



PRODUCTION NOTES

LES PRODUCTIONS DU TRÉSOR
PRESENT

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CO-PRODUCTION

THE CONCERT

A FILM BY
RADU MIHAILEANU

FRANCE • 2009 • 122' • SCOPE • DOLBY SRD/SR/DTS • COLOUR

Release date: April 29, 2010
Rated: TBC

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SYNOPSIS

Andreï Filipov was a prodigy – the celebrated conductor of the Bolshoi Orchestra, the greatest orchestra in Russia. Today, aged 50, he still works at the Bolshoi, but as a cleaner.

During the communist era, he was fired at the height of his fame for refusing to get rid of all his Jewish players, – ‘Zionists and enemies of the People’ – including his best friend Sacha Grossman. Andreï sank into booze and depression.

The Director of the Bolshoi, an old apparatchik, has been promising forever to return Andreï’s orchestra to him “soon”, but he’s mocking him, humiliating him sadistically. For him, Andreï’s a has-been, and he’s doing him a big favour by keeping him on as a cleaner.

Then Andreï finds a fax inviting the orchestra to play at Pleyel, in Paris, in two weeks’ time, as a last minute replacement for the indisposed San Francisco Philharmonic. Andreï conceives of a crazy notion: he’ll round up his old musician buddies, a motley bunch now scraping a living in Moscow as cab drivers, removal men, flea market traders, suppliers of porno film sound effects...

They’ll go to Paris as the Bolshoi.
They’ll defy destiny and take their revenge!
Will they make it?

CAST

<i>Andreï Filipov</i>	Alexeï GUSKOV
<i>Sacha Grossman</i>	Dmitry NAZAROV
<i>Anne-Marie Jacquet</i>	Mélanie LAURENT
<i>Olivier Morne Duplessis</i>	François BERLEAND
<i>Guylène de La Rivière</i>	MIOU MIOU
<i>Ivan Gavrilov</i>	Valeri BARINOV
<i>Irina Filipovna</i>	Anna KAMENKOVA PAVLOVA
<i>Jean-Paul Carrère</i>	Lionel ABELANSKI
<i>Victor Vikitch</i>	Alexander KOMISSAROV
<i>Owner of the ‘Trou Normand’</i>	RAMZY

CREW

DIRECTED BY	Radu MIHAILEANU
SCREENPLAY	Radu MIHAILEANU
IN COLLABORATION WITH	Alan-Michel BLANC Matthew ROBBINS
FROM AN ORIGINAL STORY BY	Hector CABELLO REYES Thierry DEGRANDI
ORIGINAL MUSIC	Armand AMAR
PRODUCER	Alain ATTAL
DP	Laurent DAILLAND
PRODUCTION DESIGNER	Cristian NICULESCU
EDITOR	Ludovic TROCH
SOUND	Pierre EXCOFFIER Selima AZZAZI Bruno TARRIÈRE
1ST ASSISTANT DIRECTOR	Olivier JACQUET
SET DESIGNER	Stan REYDELLET
COSTUME DESIGNER	Viorica PETROVICI
PRODUCTION MANAGER	Xavier AMBLARD
POST-PRODUCTION DIRECTOR	Nicolas MOUCHET
UNIT MANAGER	Grégory VALAIS

AN OÏ OÏ OÏ PRODUCTIONS, LES PRODUCTIONS DU TRESOR,
FRANCE 3 CINEMA, EUROPACORP, CASTEL FILMS,
PANACHE PRODUCTIONS, RTBF (BELGIAN TELEVISION),
BIM DISTRIBUZIONE COPRODUCTION WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF
CANAL+, CINECINEMA AND FRANCE 3 WITH THE SUPPORT OF
EURIMAGES, THE REGION OF ÎLE-DE-FRANCE, BELGACOM,
ING TAX SHELTER AND LE FONDS D’ACTION SACEM

A CONVERSATION WITH RADU MIHAILEANU

How was this project born?

I was first approached by a producer who submitted a synopsis to me: it was written by two young writers and was about a fake Bolshoi Orchestra landing in Paris. I really liked the main idea but not so much the rest. I asked this producer if I could develop my own script from the same starting point and he gave me the go ahead.

How did you write?

My collaborator Alain-Michel Blanc and I went to Russia for two weeks first in order to meet the people who would be the inspiration for our characters. This fed an enormous amount of lines, scenes and ideas that ended up becoming the scenario. That was in 2002, before the shooting of **LIVE AND BECOME**.

When Les Productions du Trésor took the project over, for a while we envisaged shooting the film in English with American actors. Destiny had other ideas and we returned to the story's original languages: French and Russian. Be that as it may, the screenplay's structure got tighter with the new trio: Alain Attal, Alain-Michel Blanc and me.

In THE CONCERT, once again we come across the theme of the positive imposture...

It's a theme that takes over my work in spite of myself. It might be linked to the fact that my father, who was called Buchman, had to change his name during the war in order to survive. He became Mihaileanu so he could face first the Nazi, then the Stalin, regime. Even though I viewed this positively, there is a conflict in me between these two identities. Moreover, I have for a long time suffered being considered a foreigner wherever I find myself – in France or in Romania – and of course everywhere else. Today I see this as an advantage and I am very happy to be both an insider and an outsider. That is probably why my characters have huge difficulties at the beginning and have to pretend to be someone they are not, in order to liberate themselves and try building bridges to others.

From the outset, the film introduces a touch of irony with the demonstration of old communists who in fact are extras.

When Alain-Michel and I were in Russia we were struck by this demonstration that takes place every Sunday morning in Moscow and which sums up the paradox of the new Russian society: on one side the old communists, very nostalgic for that era, and the medals peddlers who sell their stuff to the demonstrators and tourists alike and, on the other side, the new capitalists hardliners. All that amidst a crowd of people some of whom are lost. I find this contrast both tragic and comical.

Through the metaphor of the concert, the film talks about the fundamental relationship between the individual and the group.

