

**GUESS WHO
IS CALLING?**



15:59

89%

DENIS
PODALYDÈS
DE LA COMÉDIE FRANÇAISE

SALIF
CISSÉ

AURE
ATIKA

CLARA
BRETHEAU

GUESS WHO IS CALLING?

A FILM BY
FABIENNE GODET



FESTIVAL DE L'ALPE D'HUEZ 2025
AUDIENCE AWARD



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SYNOPSIS

Baptiste, a brilliant voice imitator, is struggling to make a name for himself. That is until Pierre Chozène, a famous writer, offers him an unexpected job: answering his phone calls while pretending to be him. Hounded by fans, journalists, and nosy acquaintances, Pierre needs peace and quiet to finish his most personal novel. Baptiste accepts the job and becomes the writer's official voice, but soon realizes that stepping into Pierre's shoes comes with a whirlwind of complications.





HOW DID YOU DISCOVER THE NOVEL FROM LUC BLANVILLAIN?

A friend from Luc, the writer Erwan Larher, shared it with my producer, Bertrand Faivre.

Even before finishing the novel, he realized that the concept was genius; he optioned it, not knowing we'd adapt it. Later on, he asked me if I was interested. I read it and I said yes.

WHAT WAS IT THAT DEEPLY INTERESTED YOU IN THIS STORY OF A YOUNG IMITATOR TAKING THE PLACE OF A FAMOUS WRITER TO BECOME HIS TELEPHONIC DOUBLE?

Numerous things. To start with, the argument itself. Totally inconceivable but totally merry. It gives place to misunderstandings and multiple paths.

This story is also really contemporary. GUESS WHO IS CALLING? questions our dependence on our mobile phones - symptomatic of a time when we are always connected to everything except to ourselves.

The other thing that caught my attention, beyond the uniqueness of the plot, is the friendship that these two men will build, that will allow each of them to grow. This point of contact between

Baptiste Mendy (Salif Cissé) who dreams of fame, who searches the highlights and popularity, and Pierre Chozène (Denis Podalydés) who wishes for silence and invisibility.

The goal for Chozène is, in fact, to write a book about his father. And, for this, he needs solitude. But if he chooses to isolate from his social life by giving Baptiste his phone, it is also because this life is a weight for him. From obligations to commitments, his life is turned around, and his freedom is restricted. Just until the moment when he becomes more aware of this and has the courage to say no. In giving his social-self to this talented imitator, Pierre Chozène does not think about the consequences to come. Not only will Baptiste answer the calls, but he will also take initiatives and many liberties to the point where he totally invents and reorganizes the life of the writer. He will shake the lines and without wanting it, this will allow him to escape from a life he no longer wants and asphyxiates him. In parallel, Pierre Chozène, confiding in Baptiste, will convey the idea he must live his life now with plenitude, without looking to sell it to a random and vanishing success. It is this narrative we explored with my co-screenwriter, Claire Barré.

The other thing that I also really loved is the relationship between Baptiste and Elsa, painter and daughter of the writer. The fact that she offers him to pose in front of her and that the original painting that inspires her represents a woman,

questions the story of painting. For a long time, women did not have access to arts and even less to paint masculine models. It also questions gender. Baptiste suggests “Male-Female” as a title for the painting. And beyond Elsa’s character, I find that all the other female characters show freedom that we cannot find in Baptiste or Pierre Chozène.

YOU HAVE CHOSEN TO REPLACE « THE GREAT ODALISQUE » OF INGRES (IN THE BOOK) WITH A PAINTING BY LORENZO LIPPI...

I searched for a less known painting for the public. When I found « Allegory of Simulation » by Lorenzo Lippi, I was immediately touched without really realizing the symbolism it had. This portrait of a young woman holding a mask in one hand and an open pomegranate in the other was an uncommon allegory because the attributes are never associated. The mask is an emblem of the theater, of imitation, but also about lie. The pomegranate, whose rind contains many small seeds, symbolizes unity, but also false appearances, as it sometimes holds surprises once opened. It’s also a symbol of fertility and power. When I learned that this painting was on display at the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Angers, my hometown, I also saw it as a sign.

