best Original Score 1997 Golden Globe Winner – Best Original Score, Motion Picture 1997 BAFTA Award Winner – Best Music
L'Amant (*The Lover*) by Jean-Jacques Annaud 1993 César Award Winner – Best Original Score

Patrick Blossier Director of Photography – Biography

Born in 1949, Patrick Blossier has had a rich career in France, working with many of its most respected directors, among them Agnès Varda, Costa-Gavras, Bertrand Tavernier, Patrice Chéreau, Alain Cavalier, Anne Fontaine and Rachid Bouchareb. In 1985, Patrick Blossier was Agnès Varda's Director of Photography for the Venice Golden Lion Award winner, *Sans toit ni loi* (Vagabond). He then received a Best Cinematography nomination at the 1988 César Awards for his work in *Miss Mona* by Mehdi Charef.

Since 1988, Blossier has worked closely with Academy Award® winner Costa-Gavras, and was responsible for the cinematography of the 1990 Berlin Golden Bear winner *Music Box*, as well as *Mad City* in 1997, and *Amen* in 2003, for which he personally received a César Award nomination.

Patrick received his fourth César Award nomination for Best Cinematography after working with Rachid Bouchareb on the 2007 Academy Award® nominee *Indigènes* (Days of Glory). Patrick Blossier is the Director of Photography of *Le Moine* (The Monk), by Palme d'Or nominee Dominik Moll, which will soon be released in North America.

Selective Filmography

2011 *Le Moine* (The Monk) by Dominik Moll (in production) 2009 *Le Hérisson* (The Hedgehog) by Mona Achache
Eden à l'Ouest (*Eden is West*) by Costa-Gavras 2008 *La Fille de Monaco* (The Girl from Monaco) by Anne Fontaine 2006 *Indigènes* (Days of Glory) by Rachid Bouchareb
2007 Academy Award® Nominee – Best Foreign Language Film
2007 César Award Nominee – Best Cinematography 2005 *La Moustache* by Emmanuel Carrère
Le Couperet by Costa-Gavras 2004 *Feux Rouges* (Red Lights) by Cédric Kahn
2003 *Père et Fils* (Father and Sons) by Michel Boujenah
Le Pacte du Silence by Graham Guit 2002 *Amen* by Costa-Gavras
2003 César Award Nominee – Best Cinematography *Décalage Horaire* (Jet Lag) by Danièle Thompson
2000 *La Fidélité* (Fidelity) by Andrzej Zulawski 1998 *Hors Jeu* (Foul Play) by Karim Dridi 1997 *Mad City* by Costa-Gavras
La Femme de chambre du Titanic (The Chambermaid on the Titanic) by Bigas Luna 1998 Goya Award Nominee – Best Cinematography
1995 *Innocent Lies* by Patrick Dewolf
1994 *La Fille de d'Artagnan* by Bertrand Tavernier 1993 *Libera Me* by Alain Cavalier
1993 Cannes Film Festival – Prize of the Ecumenical Jury *La Petite Apocalypse* (The Little Apocalypse) by Costa-Gavras
1992 *Le Temps et la Chambre* by Patrice Chéreau (TV) 1991 *Jacquot de Nantes* by Agnès Varda
Hors la Vie by Maroun Bagdadi 1991 Cannes Jury Prize Winner
1990 *La Vengeance d'une femme* by Jacques Doillon 1989 *Music Box* by Costa-Gavras
1990 Berlin Golden Bear Winner 1988 *Betrayed* by Costa-Gavras
1987 *Miss Mona* by Mehdi Charef 1988 César Award Nominee – Best

Cinematography

1985 Sans toit ni loi (Vagabond) by Agnès Varda 1985 Venice Golden Lion Winner

Cast

Renée Michel.....Josiane Balasko
Paloma Josse.....Garance Le Guillermic
Kakuro Ozu.....Togo Igawa Solange
Josse.....Anne Brochet Manuela
Lopez.....Ariane Ascaride Paul
Josse.....Wladimir Yordanoff Colombe
Josse.....Sarah Le Picard Jean-
Pierre..... Jean-Luc Porraz Madame de
Broglie.....Gisèle Casadesus Madame
Meurisse..... Mona Heftre
Tibère..... Samuel Achache La
Mère de Tibère Valérie Karsenti Le Père
de Tibère Stéphan Wojtowicz

Crew

Directed by..... Mona Achache
Produced by.....Anne-Dominique Toussaint
Original Screenplay by.....Mona Achache
Freely inspired by the novel.....“L’Élégance du Hérisson” by Muriel
Barbery © 2006 Editions Gallimard Original Music
by.....Gabriel Yared
Associate Producers.....Romain Le Grand & Tarak Ben
Ammar Line Producer.....Pascal
Ralite Post-Production Supervisor.....Matthieu
Bled Director of Photography.....Patrick Blossier
Editing.....Julia Grégory
Animation.....Cécile Rousset
Production Design.....Yves Brover
Sound.....Jean-Pierre Duret & Arnaud Rolland
Mixing.....Nicolas Naegelen
Casting.....Michael Laguens & Sophie Blanvillain 1st
Assistant Director.....Fabrice Camoin Script
Supervisor.....Rachel Corlet Costume
Design.....Catherine Bouchard Make-up
Artist.....Didier Lavergne Hair
Stylist.....Cédric Chami Unit
Manager..... Gaël Deledicq On Set
Photographer.....Thomas Brémond

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