I understood during the sound mixing that this metaphor also exists in the choice of the concert that takes up the end of the film: Tchaikovsky's "Concerto for Violin and Orchestra". For me we are talking about the relationship between the individual and the community, which takes us back to today's crisis. We observe today that we have reached the ultimate degree of individualism and that human beings are out of step with the world: they'd like to keep the individual's fundamental rights while going back to a society that's a bit more united. I discovered that Tchaikovsky's concerto couldn't be harmonious if the violin and the orchestra did not complement each other: if the violin doesn't sound good, the orchestra drifts away and vice-versa. The two are interlinked. Today's crisis shows this in a violent way; the link between the individual and the collective must be very strong and in order to find harmony – or happiness – we must try to play in unison as much as we can.

This harmony is also built through the exchange between the Russians, the Gypsies and the French who all view the world in very different ways...

That is what we call today "intercultural exchange": in a society, including France, the mixing of cultures, linked to the different migratory waves, is omnipresent and extremely rich, if not without its difficulties. This is our world today and it will be more so tomorrow. That is what the film tells of: a gang of down-and-outs from Moscow – Russians, Gypsies and Jews –

landing in Paris, and the encounter between a Slavonic-Eastern culture and a Western culture that is rich and Cartesian that follows. From the onset, the shock is explosive: the “barbarians” from the East – of which I am a part – land in the country of the “civilized” who get nervous about their assets and fear that the rules will not be respected in the way they have been defined. In the end, despite friction, beauty and light comes from this encounter. And the concert expresses this harmony born out of culture shock.

How do we define the “ultimate harmony” that Andreï talks about so often?

That is what my Russian characters aspire to after having been ostracised from society. We’ve all been there at some point or another, damaged by life, out for the count as it is put in boxing. It’s very hard to get up again and that is precisely what my characters are trying to do: first they try to regain their self-confidence, then they try to get up and become worthy human beings once more. All in order to find the ultimate harmony again, if only for a moment – the duration of a concert – and to prove to themselves that they still have enough strength to dream and to stand up. It is a little victory over the death that waits for us in the wings. But the question is also valid for those who have never had to suffer tragically: are they capable of dreaming, of wanting to reach their “ultimate harmony”? Are they capable of mobility?

How would you define the film’s humour?

My favourite kind of humour is a response to suffering and difficulty. For me, humour is a joyous and intelligent weapon – a gymnastics of the spirit – against barbarism and death. Tragedy’s twin. Effectively, in the film, the humour comes from a wound that was inflicted on Russia thirty years ago, in Brezhnev’s USSR. People were humiliated and cast down. Their will to get up again and regain their dignity has to pass through humour. Beyond their tragedy, and because of humour, the protagonists of THE CONCERT have the strength to aspire to their dreams. This for me is the most beautiful expression of vital energy.

There is also humour due to the meeting between the Russians and the French...

Even within their society, the Russian characters were quite shabby... marginal. Once they arrive in France, the contrast is even more striking and sparks conflicts that I find funny. I wanted to bring some exotic “colour”, particular to this horde of Slavs set in the monotonous and sleepy universe that is French society seen from afar.

This is also found in the contrasts between the Russian and the French sets.

Absolutely. We have attempted to differentiate both societies through sets, costumes, light, sound and direction. In Russia, the costumes are both coloured and “distempered”, old-fashioned, the lines often chaotic, while Paris is more luminous, often golden, “contrasty” and mostly composed of straight lines. For example when the Russians call the director of the Theatre du Chatelet on the phone, they are in a pathetic little closet located in the basement of the Bolshoi, amidst a cacophony, whereas the office of the Parisian director they are talking to is almost completely white, furnished in the latest style, squeaky clean, silent and made of perfectly straight lines. Whereas the Russians evolve in total imperfection, the Frenchman played by Berléand does so in quasi-perfection. Consequently, the Russians are often filmed with a handheld camera, they are in permanent motion, “badly centred”, whereas Duplessis and his team are mostly filmed symmetrically, with a fixed camera or in a very calculated movement. I also like the scene in the restaurant between Andreï and Anne-Marie. The contrast of the costumes reminds me my arrival in France: Andreï wears a brand new suit but it seems too big and from another time – he is presentable, he wants to be worthy of this dinner. Anne-Marie wears a pretty silver blouse, simple, modern and sober. Her discreet jewellery shines like her eyes and the surrounding lights, inside and outside. Andreï seems like a dark patch in the City of Lights.

The way the Russians make the French language their own is hilarious!

Again I was inspired by personal experience. When I was a child I learned French with a French woman in her seventies who had left France in her youth to follow a Romanian she had fallen in love with. She expressed herself in a French no longer in use in

France. So I learned a literary and very old fashioned French and when I arrived in France I myself used most of the archaic expressions that my characters use in the film. I remember wanting to thank a lady who had helped me get my entry visa, I said to her "I fuck you warmly" ("Je vous baise chaleureusement" : the verb baisier is no longer used to mean "to kiss" but is now part of slang culture and means "to fuck"). My characters also think they speak perfect French but in fact it's barely comprehensible. It seemed to me that I could use this to great comic effect. It was also a way of paying homage to a generation who adored French culture and is now disappearing.

Each Russian character has his own particular knowledge of French.

Yes, there are three different styles of language which we had a lot of fun with while writing. First, Ivan, who thinks he is the one who can master French better – he must have been taught by an old French lady in the fifties – he composes pompous sentences, gets by pretty well, a few errors of syntax and meaning notwithstanding. Then we have Andreï, who doesn't speak as well but keeps a somehow archaic preciousness, punctuating each sentences with "n'est-ce pas". Finally Sacha, his best friend, whose vocabulary is very limited and who speaks pigeon French, peppered with a few Russian words.

The film recalls the fate of the intellectuals and the artists in Brezhnev's Russia.