HOW IS WRITING AN ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY DIFFERENT FROM WRITING AN ADAPTATION?

The first part of this work was about asking myself why this story touched me the way it did and clarifying why it resonated with my own interrogations or obsessions. This step was crucial because it guided the choices that we later made with Claire. We've then decided to focus the intrigue around the relationship between Baptiste/ Pierre Chozène. The subjects about a life-changing encounter and transmission, can be found in my previous films. But this time, I chose the tone of comedy. A social and contemporary comedy.

DID YOU HAVE THE CAST IN MIND ALREADY WHEN WRITING?

While we wrote, I regularly checked the websites of acting agencies, and two names were evident to me: Denis Podalydès and Aure Atika. Once the screenplay was finished, I brought in a casting director, David Bertrand, who was an invaluable resource because he helped me meet young actresses and actors. For the main role of Baptiste, I saw a great amount of people, but I had an instant heartbeat for Salif Cissé, who has an amazing presence and charisma. But not only that. He is also a

really talented and hardworking actor. I wanted each character to be portrayed by a unique actor, someone who didn't resemble anyone else.

YOU GAVE SALIF CISSÉ ITS FIRST BIG ROLE IN CINEMA. WAS IT A CHALLENGE OR NOT AT ALL?

Absolutely not. I was certain of my choice after the first auditions. I just needed to test his voice against the one of Denis Podalydès. Michaël Gregorio, one of the best imitators in France, took part in the film really early on, from the writing stage. He was by my side in this job, and he confirmed me what I felt: there was a proximity between the voice of Denis and the one of Salif. They could accommodate each other to serve the story..

WHAT KIND OF DIRECTOR ARE YOU FOR THE ACTORS?

The actor's direction is for me, above everything, mutual trust. More concretely, I don't do rehearsals, but I love discussing with each of them the deepest points of their characters, before filming starts. The screenplay was fully written, but we took the time every morning to discuss the scene and its staging. We even did some improvisation. I like the set to be a living space where the script is re-examined, even if comedy is a stylistic exercise

that requires precise timing and leaves little room for flexibility due to that constraint. Obviously, I spent much more time with Salif who's nearly in every shot and who carries the film on his shoulders.

BAPTISTE INDEED PERFORMS MULTIPLE IMPRESSIONS. YOU BROUGHT IN THREE DIFFERENT IMITATORS, HOW DID THEY SHARE THE JOB?

Salif initially worked with Michaël Gregorio to approach to Denis' voice. But I did not want Baptiste's character to only be a speaker imitator, I also wanted a singing imitator, which is not at all the case in the book. Salif worked really hard and was coached by three different imitators who had each one their focus. Fabian Le Castel does the voice of Columbo, Sarkozy, Chirac, but also Johnny and Bashung. Eklips is behind the voice of the rap fragments, and Michaël Gregorio performs Michel Berger as well as the song "Moonlight in Vermont". Some of the chosen songs were personal ones made in collaboration with the imitators and Salif because we needed him to feel confident and also in the mood to sing those songs. For example, he really enjoyed the song "Diego".

THE PERFORMANCE OF SALIF CISSÉ IS REALLY EXTRAORDINARY...

What you see on screen is the result of an enormous work from Salif. Initially, he needed to learn each song so he could perform them live in front of an audience, but he also worked on the gestures, which was essential so it could be believable. Same thing for the voices. We can totally see it in the imitations of Sarkozy and Le Pen. Imitation passes through the body as well..

WHO LENDS THEIR VOICE TO BAPTISTE WHEN HE IMITATES PIERRE? IS IT DENIS PODALYDÈS ITSELF?

