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presents

MICROBE AND GASOLINE



Theatrical release date: July 1, 2016

Written and Directed by: Michel Gondry

Starring: Ange Dargent, Théophile Baquet, and Audrey Tautou

Running time: 103 minutes

Rating: “R” by the MPAA

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Publicity Contact:

Prodigy PR, 310-857-2020

Alex Klenert, ak@prodigypublicrelations.com / Rob Fleming, rf@prodigypublicrelations.com /

Jacki St. Thomas, js@prodigypublicrelations.com

SYNOPSIS

Microbe, a shy, aspiring artist, has trouble making friends at school until he meets Gasoline, a likeminded outcast. Together they hatch a plan to build a car and spend their summer on an epic road trip across France. This charming adventure from Michel Gondry (MOOD INDIGO, BE KIND REWIND) has been called his “most satisfying movie since ETERNAL SUNSHINE OF THE SPOTLESS MIND,” reminding us how friendships can help us reach our true potential. Also starring Audrey Tautou (AMELIE, DA VINCI CODE).

INTERVIEW WITH MICHEL GONDRY

Q) How did the idea for MICROBE AND GASOLINE come about?

When I finished SCUM OF DAYS, I was a little all over the place as I was under enormous pressure. There was talk that I would start over on UBIK, another adaptation of the famous cult book with the reputation that it is inadaptable. It was Audrey Tautou who suggested that I make a more personal film. I started to pull myself together and focus especially on friendships. I grew up in a family of hippies in Versailles, we were very pampered by our parents, not by the people around us, and I have always been familiar with social situations in school. The Hoche School in Versailles was very strict; there is no equivalent to what it was. I was closest to other teenagers who were rejected by others or those with parents who had special trades. I remembered one in particular, he was a handyman and his strict father was an antique dealer. I started to add these memories together and it gave this story of friendship.

Q) Is Microbe you, and Gasoline your friend?

The relationship between the kids is quite true to the reality of my adolescence: Diesel is a combination of two or three of my friends, including the one that I mentioned, whom I’ve not seen. But there was also this handyman cousin who would build models of arches. Together, we invented a machine that could draw images. I was particularly strong in design and coming up with ideas. I was quite a handyman too but the bolts were not as tight! And it’s true; I was always mistaken for a girl. I was maybe a little younger than Microbe, but I remember when the baker told my mother, “Your daughter has beautiful hair...” That happened often. In an English class early in the year, I had to move my table and my teacher told me: “Ask a person of the stronger sex to help you...” I was also taking remedial classes and after one week, my teacher still thought I was a girl. I was only four years old and I was so ashamed that I dared not correct anyone.

Q) Did you really build a car with your handyman friend?

I have mixed memories. With another friend, we had bought a used kart, and we would use it on the supermarket parking lot on Sundays. It was good fun! As for the friend who inspired Gasoline, he had a project to manufacture a car, but it remained a project. This is why the journey itself is more of a fantasy. I think that making the film allowed me to realize my childhood dream.

Q) Does Microbe’s family resemble your family?

Absolutely, I took them character-by-character. I have two brothers, one older and one younger. My older brother was the hard rocker and later, the punk. In my short film THE LETTER, he

was already the bad guy; I wasn't going to add to it! My little brother was both very athletic and very sensitive. I remember once when he wept because he did not make any money, and only gave ten cents to my parents. The guilt was traumatizing... There were flaws in this family. My father was not very loyal and my mother was depressed. We were very open but there was no strong structure, no strength and it was scary. I especially wanted to show the contrast with the parents being more restrictive with Diesel. My family was more sympathetic, but also more fragile and deteriorating in some ways.

Q) Does the character Audrey Tautou play resemble your mother?

Audrey's older, but she looks like her a little. Save that my mother would wear rather large floral dresses; it was the 70s. I'm not sure that this wardrobe would have made it to the screen even though it is part of my memories. Audrey plays a piano teacher as did my mother. My mother was depressed but she still had some will power: she made me realize a connection and it was called a "brotherhood." She believed in reincarnation – it is about this time that I became a vegetarian. This reassured me about death, but one day she told me, "You, you will not reincarnate because you're an angel, you have only one life..." She was not aware of the effect it had on me. She also had a need for physical contact that I was reluctant to give, I did not want her love, I saw her as a void in the house that was not comforting at all. That's why throughout the film, when the mother wants to approach him, Microbe retreats...

Q) Microbe suffers because he feels that he is different but yet he does not want to be like others. Did you share the same feelings?

Yes, I wanted to have long hair because all students of the Hoche School, including many military sons had very short haircuts. I did not want to be like them. One day, there was a lice outbreak, and there was talk of cutting everyone's hair short, I looked at the school's boys heads to see what I could look like and it scared me. Secretly, I was also afraid that I would still be taken for a girl with short hair. Then, I would not have had an excuse anymore.