Even if a little wind of freedom started blowing nearly ten years prior to Perestroika, Brezhnev's government was still trying to gag the intelligentsia. Each totalitarian regime fears that the intelligentsia's points of view contaminate the masses who could rise up. Brezhnev didn't trust the Jews, amongst others, as they often spoke up on sensitive issues and had relatives abroad, susceptible to relaying their points of view. That is why he got rid of the Jewish musicians of the Bolshoi Orchestra, as well as the Russians who had defended them. Just as the regime feared the Gypsies and minorities in general who did not submit to its authority. Indeed, the Gypsies have never obeyed orders in any country: they are the freest human beings in the world. I wanted to evoke this reality implicitly. On the other hand I wanted to show that a fact that could be

considered insignificant – the sacking of a conductor and of Jewish musicians – can spark off a terrible trauma for a whole generation who will spend the next thirty years trying to get over it. That is the case of broken destinies of many people from Eastern bloc countries.

Through the matter of communication, you also question the sense of values.

I feel that since the end of the 20th Century we have not paid sufficient attention to the emergence of the new means of communication: the birth of the virtual world. I consider that the virtual world has provoked today's crisis: we put aside the real values such as work, real encounters, time, friendship, love, knowledge by adopting more virtual values such as money, information, a frantic pace, communication and the acquisition of new tools. I have the feeling that human beings today want to go back to true values. They also understand that the matter of the Other is true wealth. And they try to re-establish a balance between the Individual and the community. In this view the film shows that without friendship, without this meeting with another culture, one cannot reach happiness.

We sense in your work an iconoclasm that tries to shake up conventions.

I think that life is made of rules and at the same time of moments where these rules have to be shaken up in order to move forward and test new territories. My characters that are in a state of semi-homelessness have nothing to loose, they have no other choice than resourcefulness: they are condemned to innovate and to progress. From then on, everything is possible, even if that means breaking the established laws. They fabricate their own passports; they don't go to rehearsals so they can carry on diverse illegal dealings – in short, they are on the fiddle and draw on great reserves of resourcefulness in order to survive. All my characters have a share of poetry – feet on the ground and head in the clouds – because I think it is impossible to separate the realms of reality and the realms of the imaginary.

As always you've called in actors of different origins.

Yes. First there are five formidable Russian actors who are great stars in their country. I was struck

by their ability to express themselves both inwardly and outwardly and to act with their bodies. Then I was very lucky to work with exceptional French actors. But what was really marvellous was to witness the meeting of these two schools who, little by little, ended up understanding each other. And I am not forgetting my Romanian actor friends! It was a brilliant melting pot.

Can you talk about your direction of the actors?

I needed a period of adaptation that went on during the preparation; I hold rehearsals from the initial stages onwards. Initially I had a bit of an arm wrestle with the Russians who arrived very sure of their superiority – and of their incredible tradition – and who in a nutshell wanted me to submit to their will. It was only a game, a way of testing me. Very quickly they realised that I knew exactly what I wanted, that I too was from the East and that I was only here to help them sublimate themselves. From then on we collaborated very constructively and they were fantastic.

The second power struggle was the meeting between François Berléand and three of the Russian actors who wanted to exert some kind of hold on him. Confused at first, François regained his control and through humour showed them his great actor's range. He was brilliant, meteoric. That really astounded them and they respected him immediately, as much as he respected them.

What about Mélanie Laurent?

I've adored her in everything she's been in, particularly Philippe Loiret's *DON'T WORRY, I'M FINE*. But I do think that here she has found her first great woman's role. We really tried to build the character of a truly free woman. I want to thank her for all she gave me, she is quite simply sublime. And watch out... the seeds of a star!

How was the shoot?

We shot in Romania for about three weeks; we reconstituted nearly all the Russian parts of the film there because it is very difficult to shoot in Russia. Nevertheless we needed to shoot in Moscow for two days; we needed some shots of the city and of Red Square. Something happened to us there,

worthy of a film: the day before we were due to shoot we still had had no authorisation, despite a six month wait. Miraculously, thanks to Alexei Guskov's intervention the whole thing unblocked, we got Red Square all to ourselves, which is remarkable. We were laughing, pretending we were the crew of a James Bond movie!

And in Paris?

This was my first true feature film in Paris, where we worked for a total of eight weeks. I have to say that the Theatre du Chatelet welcomed us warmly, from the management to the stagehands – we could have only great respect for them. I do hope that the film pays the homage that this theatre deserves; I also hope this magical place gets rediscovered.

The shooting of the concert itself shows impressive virtuosity. How did you prepare for this?

It was a nightmare that lasted six months! I was terribly frightened of this stage because the film ends with the concert and that's what will stay in the audience's mind: I just had to get it right. Not to mention that I had never shot a classical music concert. I started by viewing every single film about music, concert DVDs, classical, rock, etc. I learned a tremendous amount: the "language" and the importance of each instrument, at which moment it has to be filmed and in which way so that it is dramatically effective. The challenge was to try to be more spectacular and modern than captations are, while being faithful to the drama, to the characters and to not overdo it. We then worked with music coaches so the actors could be credible as musicians. We prepared the continuity editing, shot by shot. We each had a bunch of boards indicating each and everyone's roles, always according to the musical bars. When it came to the shoot, we worked with three cameras, each one supposed to centre on this or that musician or section: it was all the more difficult as we only had four days to do it and had to protect the actors from all the tension as much as we could. Lastly, I also had to take the flashbacks into account as we were filming so they could be inserted when editing, to the very second, while taking musical accents into consideration at the same time.

This is the second time you've collaborated with composer Armand Amar.

I consider the music is the true soul of a film: the invisible part that is not revealed in images, its secret story. On *THE CONCERT* there was on one side the existing classical music that needed to be adapted for the film and on the other the original music. Like me, Armand is curious about other cultures: I felt strongly that the Slavonic spirit had to be brought into the music. We listened to a lot of Russian music – liturgical, soviet and contemporary. In the end the original score includes symphonic music, some chorale to translate the passing of time, the relationship between the present and the past, modern music and Gypsy music. What's more, the film's rhythm is musical. I hope that it will connect to the music each person carries within. And that children will no longer be afraid of classical music while continuing to love all the others.

A CONVERSATION WITH ALAIN ATTAL

When did you get involved with the project?

