

French – South African Coproductio Forum

19 – 23 July 2012



DURBAN
INTERNATIONAL
FILM
FESTIVAL





Ladygrey

Genre

Drama

Format

35mm

Estimated Duration

100 min

Budget

€ 3,900,000

Producer

Bertrand Faivre

Director

Alain Choquart, adapted from two novels by Hubert Mingarelli

Note of intention

A few days in the lives of several characters living in a small town at the foot of the Drakensberg Mountains, South Africa. On the backdrop of nature's physical splendour, the town's dark history surfaces and challenges each one of them to overcome the past.

The setting of a small town at the foot of the Drakensberg is both timeless and difficult to identify, which emphasises the universal quality of the characters (as in *The Piano* by Jane Campion, where both the setting and the period became relatively unimportant). The surroundings are imposing: mountains, trout-filled rivers, steep paths covered in snow from the violent winter storms. We can all relate to the characters whose lives unfold against this backdrop. In each one of us there is a daydreaming child, or a woman, anxious and trembling in the face of desire, an overly virile, brutal man, or a loving father who invents a glorious past for himself. My idea is to show the intimate, the minute, revealed through the vastness of the universe. Nature, therefore, will be treated as a character, the illustration of an indisputably Superior strength, whether as an expression of the divine or as a simple physical presence that dominates mankind.

Some visual references: long shots of the gentle or oppressive landscapes in Lars von Trier's *Breaking the Waves*, or a close-up of a dripping leaf pierced by sunlight to evoke the destiny of men at war in *Thin Red Line* by Terrence Malick.

Synopsis

Ten years since the end of Apartheid and during the fragile times of reconciliation, black and white communities live together warily at the foot of the magnificent Drakensberg Mountains in South Africa, in the small town of Ladygrey, established next to a French Catholic mission.

Our story focuses on eight members of these communities: Mattis (Jérémie Renier), 30, but with the mental age of a child, lives with his dying father Henri and his beautiful, mixed-race half-sister, Estelle. He is haunted by one goal: to save enough money by helping out elderly people from the mission and buy the fish eagle encaged at the local shop. His father Henri (André Dussolier), 65, is bedridden and fights against death. Mrs Borgman, 65, gatekeeper of the mission, is Mattis' close friend. She desperately waits for her husband's body, killed during the Apartheid, to reappear in order to offer him a decent burial. Estelle (Naomie Harris), 33, sells her body to earn money and become self-sufficient so that the custody of her half-brother is entrusted to her after their father's death. The local landowner, Angus (Ciaran Hinds), 50, is obsessed with killing the jackals that have been attacking his sheep. He and his workers fence off his property. His past as a pro-apartheid activist endangers the balance in his relationship with his young wife Olive, who is physically attracted to Angus but scared by who he could have been. Samuel (Peter Sarsgaard), 40, white like his boss Angus, is mistrusted by his fellow black workers, who suspect he's treated differently because of his skin colour. Samuel is a widower and has a hard time making ends meet. He does his best to make his son proud, planting several rosebushes that he hopes to sell for a tiny profit. His son Waldo, 12, spends his days shaping a secret tunnel in the tall grass down the river to reach the spot where his mother was drowned some years ago. He idolises his father, though he's beginning to realise

Samuel is far from infallible.

Olive, 30, works as a nurse, tending to the dying Henri. Recently arrived from the big city and lost in this huge and hostile region, Olive does her best to integrate with these rural communities, notably Samuel, whom she's strongly attracted to. As she travels through the village on her rounds and starts to piece together everyone's interconnected stories, she also realises that Angus is addicted to Estelle's expensive body.

On a sunny day, workers of the township's water company discover the burnt bodies of black men and children killed during the massacre known in the community as the "Eleven of Ladygrey". Both Henri's and Samuel's wives were killed during the riots that erupted in the aftermath of the massacre, while Mrs Borgman's husband is one of the eleven bodies. The discovery shatters the fragile community, unravelling buried feelings and feuds.

Will anger and resentment take over? Will they be able to turn the page of their tragic past so that forgiveness may someday be given? There is no easy solution, only choices. The hope of everyone can cure the pain of all, as each person finds a way towards reconciliation. A green and quiet river will fulfil the dreams of the most innocent...

Short Biography

Bertrand Faivre's production companies (*Le Bureau Paris, The Bureau London*) have seen their reputations grow on both sides of the Channel since their inception in 2000, gaining recognition for the distinctive talents they've nurtured and retained, as well as for the excellence shown to financial partners in the management of the companies. The companies' producers and co-producers credits include films by multi award-winning directors such as **A. Kapadia, E. Zonca, F. Berthaud, C. Ruggia, F. Godet, A. Haigh, A. dos Santos** and **R. Bouchareb, C. Carion** or **Costa Gavras**. Most of these films star major international talents, opened in prestigious film festivals and were critically acclaimed and financially successful. Parallel to this production activity, *Le Petit Bureau* (Paris) handles French TV sales rights for a library of 620 films, and international rights for about 150 of them.

Born in 1960, **Alain Choquart** has been a Director of Photography for more than 30 years, working especially closely with multi-awarded directors such as **Bertrand Tavernier** (*L 627, L'Appât, Capitaine Conan, Ça commence aujourd'hui...*) and **John Berry** (*Boesman & Lena, Captive in the Land...*) as well as on short films, music videos and commercials directed by **Enki Bilal, Serge Gainsbourg** or **Alain Franchet**. He directed numerous TV series in France and is now preparing his first film as a writer-director: *Ladygrey*, awarded with a Special Mention at France's biggest Screenplay contest (Sopadin).