Q) Was there a Laura in your school?

Yes, her name was Emmanuelle, and we are very good friends now. I think of how she was about ten years ago and they are not the same person. We talk about this in my film about Noam Chomsky, and the difficulty in adjusting memories to the present reality, and how reality finally erases the old memories. I kept pictures of her from that time. I was very in love for four years and finally it was my brother who went out with her. This story inspired my short film THE LETTER.

Q) The students of the film have become a form in itself. Did you have any references?

I looked at DIABOLO MINT for inspiration and its form is very successful. In the bonus DVD, there is a beautiful making of featuring an interview with Diane Kurys. I understood that the purpose had to be to highlight children's emotions, and to abandon any aesthetic pretensions. I repeat, I did not want the film to take place in the past: it would have been blocked by the context, no flexibility, because you cannot suddenly fill a street with 70s cars... I imagined Microbe and Gasoline to be opposed to technology and trend. We, at the time, were anti-modern. I was anti-commercial, I would never have gone to see SATURDAY NIGHT FEVER or STAR WARS, and I liked the music that was not popular. I achieved that through their attitude towards the iPhone.

Q) The boys speak very well, almost like an adult...

I was lucky: as soon as the characters began to speak in my head, they all spoke like that... Was my friend as confident as Gasoline? I do not know. I was perplexed to be mistaken for a girl, so I absorbed everything that would have allowed me to become more of a guy... Gasoline is more of an adult because of his isolation from his family. I had another friend, who did nothing but watch TV all day, and suddenly he had gained incredible knowledge in virtually everything. It was he who had invited me to sleep with him and spend the night in a chair with open eyes.

Q) But for the actual dialogue, how did you write it?

What is certain is that they are not millennials, they do not speak the slang of the youth. On several occasions, Gasoline puts Microbe in his place: "Stop with the slang", "Do not high five, it is vulgar". They speak in a staggered manner, or a little old-fashioned. Without comparing, because I do not want to see it that way at this stage, it is similar to MY NIGHT AT MAUD'S: people say true things that are deeply felt, but with the written language, it is quite far from reality. Sometimes young actors tell me that they do not think they would say such and such. I tell them: "But your character is not exactly as you are in real life...".

Q) The trip is the materialization of their friendship...

They have time to talk because the car is really not fast! The actual journey is born of a series of dreams that I had, and I've used them almost in order: a dentist, a hairdresser, an American footballer, flying a plane at low altitude or in reverse. There are four or five dreams put together, but rewritten with a relatively realistic background. They are pretty childish dreams, perhaps because the first part is based on events deep in my childhood...

I did not sleep very well, I always had dreams. For example, I dream that I live in my childhood home every week. It's heavy! Fun fact, we shot in my grandparents' house in Versailles and in front of the house where I lived. We shared the same garden separated by a hedge. The hole in the wall of our house, which is currently occupied by other people still exists: we wanted to dig to see the thickness of the wall. When we visited the house, she seemed tiny... In general, if my dreams have dramatic potential, I take note of it. Sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night, and I think it's such a great story, and in the morning, I find it much less so!

Q) Where did you find the young actors?

This was incredible casting by Sarah Teper and Leila Fournier. They met sixty kids. The child who plays Microbe is Angel Dargent. In our first meeting, it was already magical: he was similar to the character, he loved films of the 60s, his culture is not at all contemporary... But when he was made to play a scene, it was a disaster: he had done theater, and he delivered theater. It was clear that we would not make it. I saw his little head, and how disappointed he was. It broke my heart. Another child was found, and then I learned that he had already acted in WAR OF THE BUTTONS, it gave him an advantage over Ange. We went back to Ange, we started over and he was great.

Théophile Baquet, who plays Diesel also acted in WAR OF THE BUTTONS, but we only found out later, because he was found at the entrance of a school. He is the son of Maurice Baquet. I told him STOWAWAY IN THE SKY was my favorite film, but he had never seen it. His look in

real life is more gothic-punk, and he struggled to put on his Michael Jackson jacket and his moccasins. When we put them together, Ange and Théophile was immediately extremely alive, it was happening at top speed!

Ange has a very mature side, but also a naive and super earnest side. One day he came to me with the script. He said: "It is written: "We will push up Nemours'... Why should we push the car to Nemours?" So I added it to the dialogue. It is a somewhat outdated term for them. Diane Besnier, who plays Laura, is also the same way. She was very earnest. She had braces that we kept. Anyway, I do not think we could have removed them!

Q) Are the nicknames of the time period?