I read it knowing the rights were tied up but that it had come to a standstill because the relationship between Radu and Philippe Rousselet – the producer who had developed the project – was in a state of deadlock. I really liked the way the script handled the big story through the small story of these colorful characters who never let themselves be beaten: even if Radu didn't write the original concept, it was a film that resembled him. After having met Radu I discovered that it was an enormous project and I bought the rights from Rousselet.

THE CONCERT was originally going to be shot in English...

Yes, because Radu wanted to make an entertaining, mainstream movie; he thought that the English language would allow him to be more universal and touch a bigger audience. We worked on an English version of the script for a few months with Matthew Robbins – who did a tremendous job by the way – but we soon realized that the use of the English language would render the film more artificial. Soon after the 2007 Cannes Film Festival we had a change of heart and decided to shoot in the original languages: Russian and French. We also understood that the old-fashioned French, jabbered by the Russians generated moments of pure comedy.

In which direction did you wish the script to be re-worked?

We deepened the themes dear to Radu; in particular we mentioned the way in which Brezhnev's regime mistreated Jewish intellectuals and artists. Radu was concerned that there wouldn't be enough humour: I reassured him, telling him we didn't need a gag every two minutes to provoke laughter. Just the thought of this gang of has-beens recruited by an ex-conductor to play Tchaikovsky at the Chatelet is a typical comedy set-up.

What was your ambition in terms of production?

I wanted this film to be rich, lyrical, and stylish, I wanted Radu to have enough time to get the most important sequences; to spend the whole day if he thought it was necessary to shoot a one minute

and a half scene. Up until now he has shown himself to be a great storyteller and actor's director. I thought that for his fourth film we needed to go a step further in terms of production, all the more so as the subject allowed that. I wanted THE CONCERT to give him the opportunity to take all the time he needed.

Did you play a part in the casting?

Some parts were very obvious, like François Berléand for the Director of the Chatelet or Lionel Abelanski as his assistant. Radu and I both thought of Miou Miou for Guylène and we thought long and hard about the part of the young prodigy. Radu had a real flash when he met Mélanie Laurent. But she didn't realise then that he would be so demanding: he reminded me of certain American directors who ask their actors to gain 30 kg for a part. As for our Russian cast, I knew that we had found our conductor as soon as I met Alexei Guskov.

It was a real challenge to recruit so many established Russian actors...

As in France we had to convince the decision-makers to finance a film with Russian actors, in Russia we had to be credible as French producers to convince established Russian actors to be a part of this adventure! Radu and I fell in love with Alexei Guskov and Dimitri Nazarov who are very famous actors in their country. But as is the case with most Russian actors who are in demand they work non stop in cinema, television and in the theatre so we had be very convincing during our many casting sessions in Moscow.

Did you want to shoot the film in Russia?

Everything is so complicated there: as soon as you make any kind of request you systematically get "it depends" or "we shall see" as an answer. Besides, we found out that Red Square had been covered in turf for the Champions League Final only days before shooting was due to start. No one had bothered to tell us! We had to reschedule everything. We therefore decided to start a co-production with Romania where we shot most of the Moscow sequences in four weeks. In Moscow we only did exterior shots.

How did you convince the Theatre du Chatelet to allow you to shoot there?

At first, the Theatre du Chatelet people were a bit daunted at the thought of a film crew invading their premises. But once they read the script they gave us their agreement and they were wonderful: we were made to feel welcome, we totally took over the place, and we shot at night as well as during the day, for a few weeks.

How did the editing go?

Radu astonished me! Whereas on set he was a real go-getter because he had his film in his mind and a very high standard of expectation, when it came to the editing he was very ready to listen to any comment that was made to him. He was willing to cut scenes, as if the film didn't belong to him any longer, whereas it had so much so during shooting. In between the first two editing versions, Radu had taken into account nearly all my observations! Generally speaking directors feel you are trying to cut their arm off when you suggest cutting this or that. Radu liked to ask the advice of those around him.

Was THE CONCERT a particularly difficult film to finance?

Very early on the international market believed in the project and Wild Bunch, our international distributor, was the first to support us. Then CANAL+, France Television and EuropaCorp entered the project, bringing important amounts. We also got the support of Eurimages because we were in co-production with Italy, Belgium and Romania. The Île-de-France region also brought us its support.

Despite all these partners the film was underfinanced and it's the producer you're talking to now who took most of the risk. It is partly my fault, I could never say no to Radu...

A CONVERSATION WITH ARMAND AMAR

How did you adapt Tchaikovsky's Concerto to the film's constraints?

It was a real challenge: we started from the unabridged Concerto, which lasts 22 minutes. We got it down to 12 minutes, trying to avoid causing Tchaikovsky to turn in his grave! It made us analyze the Concerto in depth; we were then able to identify the elements that were repeated in order to eliminate them. Then we had to find a connection between the Concerto's crescendos and the feeling Radu wanted to spark off. But we tried very hard even though we suppressed some bars so that it wouldn't shock musically.

It wasn't too difficult working with such a well-known Concerto?

It is slightly sacrilegious to touch such a piece. I know Tchaikovsky's work very well; like him, I have composed many ballet scores. But he is not a composer who particularly belongs to my culture, I feel closer to Stravinsky and Prokofiev.

Did you work in collaboration with classical musicians?

Yes, because I regularly work with musicians and orchestrators who are classically trained. But I mostly worked with Sarah Nemtanu the violinist who gave us many technical indications which were extremely helpful.

Could one call THE CONCERT a musical film?

In my opinion it is more a film where music plays its own role in its own right: it is the engine of the plot and it makes the characters progress.

How did you conceive the musical colors of the film?

Radu Mihaileanu had written his screenplay with a few musical ideas in mind. It was some sort of contract marked by his experience of communism in Romania. For instance, he wanted the music to evoke socialist realism at a precise moment. I worked with a team of six people where I mainly played the part of the arranger. Radu gave me great freedom with the emotional themes that evoke the characters.

Many musical 'registers' exist side by side in the film.

I myself have a "world music" label and have a fairly good knowledge of Gypsy music. We also used techno music that a DJ remixed for me.

