

GAUMONT PRESENTS

A BOUCAN AND QUAD PRODUCTION

NIGHT CALL

A film by Michiel BLANCHART

JONATHAN FELTRE

NATACHA KRIEF

JONAS BLOQUET

THOMAS MUSTIN

WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF ROMAIN DURIS

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SYNOPSIS

One evening, Mady –a student by day, and a locksmith by night - sees his life turned upside down when he opens a wrong door and accidentally finds himself involved with organized crime. In a city racked by violence, he has only one night to find Claire, the woman who betrayed his trust.

The countdown begins...

AN INTERVIEW WITH MICHIEL BLANCHART

Talk to us about the origins of *NIGHT CALL*.

I always dreamed that my first feature film would take place in the course of one night. My penchant for films that are boxed in by a restraint brought me to reflect on the unity of time. And I decided to articulate my story around a frantic chase. It was reassuring, when writing, to have that as a framework, being able to place the main character in extremely specific situations, where each step is absolutely necessary to drive the story forward.

Besides, locksmiths fascinate me. Like many others, I have lost my keys and had to call someone I didn't know in the middle of the night. You have to pay cash for him to break open your lock! They enter private homes, they see things that should not be seen. They must have some strange encounters.

I was writing the screenplay toward the end of the second wave of Covid, in more or less 2020. Black Lives Matter demonstrations were becoming more frequent in Brussels. I lived near the Palais de Justice, so I had a front row seat. That swell of anger moved me. It touched and inspired me. I tried to make that palpable in the screenplay via Mady's adventure and the various threats he encounters. The coming together of all those strands that were not necessarily supposed to meet brought meaning to the project.

Before *NIGHT CALL*, most of your short subjects combined your interest in cult films with taking them up to another level.

I wanted to avoid writing an overly didactic film, a film that hammers home a point of view about political or social subjects. Nor was I interested in slavishly respecting the constraints of cult films. I tried to approach problems obliquely, remaining generous with the audience. Without wanting to compare myself to Spielberg, the best example of that is his *DUEL*, but there are also *COLLATERAL* or *TRAINING DAY*. I absolutely love those film. What they have in common is how they look at their times, without forgoing suspense and entertainment pleasure.

Whether in your short subjects or in *NIGHT CALL*, via the relationship that develops between Mady et Claire, there is one recurrent subject: how complicated it can be to establish a relationship...

That has to do with my desire to mix genres: I like films that are seething with anger and dark emotions, or that talk about very violent subjects. In one way or another, I want to tell love stories that may not always appear to be very romantic. I do not want to restrict myself to stories that involve couples. I like relationships that develop against complicated backgrounds. We live in a world in which we can no longer ignore the violence and suffering that goes on around us. In *NIGHT CALL* I wanted characters at the center of a very noir action film, and who are by their very situation in conflict. But whose quest is to find each other. That concerns Mady and Claire, but their antagonists as well. They have their backs to the wall, and they need to join forces to survive.

In fact, the main antagonist, if not to say "villain" in *NIGHT CALL* is not your run-of-the-mill bad guy. Even if furtively, you gift him with big-hearted nuances...

Cult cinema has taught me that for it to work, you need a kind of mythology: a hero and his adversary as the Yin and the Yang. Who is not fascinated by villains? I tried to create empathy for Yannick, while keeping him wrapped in mystery. We realize that he has a life away from all this, that he has reasons to do what does. The film is told from Mady's point of view, so by giving more depth to the bad guy, I wanted us to be as impacted as Mady by what is happening.

Is that also why you cast Romain Duris, the only famous actor in the film, as Yannick?

It is in fact the only role I wanted to be played by an established actor, someone immediately recognizable. His appearance modifies the situation: the audience recognizes Romain and understands immediately that he is not a character like the others.

Even though he has already played darker roles, in the collective imagination Romain Duris is not expected to play a cold-hearted villain. What could be more terrifying than taking a familiar, sympathetic face and showing the indifference or even cruelty that lurk behind it?

How did you choose the other actors, Jonathan Feltre as Mady and Natacha Krief as Claire?