No. It's a combination of both voices. Salif worked alongside Michaël Gregorio to get as close as possible to Denis's voice while filming. And it was already mind-blowing. Later, Denis came in for post-synchronization of all the sequences where Salif imitates him, matching his performance. Each of them made a journey toward the other. The sound editor, Anne Gibourg and her assistant Grégoire Chauvot, then did a meticulous job, the old-fashioned way, syllable by syllable, breath by breath, even respecting the small mouth sounds that no one hears. It was a masterpiece and an insane amount of work! Laure Arto's mixing work completed the rest. This is a film where sound work is cru-

cial. That's why, in the end credits, the sound team is listed before the image team.

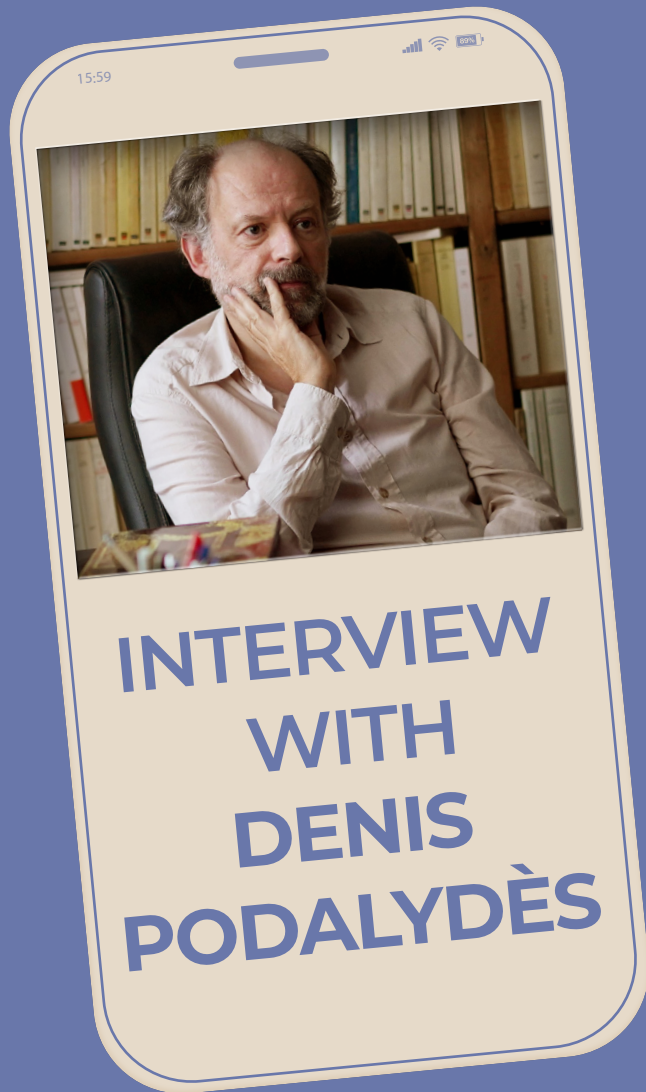
THE RINGTONE FOR PIERRE'S PHONE SETS THE RHYTHM OF THE FILM : "LE FREAK", PLAYED BY CHIC. WHY THIS SONG?

Well. In fact, this is not the ringtone I originally wanted. I dreamed about "Staying Alive" by the Bee Gees because it made more sense. Staying alive is the true question concerning Chozène who has something dead inside that Baptiste will wake up. After all, that's the song used for performing CPR. But the rights for it were too expensive. So, we settled on another piece of music that we found funny and offbeat in relation to the character.

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE THE SONG "MOONLIGHT IN VERMONT" FOR THE END OF THE FILM?

It is an exceptional vocal performance that gives Michaël Gregorio on stage because he switches from a male to a female voice. We knew that'd be a big challenge for Salif. And we loved the idea of this challenge.





WHAT IMMEDIATELY DREW YOU TO THIS STORY?

His argument is totally unreal: a writer who entrusts his voice to an imitator so he can get rid of himself, from his own life and dedicate himself solely to writing. I found it bold and mind-blowing, therefore interesting.

DO YOU UNDERSTAND THE NEED OF THIS FAMOUS WRITER TO DISCONNECT FROM OTHERS WHEN FOR THE FIRST TIME HE WILL WRITE IN THE FIRST-PERSON, THEREFORE OPENING UP ?