How do you collaborate with Radu?

Since GO, SEE AND BECOME we have become very close. Because of that we constantly exchange ideas. Radu is such a perfectionist, he pushes people to their limits, and I like this way of working. He is extremely human, profoundly enthusiastic and very professional. What's essential for him is that the emotion is conveyed.

What is your working method?

I'm an autodidact and I work by ear. I constantly feel that I'm doing something new, even if that is what I have set myself to do. As long as I keep making new discoveries, I keep going. The day I stop discovering I'll stop.

How would you define the "ultimate harmony"?

For me, it's a way of life. In this business you experience a lot of ego clashes between producers and creators. Consequently, the ultimate harmony is a way of keeping some kind of humility towards the others so that we can have an exchange: to me it means standing back to impose yourself better. I have a very hard time telling myself I'm creating something 'ultimate'. Because if it's ultimate, what's the point in continuing?

A CONVERSATION WITH ALEXEÏ GUSKOV

Were you familiar with Radu Mihaileanu's films?

No, but I had heard of Radu. What was most important to me was that his films represent some kind of confession. He creates with much sincerity, from his heart.

How would you describe your character?

I love him so it's very difficult for me to describe him. It's as if I was talking about myself. If the audience loves him too I would be happy. He has all the human weaknesses: he is an ordinary man thrown into extraordinary circumstances.

He and his wife have such a strong bond. Do you think it is mainly down to her that he carries his project through?

In Chekhov's play THREE SISTERS, he writes: "The woman, it's the woman". In his notes he had developed three pages of the hero's thoughts on family life. Then he reduced it to one page and finally only this sentence was left. My character has done everything himself in his life but he could have never succeeded if he hadn't had someone close by his side.

You were in your twenties in the late seventies.

Did you get inspiration from your memories of the USSR to construct Andreï's character?

When I was in my twenties I was young, happy and my mind worked according to my age. I loved the spring, young women and a particular brand of Porto called The Three Seven. I was happy. I did not witness of the Stalin era which was so terrible. But I am certain that those who were in their twenties during the Stalin era were also happy.

Andreï is a wounded character, eaten by guilt. Is this difficult to play?

It is the greatest privilege that was given to me as an actor by the screenwriters and the director. The difference between man and animal is moral sense. And from this moral sense also comes the feeling of guilt. Roles like this are so rare that I don't even know how to play them. That is why I am so grateful to Radu and my partners – French and Russian – for their help. Now it is for the audience to decide if we have succeeded or not.

What are his feelings for Anne-Marie?

It is a feeling one experiences when one can be reborn or brought back from the past. To erase one's pain or to be freed from it. If Anne-Marie forgives him, Andreï's life will become normal again.

One cannot live with a sense of guilt – better to confess. If you are eaten by guilt, life will elude you! So it is important for Andreï that his wife forgives him or even better, that she understands him. That she understands and accepts his truth. Because, like Andreï, she too is an artist.

How did you get on with the French actors?

Very well. We drank a lot of wine, ate cheese and exchanged a lot of jokes! They are exceptional work partners. I was very lucky because they were very tactful, full of talent and receptive. Real partners – that's important because you can't win a battle on your own. I thank all of them, Miou Miou, François Berléand, Mélanie Laurent, Lionel Abelanski and all the others.

Wasn't the language barrier a real obstacle?

Yes it was. But even though Radu and I needed an interpreter when we started, he only needed to look me in the eyes for me to understand what he expected of me by the time we finish the shooting. The interpreter wasn't essential anymore.

I have never learned French. You could say I didn't even know of its existence because I have always used English. But now French is closer to me, it's an incredibly beautiful language.

How did you feel 'conducting' an orchestra at the Theatre du Chatelet?

First I got scared, immensely scared. Then I was filled with wonder. Finally, thanks to this film, I have discovered the world of classical music. We "all have studied a bit" as Pushkin used to say. Everyone knows classical music and as a teacher of the MKHAT (Chekhov Moscow Art Theatre) I talk about it with my students. But this time I was completely immersed in that world. In fact I really envy those who have musical talent. I don't have it.

How does Radu direct his actors?

Like a great director. He is a mischievous despot. He knows exactly what he wants and uses every means to reach his goal. But when an actor figures that because of that he or she will get beyond their limits and achieve more than he or she thought was capable of, he or she will obey. It becomes a kind of creative friendship, a creative union. That is what you'd call true collaboration. We are the co-authors of the characters. That is why, if I have the opportunity to work once more with this director I will not argue, I won't even bother to read the script, I'll just say yes.

What do you think of the film?

I was very moved by the tone of THE CONCERT. For me this is not only to do with my country. Art is marvelous because one can start with the simple story of an ordinary man, then generalize it in the Chaplin tradition, give it an epic dimension as is the case in the film and as I understood it when I read the script. This could have happened to a Polish conductor or a German from the GDR or to any man living under a totalitarian regime. It could have been a Frenchman under Robespierre or an American during the McCarthy witch hunt era. It could have happened in any country, this story is not tied to specific political realities. If we talk about the musicians of the orchestra, it is the story of people who, 30 years ago, did what they loved most but were prevented from doing it for 30 years. This is the story of how, after arriving in Paris they first hold on to their day to day lives. And how only art, music, that way of drawing marvelous sounds from their instruments, gives them wings.

How would you define the "ultimate harmony"?

Spontaneously and without thinking too much – for me, it's love. Then, one can think there are many nuances in love. Art is probably a kind of love. Since the days of cave paintings, people have been able to obtain this ultimate harmony in doing something new and putting themselves above ordinary life.

A CONVERSATION WITH DMITRY NAZAROV

What interested you in the script?

The story: so touching and full of generosity. I cried three times while reading it, despite some naïveté that one can explain by a certain ignorance of the history of the USSR.

Did you know Radu Mihaileanu's films?

No, not at the beginning. But to understand his language as a director I did view his movies during the filming. It was easier to understand each other afterwards.

How would you describe your character?

He is a fountain of emotions, hot blooded, a child with a nuclear charge inside of him. Radu called all this paranoia, which is also true.