It took a while. I had no one in mind when writing *NIGHT CALL*. For Mady, the casting began a year prior to the shoot. Jonathan impressed me very much, and we continued to enrich the character together. We rehearsed a lot.

As for Natacha, during an audition with Jonathan there was obvious chemistry going on between them. Everyone says that directing actors relies 80% on casting: when you have people like these two, who understand the text and bring the script to life as you imagined it, it's in the bag!

Even though *NIGHT CALL* depends on the rhythm imposed by unity of time and an organic chase scene, it remains a technically complex film. I'm thinking of that spectacular sequence in the Metro...

Several earlier projects convinced me that the rhythm imposed by the story should predetermine how you direct. But that does not mean that you cannot try for some true action scenes. I wanted to have fun with the language of cinema, while conserving a sense of realism. I wanted to follow the end of that chase scene as close to the character as I could. I wanted to see him run into the metro, I wanted to understand the geography of the city, while still sensing a threat that remains unseen. And realizing it in one continuous take creates authentic tension. So long as that shot lasts, the character is not out of danger.

And your desire to film Brussels as rarely seen in the cinema. Where did that come from?

I wanted an authentic Brussels, not a post card Brussels. Driving by the Marolles elevator, or the Palais de Justice, made me fantasize about my city as a film location, much like American films made me fantasize about New York. This way of revisiting Brussels speaks to its inhabitants, although I wanted to film it in a more universal way.

***NIGHT CALL* appears to be influenced by South Korean cinema, especially in its capacity to shift from one register to another, while always remaining fluid.**

That combination is what excites me most about the language of cinema. The audience knows its codes well enough for us to be able to twist and turn them around. South Korean cinema does that very well and it is in fact one of my primary references in terms of tone. I think of course of films like *MEMORIES OF MURDER* by Bong Joon-ho, in which from one moment to the next you pass from a serious, blood-curdling sequence to a comic scene. Such is life! You may be experiencing something very traumatic, while being bowled over by the absurdity of the moment.

That raises a question, how do you film action scenes...

I tried to spectacularize *NIGHT CALL* via my direction, while always making sure that what goes on in front of the camera remains plausible. There are of course moments where I do go overboard: it is hard to imagine Mady physically standing up to everything that he goes through in the film. But he always managed to pull himself together and continue. On the other hand, all our stunts are realistic. In every case, I aimed for a rhythm that would entertain the audience.

... and the aesthetics of filming at night to make things look a little less real.

The main thing is to believe in the veracity of what your characters are experiencing, what they feel, the situation they find themselves in. Feeling total empathy with them. But once you set up a camera, turn on the lights and shoot, you are no longer talking about reality, you are interpreting reality. So, you may as well let yourself go, create an atmosphere artistically, a perception in sync with what the characters are feeling.

Speaking of emotion, you mentioned at the beginning of this interview your desire to include Black Lives Matter demonstrations in *NIGHT CALL*. They obviously imply a second, social or political, reading. Why was that important to you?

As a filmmaker, how can you not talk about the world and the times you live in? You can still create mainstream cinema while fooling around with the codes of the genre and introducing more compelling themes. The evocative power of cinema is also meant to move minds and souls indirectly. But my films do not deliver any messages. They are not politically committed. But I do hope that they remain lucid and sincere. As was my anger while writing *NIGHT CALL*. Making films is my way of expressing that.

Hence some fictional elaboration, as shown by Mady's evolution, moving from fear to the desire to make a moral choice?

Exactly! The entire film focuses on Mady. He reveals himself as he reacts with other people's lives during his various adventures. But for me, his story is a kind of *coming-of-age story*, a road to maturity. He develops from someone keeping a low profile, trying to make his way in the world, to a heroic individual who for once in his life succeeds in doing what he thinks is right in a completely unjust world. To do that, he will be confronted with a moral choice whose consequences he will have to live with. In that sense, *NIGHT CALL* is clearly a fictional construct.

AN INTERVIEW WITH JONATHAN FELTRE

Michiel Blanchart speaks of Mady as a character who evolves from a state of fear to an awareness that will lead him to make a moral choice. Did you see him like that?