No, I was called "muscular shrimp" when I was a little younger. Gasoline was a not very flattering nickname of a girl who lived near the village where my aunt lives: she was called Gasoline like the gasoline pump... So it has nothing to do with it.

Q) Who invented the cabin-car?

It is I, it was my childhood joy to draw cars; I drive badly and did not enjoy the idea of buying a luxury or sports car. Moreover, today's car bodies are not as pretty. When we watch a movie, it is cars that express the time first. I had the idea of the cabin-car from early on, I drew it and I gave it to my usual designer Stephane Rozenbaum to build it. She did not use a lawnmower engine; it would not have been powerful enough. We constructed several: the first continuous body, to which the bodywork was added; then, a more powerful engine and that became the cabin-car; then, the cabin-car was burned; and finally a lighter version for the scene where the car falls into the river. We went to Morvan with the car, although much had been shot in Ile-de-France. When I made this film, it was also taking the weight of SCUM off of me: there was only one camera, a small team, and I love working in these conditions.

Q) Did the young actors really drive the car?

They loved it! It was Microbe who was the craziest at the wheel! Admittedly the car was not going fast. Sometimes you had to push in spite of the back engine. I see the car somewhere between MAD MAX and WACKY RACES. In slow motion...

Q) This is the first time you worked with the musician Jean-Claude Vannier?

I was looking for a composer. One night, I dreamed of Charlotte Gainsbourg. When I woke up, I thought of the song of his mother, Di doo dah, with this simple bass rhythm, guitar picking, and I knew that it was Jean-Claude Vannier. He arranged many of Gainsbourg songs, including the album Melody Nelson. He also made beautiful songs like Super Nana by Michel Jonasz. I contacted him, I showed him the film, he immediately agreed. The music carries the film well, with a little old-fashioned side.

MICHEL GONDRY'S FILMOGRAPHY

Feature Films

2015 > Microbe and Gasoline

2014 > Is The Man Who Is Tall Happy?
Official Selection Berlin International Film Festival 2014

2013 > Mood Indigo

2012 > The We and The I
Opening Film for the Directors' Fortnight at Cannes Film Festival 2012

2011 > The Green Hornet
Nominated for the MTV Movie Awards 2011

2009 > The Thorn In the Heart
Official Selection Cannes Film Festival 2009

2008 > Tokyo!
Official Selection Cannes Film Festival 2008
Official Selection London Film Festival 2008

2008 > Be Kind Rewind
Official Selection Berlin International Film Festival 2008
Official Selection Sundance Film Festival 2008

2006 > The Science of Sleep
Official Selection Berlin International Film Festival 2006
Official Selection Sundance Film Festival 2006
Best Production Design European Film Awards 2006

2006 > Block Party

2004 > Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind
Oscar for Best Screenplay 2004
BAFTA for Best Screenplay and Best Editing 2004

2001 > Human Nature
Official Selection Cannes Film Festival 2001
Official Selection Sundance Film Festival 2001

CREDITS

Daniel (Microbe) • Ange Dargent
Théo (Gasoline) • Théophile Baquet
Laura • Diane Besnier
Marie-Thérèse • Audrey Tautou
Steve • Vincent Lamoureux
Agathe • Agathe Peigney
Oscar • Douglas Brosset
Kevin • Charles Raymond
Simon • Ferdinand Roux-Balme
Romain • Marc Delarue
The bandleader • Ely Penh
The dentist • Laurent Poitrenaux
Madam Leloir • Jana Bittnerova
Mister Leloir • Zimsky
Christian • Fabio Zenoni
The stewardess • Elsa Truscello
The organizer • Etienne Charry
The journalist 1 • Amir Abou El Kacem
The journalist 2 • Hamza Meziani
The person in charge of culture • Emeline Bayart
The hairdresser • Masako Tomita
The masseur • Eriko Takeda
The dentist's wife • Hélène Alexandridis
The math teacher • Nadine Sainsily
The Russian teacher • Sacha Bourdo
Théo's Brother • Matthias Fortune Droulers
La batteuse punk • Maureen O'Donoghue
The punk singer-guitarist • Geoffrey Noël
Carole Raoult • Marie Berto
The school principal • Jean-Christophe Bretignière

Director • Michel Gondry
Screenplay • Michel Gondry
Photography • Laurent Brunet
Sound • Guillaume Le Braz, Jean Gargonne,
Dominique Gaboriau
Original Score • Jean-Claude Vannier
Production Design • Stéphane Rozenbaum
Costumes • Florence Fontaine
Casting • Leila Fournier, Sarah Tepper
Script Supervisor • Carole Fevre
Editing • Elise Fievet

Producer • Inigo Lezzi
Producer • Georges Bermann - Partizan
Films
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