You were in your twenties in the late seventies.

Did you get inspiration from your memories of the USSR to construct Sacha's character?

In my work but also in my conflicts with Radu, I did rely on the knowledge I had of my country of that time. I was born and grew up there and I didn't know any different. There wasn't any choice. It was my life. It was a happy, sad, hard, beautiful life; it was different from what it is today. I knew this life very well.

Sacha has very strong values when it comes to friendship. Could one say he represents Andrei's protective big brother?

In this duo, Sacha is the follower. He looks after his friend, not because he is older or has more experience but because he loves him, he loves his work. He loves him and he admires him. That is why he forgives him everything and tries his best to protect him.

His life has been broken by the Party and his wife left to start a new life in Israel: why did he stay in Russia?

He loves his country and his friends. At the end of the day, he is an optimist. He also considers himself a plant that couldn't survive in another soil. One of my friends who was getting ready to immigrate to Israel cried on my shoulder: "There are 40 people here who have come to say their goodbyes. I leave my mother behind, my friends, my dog, my garage

and my car. I am going with a wife and a child that isn't mine. I couldn't bear all this". He came back six months later when it was suggested he should get circumcised. He came back to Russia for a visit and ended up staying. He is now a very successful actor.

Your character is full of anger and resentment, in particular when he sees Ivan. How did you play these feelings?

Never ask an actor how he acts feelings. You'll either get a lie or something completely incomprehensible. An actor's talent, like any other talent, is a gift from God and each and everyone uses it as they wish. It is possible that an actor who can define and analyse the moment where the emotion is born is not an artist but a craftsman.

You speak French. Did it help you in your relationships with the French actors?

Of course! The fact that I spoke French helped communicating with my fellow actors, with the director and the whole team. But it also made things more difficult for me. I learned my lines in proper French then had to translate into bad French in the way my character spoke. That might have been easier to do if I hadn't spoken French at all.

How does Radu direct his actors? Does he leave you room to maneuver?

Radu is one of those rare directors who loves actors and knows how to work with them. He leaves them very little freedom. You have to fight to get a little freedom. Radu's greatest quality is that he knows exactly what he wants. His weakness is that he is too sure of what he wants.

How would you define the "ultimate harmony"?

There are different kinds of harmony – in music, in art, in life, in love, etc. One thing unites them all: the ultimate harmony which is a fairy tale but sometimes becomes reality.

A CONVERSATION WITH VALERY BARINOV

Did you know Radu Mihaileanu's films?

Unfortunately no. Later, I watched his films and liked them. But when we met I was much more impressed by Radu than by the script. This shoot was unusual in that we didn't speak the same language. He made a good impression on me right from the beginning. The more we worked together, the stronger that impression became. We also had some very amusing moments. When we were on set and the interpreter translated everything that was being said everything went very well and I had the feeling that I understood him well. But outside, when we had no interpreter, we just couldn't communicate, I thought: "How can we be so close to one another on set yet so far apart in real life?"

How would you describe your character?

He is first and foremost an adventurer, someone very passionate. That is why one can forgive him everything. What was most important for me in his temperament is the reason I wanted to play him. I wanted to spend some time with him. He has faith, faith in an ideal communism. If one forgets about the people who tried to execute communism and the methods they used so people were forced to believe in it, this ideal isn't so bad.

You were in your twenties in the late seventies.

Did you get inspiration from your memories of the USSR to construct Ivan's character?

Thirty years ago I was thirty years younger... When I am asked today about the "stagnation" era, my answer is that I was young and happy. Today we imagine these times in an unequivocal way. But people had lives then. They created. There were great writers and musicians in those times. There were many constraints but sometimes they gave birth to great works in the cinema, in literature, in ballet.

Maybe this is difficult to understand if you are not Russian. It's globally difficult to understand because of ideas one has about KGB officers and the communist era, these ideas are slightly one-sided. A lot of tragic events took place during that time. But there also was a life with its magnificent moments and its tragic ones. And of course I relied on my

own personal experience as I always do. I remembered how we used to behave, what we used to wear, how we went through life. But it wasn't the darkest time of my life.

Do you really think he is nostalgic about the Soviet Union?

Even today some people are nostalgic about the Soviet Union. People at the time felt they represented a seriously great country. Perhaps this was the fruit of propaganda but the country seemed great and happy. Is Ivan nostalgic about the Soviet Union? Probably yes, in a way. He is mad at those who killed the communist ideal. Because deep down in his soul, Ivan stays a communist. But in the positive sense of the word, he really believed in it.

He ends up fighting so that the concert unfolds in the best possible conditions.

He was an officer for the KGB but mostly he loved being the Bolshoi administrator. What it did or said doesn't matter; it's the music he loves. He also likes the feeling that the show couldn't take place without him. He likes to feel important, to feel his importance for the Bolshoi's travels abroad and for this particular tour.

How did you feel while shooting in front of the French Communist Party headquarters?

I was very impressed by its sheer size, its massive form. You immediately feel this houses a very important institution. I didn't feel anything special though. But on the other hand I was deeply moved when we filmed in Red Square because as strange as it may seem I rarely go there, even if I like it. We were taken there very early in the morning, it was a beautiful day and we were about to leave for Paris so it was particularly moving. I was mostly sad once in front of the Communist Party building in Paris because it was my last day of shooting. I was reminiscing about the few months I had spent in Paris, the people I'd met, all the pleasant moments I'd had. I felt so lucky to be able to work on this film.

Ivan speaks old-fashioned French, which is very funny for French speakers to hear. Was it very difficult for you?

Yes, it was difficult. Generally speaking I learn my

lines very quickly; in Russian I don't learn them at all. I read them once and I am ready. For this role, I had to learn by heart. Even if I had good coaches in Paris and in Bucharest, I was still concerned that no one would be able to understand what I was saying. On set I didn't understand why people laughed. And all the French people laughed. They not only found my pronunciation funny but also what I was saying. When I came back to Paris for the post-synchronization and noticed half the team repeated my expressions I thought I'd hit the bull's eye.