I think the idea is really novelistic. This shows the fantasy that many people could have - putting their lives in parentheses, locking themselves in their personal workrooms; abstracting themselves from the world and devoting themselves exclusively to art. Well, this is only an illusion, we know it. This story is a fairy-tale, we admit that that purpose is not realistic, not even credible; therefore, even if it's not that, I find the film subtle enough to make it worth embracing and playing with that fiction.

HAVE THE NOTORIETY - AND THE DEMANDS THAT COMES WITH IT - EVER FELT LIKE A BURDEN FOR YOU?

It has probably happened at certain times in my life, even if I do not have any precise, concrete memories of it right now. I think what burdened me most was the intensity of my work. I had this frenetic taste of the rehearsal room, or locking myself in my office to work. To abstract from existence was an idea or an aspiration that haunted me for a long time. Since the birth of my eldest son ten years ago, that's no longer possible. I've let go of it, not without a certain happiness. The ivory tower ideal that once guided me has a dark side—especially a difficulty in dealing with life. By devoting oneself entirely to work in order to fill everything, one can also encounter another kind of emptiness: that of a creation no longer nourished.

BY ENTRUSTING BAPSTISTE WITH HIS CELL PHONE, CUTTING HIMSELF OFF, DOES PIERRE OPEN HIMSELF UP TO THE WORLD, BECOME AVAILABLE... BECAUSE HIS THE PHONE WAS ENSLAVING HIM LIKE AN ADDICTION?

That's what he affirms. There's clearly a form of alienation. Curiously, we often say that people who are in front of screens are not people of words. Pierre is paradoxical in that sense. Winner

of a Goncourt prize, he is always in need-to-know what people think of him, what they have to say about him, and how they say it; but he wants to free himself from all that, for someone else to handle it and to solve all the problems in his place. That shows some kind of weakness, but it also seems to me that this way to reach out to a third party is a metaphor of psychoanalysis.

WHAT DID FABIENNE GODET TELL YOU ABOUT THE CHARACTER THAT WAS NOT NECESSARILY IN THE SCRIPT? WHAT'S HER VISION OF PIERRE CHOZÈNE??

We wanted to share the idea that he is a well-known writer, from a high enough level and with enough public success to command respect, which is always kind of difficult to portray in films. Often, I do not believe it. How can we make all of it believable? We've discussed it a lot by exposing all the problems of this, but also about the voice imitation. Did all of this come from a moral order? The answers came up gradually. Fabienne listens and loves to spark conversations that allow quietly move her actor direction forward. Anyhow, she did ask me to maintain a kind of sobriety, a sort of reservation.

AND HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE PIERRE CHOZÈNE ?

Alcoholism plays a crucial part in his life, but I love that we never see him drunk. We understand that he must have been drinking a lot and that his addiction, leading to a form of verbal violence, caused the separation from Clara, the woman he still loves. It is a huge wound in his life, that he's trying to fill. Although he lives comfortably in his apartment, he lives there alone. Pierre is a wounded man, searching for his father's approval that he'll never get. At first, it's not an evidence, but all these weaknesses start to show up slowly in each discovery that Baptiste makes about Pierre's life. In that sense, I didn't want to come across as a brilliant, self-assured writer; I didn't want to overdo it.

THROUGH THIS INTENTION HE HAS TO NO LONGER ASSOCIATE WITH HIS FELLOW HUMANS, DO YOU SEE HIM AS SOMEWHAT MISANTHROPIC?

There's surely some misanthropy in him, even if it does not show, which is something I really like: not labeling behaviors or giving them some archetypal name. I think artists, when they're in their own bubble, can have a tendency toward that. This relative misanthropy—which is by no means a hatred of others, but more

a desire for withdrawal—is often accompanied by an absolute love of humanity, and a longing to reconnect with it through creation.