Totally. As the film moves forward, in order to survive, Mady evolves from a victim of routine, leading the stifling daily life of a worker who always nods yes, to a resourceful decision maker. His encounter with Claire triggers a high-speed chase and an adrenaline rush, but then a new personality emerges that allows him to dominate utter chaos. Ultimately, he is transformed by what he has experienced, but also by the people he has met.

There are several levels of reading *NIGHT CALL*, from its relationship with cult movies, to other more social concerns. What attracted you to the project?

I like to say that entertaining an audience is not an action film's only vocation. Sure, you do want to make a hip, entertaining film that provokes feelings and emotions in the audience, but that is only at a primary level. At the next level, a political dimension may emerge via the context it occurs in. In *NIGHT CALL* that context mainly concerns Mady. The whole idea is to make a hard-hitting film that turns the world upside down, while still making audiences think, but without jumping on a soapbox or resorting to didactic arguments.

The symbiotic nature of mainstream cinema and political argument was already present in your work with Jimmy Laporal-Trésor on *SOLDAT NOIR* and *LES RASCALS*...

I wanted to work on films that talk about something without making that its only subject. There is a continuity between those films and *NIGHT CALL* in their thematic content and the presence of a specific environment. But that's not something I did on purpose.

***NIGHT CALL* also raises the issue of an actor being involved in a particularly physical action film...**

Like Michiel, I love the time spent on preparation. With this film, we had the luxury of sufficient time. We wondered about the bodies of people who work night and day. Exhausted. Not very pretty. We needed to feel that. Other than the action scenes, this is a film about a character in constant survival mode. So, he needed a certain physical condition, but without looking like an athlete either. Because that's not the subject. It's about some rando desperately trying to survive. That dimension of *NIGHT CALL* produced both physical and emotional intensity. Filming at night also brought something organic: night requires a different physiology, it adds a different perspective, a different energy.

***NIGHT CALL* involves sudden shifts of tone, much like in Korean cinema. Are you marked by that influence in your acting?**

I clearly see which films Michiel must have talked to you about: films like *MEMORIES OF MURDER* or *THE CHASER*, where the deepest tragedy can rub shoulders with comedy. It is always interesting for an actor to tell a story using a large palette of emotions. Not feeling confined, letting yourself be carried away by funny or improbable moments. When performing, you always need to show your involvement in the emotion. The context here is survival, but we wanted to introduce other colors and nuances too.

***NIGHT CALL* is technically a very complex film. How did you adapt to that?**

That was the challenge. That's when you realize that making a film is a collective adventure. You truly depend on each other. You need to be precise. You need to remain inside a frame decided on by the director, while still finding enough leeway to bring your scene to life. This film demands a lot of you. You must look very emotionally involved while remaining within your marks. The scene in the metro, for example, was prepared with painstaking precision. There was that, and then were also the constraints imposed by the camera's movements.

Most of the film is told from Mady's point of view. His feelings about the situation. And so, you had to be his total embodiment. Does that provoke an unusual sense of responsibility?

Exactly. I knew that, as soon as I committed myself to an action film. For me, *NIGHT CALL* was the film that would confirm me as an actor: I would see whether I had the shoulders to carry the weight of a film. I was still learning my craft when I was called in to audition. I gave myself heart and soul to catch up while they were still auditioning the rest of the cast. When I say confirm, it's because I realized that I needed to be rigorous and precise, constantly engaged to guarantee coherence. That may sound frightening, but I had Michiel's niceness, and his and the entire crew's trust to support me.

Aside from all the action and the police story which remain primary, there is also the relationship between Mady and Claire which evolves throughout *NIGHT CALL*. Doesn't this film talk just as much, if not more, about how to construct an interpersonal relationship?

That's what I really liked about the screenplay and the project itself: the characters always remain sensitive and endearing. The idea of an encounter is expressed by simple and easily recognizable things, like the Petula Clark song that opens the film. Even when *NIGHT CALL* goes for a thrills-and-chills rollercoaster ride, there are moments when the characters feel something different. Especially Mady, with his work and his solitude. The film pays tribute to people like him, people who escape their humdrum lives thanks to a chance encounter that could lead to disaster.

Michiel Blanchart sees it as a kind of coming-of-age film: *NIGHT CALL* also recounts how Mady achieves a certain maturity in his relations with people and the world around him. Did you feel that?