Ivan is in love with Paris. Are you too?

I can't define my feeling for Paris in two words. Ernest Hemingway once said: "Paris is a party that always stays with you." For me it is a party I miss in Moscow. Paris was my city, I felt so wonderful there. I only took the metro once or twice because I loved walking there. I walked all the time.

What are your character's feelings towards Andrei?

Andrei is his life. Andrei and Ivan are very close. I don't know if one can say it is love but they can't be without each other. I think these two have the same type of feeling one has towards a close relative, as if they were brothers. It's the story of their lives, they can't be apart. When Andrei decides to go to Paris, his first thought is to get Ivan. Ivan has largely contributed to destroying Andrei's life but in fact it is the ideologues who used Ivan who did that.

How did you get on with the French actors?

Very well, they were very attentive to me. They knew how difficult it was for me to speak so everyone would understand. It was not just the work on set: we had a few night scenes, in particular on a boat. I don't know what they thought but I experienced great pleasure in their company. You can see they are real professionals. We sometimes lack good work partners and this wasn't the case at all.

Wasn't the language barrier a real obstacle?

Unfortunately it was. Sometimes I couldn't express my thoughts. I don't know if what I was saying was accurately translated. By the end of my stay my very bad French was enough to get by in mundane situations, in a shop, at a restaurant, in the streets. But I miss being able to express myself with my fellow workers.

How does Radu direct his actors? Is he very hands on?

I liked his filming methods and his habit of doing more than one take. In fact we hardly rehearsed at all; we didn't shoot like in Russia where one does only one take. We did 5 or 6 with Radu. He has a great quality in that he can relate to actors and their capabilities. I loved the fact that he trusted us. If he feels the actor hasn't understood what he wants he'll change his tactics during shooting. It sometimes happens that the director will say "Do this" and that the actor replies "Yes, I got it" and that the director admits in the end that it wasn't what he asked for but that in fact was right. It is often the third solution that is the best one. That happened frequently. Despite the fact that we didn't speak the same language we reached a great complicity on set. I understood quickly what it was that Radu wanted of me and was able to do it easily.

How would you define the "ultimate harmony"?

The ultimate harmony is the goal one wants to reach, fortunately without ever being able to succeed. Because if one reaches this goal in this profession, life is over, art is over. There is no ultimate harmony in art. Sometimes at the end of a show you can hear the audience clap, you understand that it was a success and you know you haven't lived the last two or three hours for no reason. The audience is grateful, sometimes they cry. This moment of osmosis with the audience is for me the moment of harmony. But later, backstage, this feeling of harmony vanishes. The harmony is a goal that cannot be reached.

A CONVERSATION WITH MÉLANIE LAURENT

What did you find interesting in the script?

I was immediately engrossed by this gang of Slavonic characters, all slightly has-been; I was seduced by the constant changes between the comic scenes and moments of pure emotion. The script tossed certain themes around, themes dear to me: communism and the hopes it embodied, long gone ideals to which some still hold, the power of the Russian mafia, etc... I liked the political theme behind the comedy and the lightness. As for my character, the thought of playing an instrument – if only by mimicking the moves – was very appealing. I also liked the fact that it was a real woman's part, older than me.

Who is Anne-Marie Jacquet for you?

She is quite cold, obsessed with music, she lives in a world of her own. But mostly, she holds all her emotions in until the last scene where she lets them take complete control. The most difficult thing for me was refraining completely from smiling. I am expansive by nature but had to keep my emotions under control all the time. I had a bit of a struggle with Radu because I thought he was too harsh with her.

How does she feel about Andreï?

She has great admiration for him. He might be the reason why she entered this profession: she probably listened to his recordings non stop for years and that is what carries her today. Besides, what is interesting is that she has never played Tchaikovsky, without knowing why. She decides to take an enormous risk playing the concerto at a crucial point in her career because of Andreï. By the same token she'll accept to let her guard down and to work according to these Russian musicians' rather unorthodox methods.

How was your training with the violin?

I trained for three months with an extraordinary teacher, Sarah Nemtanu, first violin at the National French Orchestra, who has become a great friend. Thanks to her I lived with an orchestra and understood how it worked. It helped me understand the character and acquire some handling techniques for the violin and the bow.

Did you experience any particular difficulty?

I'm left handed and the violin is the only instrument that cannot be inverted: the right hand holds the bow, which is a nightmare for me! It is such an unnatural gesture for me that I nearly got tendonitis.

The concert sequence is exceptionally intense.

It's a scene that has left a big mark on me. Even Radu hadn't warned me we would go so far emotionally. I let myself be totally submerged by the music and entered a trance state. I had to stop because I started shaking: I let go of my violin and fell about crying. I had the feeling that my body was becoming the music. It was so violent I nearly fainted.

Were you familiar with classical music?

Not at all. But I get a lot of pleasure listening to it now, and as I myself make music I enjoy spotting the first violins. I love that the shoot of a film isn't ephemeral, as in *THE CONCERT*: it has triggered something in me and made me discover something that will stay with me forever. I still listen to Tchaikovsky's Concerto today and 'airplay' it, from beginning to end...

How was filming with Alexei Guskov (Andrei)?

Something beautiful occurs when two people do not speak the same language: we played a lot on gazes and shared sensations. I found it sweet not to communicate through language: it left room for play, without the harshness of exchanges.

And with François Berléand?

We giggled a lot, sometimes we just couldn't stop. It's lovely to meet a brilliant actor like him who has a real gift for humor.

What is "ultimate harmony" for you?

In my profession, they are moments of grace. For example, you have to play a scene but you don't know how to start, the director whispers a word in your ear and it all becomes very clear, you play the scene and it doesn't belong to you anymore. I feel that the ultimate harmony is something that doesn't belong to you and that happens at a level of perfection. Something spontaneous that cannot be reached if you try to obtain it.

A CONVERSATION WITH FRANÇOIS BERLÉAND

How did you become a part of this project?