ABOUT THIS WRITER BLOCKED BY THE PATERNAL FIGURE WHOSE APPROVAL HE SEEKS, WOULD YOU SAY HE REMAINS A CHILD WHO HASN'T FULLY GROWN UP?

There is for sure a sort of immaturity in him, first and foremost, through this absurd idea of wanting to get rid of his own existence. The one of a big or old child, whoever we want. Whoever would do that would be taken for a fool. What's interesting is to see how long this idea will last and to see where it will lead. It is possible that he needed that illusion to escape the toxicity of his relationship with his father and his dependence on alcohol. Pierre wishes for solitude; he comes a long way; he has always felt uncomfortable with an existence that ends up going in circles, like the tango dancers that he observes through his window. Except there are two. In the end, this absurd decision and his encounter with Baptiste, which in real life could have ended badly, will bring him back to the world. It is the power of the tale that reconciles.

DID YOU ALREADY KNOW SALIF Cissé (BAPTISTE)?

I had discovered him in the film “À l’abordage” by Guillaume Brac and I found him extraordinary. My brother Bruno had also noticed him and thought of him for a project that was never made. When Fabienne told me that he would be playing Baptiste, I was really thrilled. Salif combines the strength and the fragility, the sweetness, the lightness, and a beautiful gravity. He has a kind of a grace that soothes and calms down. I benefited from that greatly.

HOW DID IT GO WHEN YOU FIRST MET HIM?

Fabienne wanted to hear us together as soon as possible because she had this crucial issue with the voices. We worked on several hypotheses regarding this closeness, all subtly advised by Michaël Gregorio. We needed to make this journey toward each other. We immediately felt comfortable.

WHEN WATCHING THE FILM, WERE YOU ABLE TO ADMIRE HIS WORK AS AN ACTOR, PARTICULARLY IN REGARDS TO HIS PLAYBACK OF THE IMITATIONS?

Yes, I found him incredible. But not only that. In everything, actually. I love the subtlety and the flexibility of his humor, the

touching look in his eyes, which allows him to keep a slight distance from everything and mostly of all kind of ease. I love it.

AND YOUR VOICE MIXED WITH HIS. DID YOU FIND THAT UNSETTLING?

It’s a situation I had never seen in any film; it doesn’t exist. If it had just been my voice, the project would have been doomed to fail. It took a long time to do, with Salif’s work and mine in post-synchronization, and in the end, yes, this fusion is quite unsettling. Even I, when listening to it, get lost. I really enjoyed this challenge; it touched me deeply, and that’s also what encouraged me to embark on this adventure.

WHAT CAN YOU SAY ABOUT AURE ATIKA AND CLARA BRETTEAU, THE OTHER TWO ACTRESSES WHO ACT ALONGSIDE YOU?

I had never worked with Aure, whom I find wonderful and so classy. I loved working with Clara. The best proof is that I hired her for a play. In short, I had a lot of fun working with this group of actors, and I think the casting is outstanding in every way. It had to be, since it’s a film where the actors have a significant role

REGARDING THE SHOOTING, FABIENNE GODET MENTIONS A MEETING WITH THE ACTORS EVERY MORNING, WITHOUT THE TECHNICIANS, BEFORE THE DAY STARTED. DID YOU APPRECIATE THESE MOMENTS?

Yes, it's a form of rehearsal without the camera, during which we define the scene in its entirety—especially when it's a long one—and how it will be set up between us. It is very valuable; as it allows to come up with ideas, including framing, like when Baptiste sits at Pierre's desk and calls Elsa for the first time. Suddenly, I could picture Baptiste in me at my desk. Bertrand Tavernier applied this method of work systematically every day. I enjoy these moments of reflection, during which, almost like in theater, the light shines without us knowing exactly who turned it on. It is a collective problem-solving process. But this requires to be attentive to everything and everyone. These quiet moments, before the technical setup, also enhance the atmosphere and the understanding between direction and performance.

ON SET, WHEN YOU ARE AN ACTOR, DO YOU ALSO COMPLETELY FORGET THAT YOU ARE ALSO A DIRECTOR? DO YOU FULLY RELY, LIKE IN HERE, ON THE DIRECTOR?