Going inside time



Genre
Comedy
Format
HD
Estimated Duration
90 min
Budget
€ 800,000
Producer
Emmanuel Chaumet
Director
Gregg Smith

Note of intention

Against the backdrop of a longstanding family business, Strauss Roadfreight, the film presents us with the perspectives of three generations of South African society, responding to a culture undergoing rapid transformation. The older generation, whilst deeply lodged in the past, seems paradoxically to be more capable of clarity of vision and a youthful (if at times morally questionable) approach to life. By contrast Max Strauss (who has recently inherited the company's management) and his younger generation, seem mired in a complex new reality in the which the desire to build a healthy new society is thwarted by the residues of an unhealthy past and the urgent call to address the needs of many in an era of recession. His younger brother Douglas has yet another take on reality ; too young to remember the apartheid era or feel responsible for it, he has an easy-going attitude, engaging freely with the other drivers, but generally lacking an anchor or strong direction in life. If Max feels trapped by his conscience, and the demands of the drivers and their Union representative, Mr Nkosi, he must also overcome his sense of fidelity to his father's generation who have provided him with the privileged life he enjoys. A common theme in the film is the conflict generated in several characters by the need reconcile personal sentiments, memories, desires and fears, with

the demands of external phenomena of family and social dynamics. In order to convey this tension between the inner and outer realms, the realism of the narrative shifts seamlessly at intervals into mildly surrealistic situations in which the existing status quo's between the characters are transgressed or inverted.

Synopsis

Max and Celia, a young couple have recently decided to relocate from Paris, France back to Max's city of origin, Cape Town. Both have till now enjoyed secure careers, Celia working in a bank and Max as a professor in English literature, however their desire for a better quality of life coupled with the recent family pressure for Max to take over the running of his father's Transport business, leads them to take the plunge and begin again.

Celia has difficulty adjusting to her new life in the quiet suburbs of Cape Town and Max is immediately confronted by a labour conflict at Strauss Transport, a business which has been long in need of reorganising. But in spite of these difficulties, for his part Max feels inspired. The vigorous nature of his new life rekindles his progressive political ideals as well as his dormant writing career; he is enthusiastic for this new context where reality is often stranger than fiction. Whilst much of his time is taken up by fielding the demands of the various factions, he also steals quiet moments in his office to incorporate details of these daily exchanges into a once abandoned manuscript. The process of reorganisation steadily moves ahead. Mr Brothers (the labour lawyer) works quietly behind the scenes, meeting with Max, the drivers, and Mr Gains, the company's accountant. Life at the business seems to go on as usual, with the casual joking amongst the drivers and their flirtations with the Myriam, the floor manager. But the movements of Mr Brothers are tracked with suspicion by almost everyone. Negotiations with the drivers' representative, Mr Nkosi, suddenly intensify as one of the drivers returns from working a double shift and needs to be hospitalised, suffering from exhaustion. Mr Nkosi seizes Jimmy's mistreatment as the lever to ruthlessly push home his list of demands, threatening to turn Max over to the Labour Tribunal.

The turbulent goings on at Strauss Transport are interwoven with a series of contemplative scenes showing the private lives of some of the main characters (Celia, Harry Schulz, Mr Nkosi, Douglas) and a game of golf between Max and his father during a weekend visit to their place of retirement in Hermanus. In the peaceful surrounds of the golf course, there is evidence of a physical and psychological struggle between the two men. As the drama in the city gradually unfolds it becomes clear that Max will need to find a way to express his own point of view if his position is to become tenable.

Short Biography

Gregg Smith is a director of South African nationality. He was born in Cape Town in 1970 and did his initial studies at the Michaelis School of Art, UCT. This was followed by studies at the Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten in Amsterdam and Le Fresnoy in Tourcoing France. Since 2005 he lives and works in Paris, France. Recent films include: *Malleable tracks* (2012), *Love, jealousy and wanting to be in two places at once* (2011), *Underexposed* (2010), *Moving on (take 22)* (2009), *The End* (2006) and *Should we never meet again* (2005). His films have been shown widely in international festivals such as the Rotterdam International Film Festival, FID Marseille, Durban International Film Festival, Coté Court de Pantin and The Festival Internacional de Curtas de Belo Horizonte.

Ecce Films has produced more than 40 short and medium size films from the last 10 years. Many of them are first films directed by graduates from French Art Schools (Les Beaux Arts, Le Fresnoy). Our catalogue includes all the films directed by **Sophie Letourneur** and **Benoît Forgeard**. At the present moment the company is in post-production on four features, directed by **Justine Triet**, **Shalimar Preuss**, **Antonin Peretjatko** and **Sophie Letourneur**. Finally, Ecce Films has just completed the production of *Malleable Tracks* directed by **Gregg Smith**.

Contact

Julien Ezanno

+33 1 44 34 37 85

+33 6 21 87 19 36

julien.ezanno@cnc.fr

**Centre national du cinéma
et de l'image animée (CNC)**

www.cnc.fr

a publication of the
Centre national du cinéma
et de l'image animée
www.cnc.fr

French – South African Coproduction Forum