I met Radu two or three years ago and we immediately felt we were on the same wave length. We also have the same sense of humor. We became good mates. When he mentioned *THE CONCERT* to me, he told me that the role of the Chatelet director was for me. I was very touched. I knew that Alain Attal was producing the film and as I'm often a part of his projects it all became even simpler.

What did you find interesting in the script?

By the end of reading I was in tears. I called Radu and told him that if he shot it as he'd written it he would direct a great film. I also liked the idea of playing a homosexual, which I had rarely done at that point.

To top it off I am passionate about classical music and come from a family of musicians, both my father and my mother. As a result I was very touched by the story. I even advised Radu to use Leonid Kogan's performance of Tchaikovsky which I think is the most beautiful: it sounds as if he makes his violin cry. He has Jewish and Gypsy influences that one can immediately recognize.

How do you feel about your character?

When you are in charge of a theatre like The Chatelet you are constantly faced with musicians and opera singers who have unforeseen difficulties, you have to be diplomatic so as not to hurt the artists' feelings but be cynical at the same time. What Duplessis tries to achieve is first class programming and a full house. I do think this goes with the job; he is not more cynical than anybody else.

What was the most difficult scene for you?

The one in my office, between the Russian and me. It was a difficult scene to play because I had to add a slimy edge to my character in order to face the power portrayed by the rich Mafioso. Duplessis knows this man isn't joking and that he demands to have exclusivity of Russian TV rights! Things weren't made easier by the fact that there was some diabolical noise outside and that the office was boiling hot.

How does Radu direct his actors?

He knows exactly what he wants. He kept asking me to go faster, which I didn't understand, all the more so as I'm naturally a fast speaker! Only after I watched the film did I realize that I spoke and moved faster than usual. Radu had picked up on something I hadn't: the Russian musicians take their time in everything they do; my character is in constant state of anxiety and always rushing.

What do you think the "ultimate harmony" is?

It is when an absolute osmosis occurs between the audience, the soloist, the orchestra and the music during a concert... or maybe twins.

A CONVERSATION WITH MIOU MIOU

What did you like about the project?

It's one of the most beautiful scripts I've ever read. I thought the writing was funny, original and ambitious, I felt very proud to be a part of this adventure. There is something very Slavonic about these characters who spend their time fighting, shouting and crying. I also loved Radu's desperate and ironic take on today's Russia. I think he is one of the few who can afford such irony towards the Russians.

How would you describe your character?

She is very tough, very demanding, would do anything to protect her young virtuoso. You think this is all down to her nature but little by little you understand there are reasons why she is so bitter, that she in fact carries a heavy secret. As a result, because she is at the root of the film's mystery, you can understand why these Russian musicians want to go back to Paris and play that Tchaikovsky's concerto.

Anne-Marie Jacquet has a great hold over her...

Exactly. She has real authority over Guylène, because of her virtuoso status. At the same time Guylène has much affection for her, she has devoted her life to her.

Andreï and your character are very close.

I would even say they are like family. They have shared a powerful and memorable experience thirty years ago or so that has created a unique bond between them. Besides, the nature of their relationship remains a mystery until the end.

What did you think of your Russian co-stars?

They are marvelous actors. Even though I don't speak a word of Russian and they not a word of French, we managed to communicate and understand each other. We even laughed a lot together. Most remarkable is that they are extremely generous actors. Even when they have their backs to the camera they give just as much: they cry, they laugh, they shout with as much intensity as if they were facing the camera. They can't imagine their profession any differently.

How was your relationship with Radu?

I liked him enormously, he touched me. Besides his talent I admired his tenacity. He never took the easy

way out. He showed unbelievable strength, never gave up, even if that meant him being on the defensive when you would try to advise him, due to fear you were trying to tamper with his film.

What was the atmosphere like on set?

Very family-like. Radu needs to have his father and his son by his side. You can feel he was uprooted. I am fascinated by people like him who had to undergo exile. I love his Slavonic humor, both desperate and irresistible.

What was your experience when shooting at the Chatelet?

It was a magnificent experience! Only Radu would obtain The Chatelet for his crew! I even used to go back on Sundays to watch rehearsals. They were magical moments, like Radu's films: generous and ambitious. When I am in that neighborhood today I cannot stop myself walking past the artists' entrance that leads straight to backstage.

How did Radu direct you?

He's very demanding but that doesn't stop him listening to his actors' suggestions. He is a man who knows exactly what he wants, and what he doesn't want, without being authoritarian.

Were you ever close to the world of classical music?

Not really, but the film gave me a taste for it, I think a long-lasting one. This type of music is like a consolation that satisfies our senses. Thanks to this film I have now realized that the performer is paramount, not just the composer. There are similarities between a film crew and an orchestra: a bunch of solitary individuals playing together.

What is the "ultimate harmony"?

I prefer not knowing.

A CONVERSATION WITH ANNA KAMENKOVA

What interested you the most in the script?

The richness of feelings and emotions.

How would you describe your character?

She is very impressive because she loves and she has faith. Love and faith allow her to find light in the most difficult of situations. Beneath a somewhat severe appearance she has a sensitive soul.

Do you think it is her love for Andrei that gives him wings and makes him carry his project through?

Probably. If he didn't have such a woman by his side he would never have been able to get out of this situation. And what would happen if he was with a woman who didn't believe in him?

Irina is a strong woman: she is very courageous and refuses humiliation. Do you feel close to her?

Yes, I would like to think so but alas one is not as courageous or as strong as one would like to be.

Was the language barrier a difficult obstacle to overcome in your relations with Radu and the team?

At first, yes, then less and less so. Eventually I didn't even notice it. And today I have started learning French again.

How does Radu direct his actors?

Right from the casting I took great pleasure in working with Radu. That is one of the reasons why I wanted to be a part of this project. Radu knows exactly what he wants in a scene, but he will give the actor the freedom to show what he or she can do. Even though he explores very deep ranges and allows what is deepest in you to come out the shooting isn't difficult because of that. On the contrary, it makes the work even more interesting.

How would you define the "ultimate harmony"?

As a blonde I have a hard time understanding this notion! I am trying to solve this mystery. For me it's probably music.