Rather yes. Especially since in cinema, there's the question of the

camera angles, the chosen focal lengths, and the working shot, which an actor, even if they are also a director, cannot control. So, I fully rely on the one in charge, and I enjoy not having that responsibility. But I keep an eye on the direction, not to give my opinion, unless asked, but to see how it's made. It's always interesting.

AT ITS CORE, THE FILM ADDRESSES THE THEMES OF CHANGE. PIERRE TRANSFORMS THANKS TO BAPTISTE. DO YOU THINK THAT WITHOUT OTHERS WE DO NOT CHANGE, WE DO NOT EVOLVE?

Alone, it's impossible. It's like within a shoot: if, as an actor, we want to change something, everyone has to change. It's all about connection. Pierre would never evolve without Baptiste. This strange invention of going through an imitator might seem childish or odd, but it is, in fact, a desperate gesture to let someone into his circle, where he had emptied everything out.

Even just between him and his father, whom he was right to avoid, because that father would have destroyed the writer in him. Baptiste's figure resembles that of a son that Chozène does not have and who, indirectly, becomes an artist able to thrive in his own space. The story helps everyone.





YOU AUDITIONED, ALONG WITH OTHER ACTORS, FOR THIS FILM. WHAT WERE YOU TOLD ABOUT THE ROLE AND THE FILM?

I auditioned for the scene of the music show and the one when Chozène first meets Baptiste at his home to present his project. Fabienne told me almost everything about the role and the film and her narrative ambition for the screenplay compared to the book. I suggested for her to come and see me at the Théâtre des Abbesses, and she came, which was a good sign. I was performing in «1983», a play by Alice Carré, directed by Margaux Eskenazi in which I had a 10-minute monologue where I changed the register of the vocal register several times. She was able to see a facet of my work on stage, a thing that would fit really well in her film.

WHEN YOU READ THE SCREENPLAY, WHAT WERE YOUR FIRST THOUGHTS?

I've liked the story. The kind of storytelling that makes you want to follow its twists and turns. You quickly grow attached to the character of Baptiste, and you're really curious: how will he manage this situation without burning his wings? The argument is wild, original, something never seen before, and it reminded me of a British comedy, but I also felt the ambition of doing a French film in the way we know how to make them.

DID YOU IMMEDIATELY REALIZE THAT IT WAS YOUR FIRST BIG ROLE AND THAT THE FILM'S WEIGHT WOULD REST ON YOUR SHOULDERS?

I told myself it was a leading role, certainly, but I did not fully realize the importance it had. It came gradually during the preparation. I slowly understood that I had an artistic responsibility. To learn my text and to play well was not enough. I needed to bring a strong personal approach. I wanted Baptiste to be very distinctive, to leave a visual impression with a unique style the moment he appears on screen. Baptiste is an original imitator; it was necessary for me to point that in my performance.

WERE YOU AWARE OF THE AMOUNT OF WORK THAT IT WOULD MEAN FOR YOU?

I was aware of it when I read the screenplay for the first time. Even if Fabienne spoke to me really quickly about the setup we were going to use to make the imitations, I understood that it was a must for me to give a lot in the interpretation of Baptiste himself, of Baptiste in the Chozène's skin, of Baptiste imitating and singing on stage. But it did not worry me. I believe I have an enormous capacity of work

which is often an advantage. In fact, above all, I love working more than anything.

WHAT DID SHE TELL YOU ABOUT YOUR CHARACTER THAT WAS NOT IN THE SCREENPLAY TO HELP YOU BUILD HIM?

It happened through conversation, without too many preconceived ideas. We built the character together. She was not at all closed to changes or adjustments to her screenplay. I also wanted to know what aspects she wanted me to emphasize. But we also talked about the fact that I'm a dark-skinned actor and that Baptiste is white-skinned in the book. Should that be taken into account or not at all?

HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE BAPTISTE?