There was a moment when I did identify with him, when he was at a turning point in his life: I had to fight to go to school, to become able to earn my own living, and all that in the context of building a professional career, in which certain events can serve as triggers. If the question is whether at a given moment, you feel - if not the onset of adulthood, but the end of adolescence, the end of insouciance - yes, I see a little of that.

There is a third implicit level with the Black Lives Matter movement. Is that something that concerns you?

Yes, but indirectly. In any event, in this project, Black Lives Matter serves as a background to define the character, but at one point it becomes universal. That's one of the things I liked most about this project, its third level. I like how the story shows that an ambient political climate can affect people, or not affect them, in their daily lives in very minor ways. It is interesting that even with a subject like Black Lives Matter, in which police violence has an impact on everyone, *NIGHT CALL* does not get bogged down in it. I also like how Mady is aware of it. He tries to protect himself from it, but he is not indifferent to it. He simply cannot afford the luxury of becoming involved in it, of committing to it, even though reality will soon catch up with him.

Is this a way of representing diversity? If your role went to a white actor, things wouldn't have been the same...

It wouldn't tell quite the same story... I think that issues of social justice, the Black Lives Matter movement, or even a geopolitical situation that gets a lot of media coverage, affect everyone and can characterize all kinds of people. Belonging to a connected generation, aware of everything that is going on, has led to global consciousness and sensitivity. It's even more interesting when those issues are addressed in a film. And not only because it heightens their credibility, fleshes them out, or endows them with a finer sense of contemporaneity. And that goes for any skin color. If the film featured a Caucasian actor, I think he would have the same impact on how we perceive the surrounding atmosphere of the film, how things happen, and how each citizen's daily life is a matter of survival.

That does not prevent *NIGHT CALL* from sometimes abandoning harsh realism for a foray into more poetic realms...

Which provides a wonderfully effective glow. Spoiler alert, there is a happy ending. There is not always a heroic aspect in everyday life, but there is in this film. You may think that it's too facile, that it's there to smooth rough edges and lower the preceding tension. I like films in which the bad guys win, I like anti-heroes, but the other, more chivalrous side of the coin, is beautiful and interesting to play too.

CAST

MADY

CLAIRE

THEO

YANNICK

REMY

GREG

WILL

GINA

ABEL

SAM

JONATHAN FELTRE

NATACHA KRIEF

JONAS BLOQUET

ROMAIN DURIS

THOMAS MUSTIN

SAM LOUWYCK

NABIL MALLAT

CLAIRE BODSON

GRAHAM GUIT

MARCO MAAS

CREW

A FILM BY	MICHIEL BLANCHART
SCREENPLAY	MICHIEL BLANCHART
PRODUCED BY	MICHAEL GOLDBERG BORIS VAN GILS MARGAUX MARCIANO NICOLAS DUVAL ADASSOVSKY SYLVESTRE VANNOORENBERGHE
PHOTOGRAPHY	MATTHIEU JAMET-LOUIS
EDITING	TANGUY « TEPR » DESTABLE
ORIGINAL MUSIC	FABRICE GRIZARD
SOUND	LOUIS STORME DAVID VRANKEN DAVID GILLAIN
SET DESIGN	CATHERINE COSME
COSTUMES	ISABEL VAN RENTERGHEM
MAKEUP	LABHISE ALLARA MANDANGO CIRATU
CASTING	MARINE ALBERT MICHAËL BIER
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR	VALÉRIE HOUDART
SCRIPT	BAPTISTE GUIARD
STAGE MANAGER	STEFAN TATIBOUET
PRODUCTION MANAGER	LATIGONE N'GOMA
POST-PRODUCTION MANAGER	CAMILLE SCHUMACHER
LINE PRODUCER	THOMAS JAUBERT
A PRODUCTION	BOUCAN AND QUAD
COPRODUCED BY	GAUMONT FRANCE 3 CINÉMA A PRIVATE VIEW RTL BELGIUM - RTL TVI VOO ET BETV PROXIMUS BNP PARIBAS FORTIS FILM FINANCE CANAL+
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WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF	CENTRE DU CINEMA ET DE L'AUDIOVISUEL
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