He's a showman with a very distinctive style. He has a certain lightness and integrity, but also this ability of adapting to every situation. I also have this ability, so I feel like a cousin to Baptiste. Then there's the duality of the character; sometimes himself, and sometimes when he tries being another, I find it fascinating. One of the key challenges for me was to convey the many facets

he can show depending on who he's talking to. He doesn't speak to everyone the same way. It was subtle, but it was needed. Compared to the original character, and I also discussed it with Fabienne, to make him a little more modern, especially in terms of the music he listens to. In the book, Baptiste does not imitate any rappers.

HE SAYS, SPEAKING OF HIS FATHER WHOM HE NEVER KNEW, "MY MOTHER TOLD ME THERE WAS JOY IN HIS VOICE." DID THAT HELP YOU TO BUILD UP THE CHARACTER?

This sentence was really important for us. I think that it builds the sense of imitation. Baptiste takes pleasure when he imitates voices, and that connects him to his father. The gift he has fills him with joy and creates a sacred connection to things, which is something I found very interesting as an actor and that allowed me to get closer to him.

WERE YOU IMPRESSED WHEN YOU LEARNED THAT YOU'D BE PLAYING ALONGSIDE DENIS PODALYDÈS?

First time that I saw Denis perform was in 2019 on the stage of La Comédie-Française, where I went for the first time. It was

"Fanny and Alexander", a play based on Ingmar Bergman's film and directed by Julie Deliquet. He didn't have the main role, but his presence on stage left a deep impression on me : his voice, his relationship to words, his ability with it all together, I saw a master in his field. And that's overwhelming for a young actor. I was impressed. But it felt mostly as an honor. I was asked to become him as Chozène. The bar was high, and the challenge was thrilling.

HOW DID THE FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH DENIS PODALYDÈS GO?

Denis is someone who is really busy; that's well known; thousands of things at the same time, but we ended up by doing a lecture without any prior contact. So, we went straight into work mode, no small talk, which suited us both, I think. That reading was really important because I needed to absorb something of him. Everything went really well. I felt that he was always there, 100 % present.

AND DURING FILMING, WHEN YOU ACTED OPPOSITE HIM, WHAT WAS IT LIKE?

I chose this job, though I do not consider it as such, I mean, not as a profession. It is mostly a calling, a passion, a reason to live that drives me towards others. With Denis Podalydès in front of me, I tried to savor every second, to stay alert to what might happen between us, to gather little things for later. I experienced what it's like to act with a great actor who gives everything, on and off camera. And we also share this common background in theater; we're the same kind of creatures, from the same family, where the members perform for one another. I felt very at ease with him, in an environment that felt deeply familiar.

DID ONE OF THE THREE IMITATORS THAT WORKED ON THE FILM GIVE YOU ANY ADVICE OR HELP YOU GET YOUR VOICE CLOSER TO THAT OF DENIS PODALYDES?

I worked a lot with Michaël Gregorio. He had warned me that spoken imitation is not his field, but in reality, and thanks to his experience, he helped me a lot. I don't have this gift of imitation. So I had to approach it as an actor and performer. The idea was not to imitate Denis's to perfection, even if there's similarity in our vocal ranges, a bit sandy and deep. That would have been a mistake. It was more interesting

to make people believe I was speaking with his voice, which is a really different approach. I needed to catch the essence of who Denis was so I could create that kind of impression.

DID THAT MEAN A HUGE AMOUNT OF PREPARATION FOR YOU BEFORE THE SHOOT?

Yes, and that required several weeks. I listened to Podalydès every day. I listened to everything by him—interviews, podcasts, audiobooks—to capture not just his intonation, but his cadence, his rhythm, his way of placing words, which I could then amplify. It was in the realm of interpretation, so I felt comfortable with it.

WHEN BAPTISTE IMITATES PIERRE, IT'S YOUR VOICE, CLOSE TO DENIS PODALYDÈS'S MIXED WITH YOUR OWN. WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE RESULT ?

When I understood the level of precision this would require, I was very happy. When I imagined my voice mixed with his, an unknown process for me, I knew that I had to make space for his voice. The final result was a form of truth between him and me. And that gives the process more credit. Baptiste gives all of him, but sometimes he loses Pierre. There was a balance to find, but the result is fantastic.

FOR THE SINGING IMITATIONS, YOU HAD AN EARPIECE, YOU NEEDED TO BE PERFECT WITH THE PLAYBACK... BUT ON SET YOU ALSO HAD TO ACTUALLY SING FOR IT TO BE BELIEVABLE.

Yes, we're talking about three constraints at once. And in fact, it was like a second round of preparation, since all the performance scenes were done separately from the main shoot and took us a good month. The song that reflects the most this difficulty is the last one, "Moonlight in Vermont" with the voice of a woman and a man together. Really difficult to interpret on every levels, and, clearly, like any other title, it was necessary for me to sing so we could bring the illusion in.

DID YOU HAVE THIS ABILITY?

I do not sing too badly. For this type of role, everything you know is useful. Then, on set, I sang in front of a full room; I gave everything, no matter the result in the moment. I was in character, and that's what I requested from Fabienne: to be in real performance conditions, not to cheat. And then she would do what she wanted.

DID YOU HAVE A SAY IN THE SELECTION OF THE SONGS?

Yes. I wanted "Diego" written by Michel Berger, for what the song tells, and to perform Johnny. He has one of the most recognizable voices; we are talking about a stage legend. I chose this song because I thought it would make things easier for me and because it's rewarding to perform. And since we're talking about Michel Berger, we also have to mention "Seras-tu là" (Will you be there) which comes at a point in the film I hadn't imagined. Fabienne placed it during a scene where Elsa is watching Baptiste on her computer; that created a touching and unexpected emotional moment.

WHAT KIND OF FILMMAKER AND ACTOR'S DIRECTOR IS FABIENNE GODET?

She is very good at welcoming the ideas of others, at collaborating. Me, I am an actor that likes to improvise. I like to suggest other lines of dialogue. But for this project, I did not feel it was really necessary; the scenes didn't lend themselves to do it. Everything was well-written enough. But, outside of the text, I was able to make acting suggestions that were really well received.

**SHE TALKS ABOUT MEETINGS WITH THE ACTORS,
WITHOUT THE TECHNICIANS, EVERY MORNING
BEFORE FILMING. WAS THAT GOOD FOR YOU?**

It is something that I had never seen before, and it was really pleasant. Filming for an actor can really take out your oxygen because of all the people that are on set. The time to perform; between “Action” and “Cut” is very limited. Having the opportunity of this moment that belongs to us at the start of the day is really enriching. Ideas are born, like in the scene where Baptiste comes to see Chozène to show him that he mastered his voice. Spontaneously, I sat at his desk, which was not planned by Fabienne at that moment. Denis thought it was wonderful because Baptiste was settling, taking Chozène’s place. And we kept that in our heads. With the technicians around us, it might have been more difficult to convince Fabienne.

**THIS STORY TRANSFORMS THE LIVES OF ITS TWO
MAIN CHARACTERS. CHANGING, THANKS TO OTHERS...
DOES THAT RESONATE WITH YOU?**

That’s exactly what the story is about and what I believe as well. Encounters that transform you, that’s the story of my life. This theme, whenever I come across it, really speaks to me.

**IN WHAT WAY DID THE FILM TRANSFORM YOU AS AN
ACTOR?**

I didn’t know, and honestly, I doubted, that everything we can use in theater, on that vast stage of freedom, could be used in cinema, where the time to act is so short. This film proved the opposite. There’s a porosity between both if we have the tools to do so. Then, this leading role brought me into contact, in a very short time, with very different talents. It requires a strong capacity for adaptation; and it affects you. This project required almost a year of investment which I accepted with joy. How many years of experience did it allow me to gain? That I do not know yet.



CAST & CREW



Decline



Accept

Baptiste Mendy SALIF CISSÉ
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Adapted from the book « Le Répondeur » by
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