



Production Notes

Welcome To The Sticks

(Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis)

Directed by Dany Boon

**Starring
Kad Merad
Dany Boon
Zoe Felix**

Release date: September 4, 2008

Running time: 106 minutes

Rated: M (Coarse Language)

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Welcome to the
STICKS*



***Bienvenue chez les CH'TIS**



Claude BERRI and **Jérôme SEYDOUX**
present

Welcome to the **STICKS***

***Bienvenue chez les CH'TIS**



A **Dany BOON** film

starring

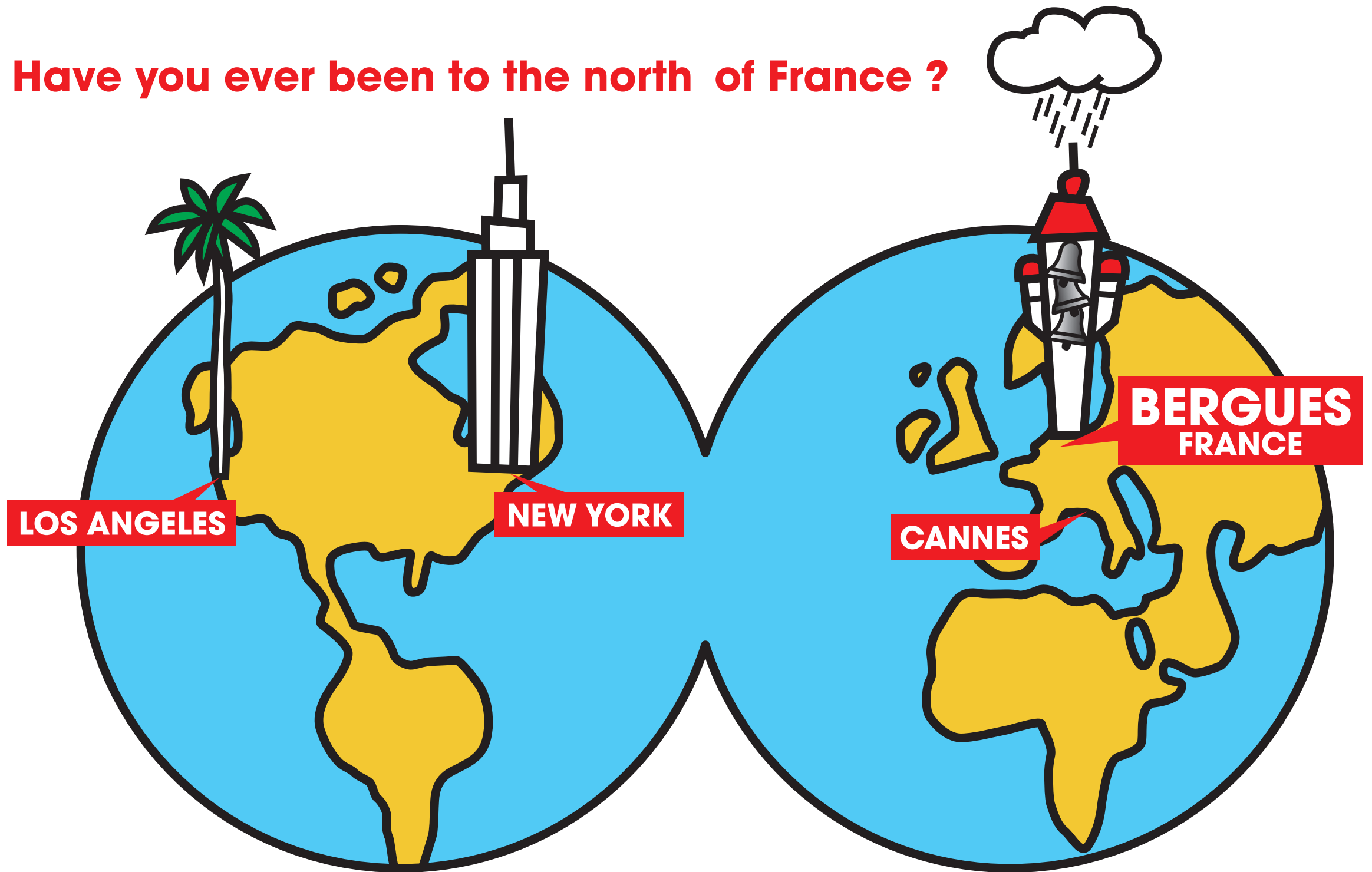
Kad MERAD **Dany BOON**

Zoé FELIX **Anne MARIVIN** **Philippe DUQUESNE**
Guy LECLUYSE **Patrick BOSSO** **Zinedine SOUALEM**

with special guest stars

Line RENAUD **Michel GALABRU** **Stéphane FREISS**

Have you ever been to the north of France ?



SYNOPSIS



Philippe Abrams is a post office manager in the beautiful southern city of Salon-de-Provence. His wife Julie's frequent bouts of depression make his life a living hell. In an effort to raise her spirits, Philippe tries to cheat his way into a transfer to the French Riviera. But when he is found out, he gets sent to a little town in northern France called Bergues.

The Abrams are tried-and-true southerners whose prejudicial view of the north is one of horror - biting cold, and louts who speak a garbled and incomprehensible dialect called «ch'timi». Philippe will go alone. To his great surprise, he finds himself in a charming place, working with people who are warm, friendly and welcoming. He makes a friend - Antoine, the village postman and carillon player, who has a tough-luck love-life and a possessive mother. When Philippe goes back to Salon, Julie refuses to believe that he likes it up north. In fact, she's convinced he's lying to preserve her feelings. To satisfy her and make his life simpler, Philippe leads her to believe that he is indeed having a terrible time of it in Bergues.

From that moment on, he sinks deeper and deeper into a comfortable lie. For two week intervals, he and Antoine have a grand old time up north and then, every other weekend, he is pampered and consoled by his wife who, little by little, overcomes her depression. Everything goes just fine until Julie decides to join Philippe in Bergues, to help him through what she believes is a terrible ordeal.

Philippe is forced to admit to Antoine and the rest of his staff that he has described them to his wife as a bunch of barbarians. He begs them to behave as such in order to cover his lie and scare Julie into leaving as quickly as possible. Philippe's employees reluctantly go along with this masquerade and give Julie the worst time of her life.

But Julie finds them out...





Where did the idea come from for WELCOME TO THE STICKS?

Dany Boon : I had the idea for WELCOME TO THE STICKS before I made my first feature, LA MAISON DU BONHEUR. But first I wanted to see if I was capable of directing a movie - I didn't want to mess up on a story that meant so much to me. Every story is important, of course, but this one was my childhood, my region. The people... well, they're my brothers! And the idea for the film comes from the vision that people who don't know the Nord - Pas de Calais have about the region. French people who have a very negative vision about the region, whether for its poverty, despair, unemployment or the mines. That's where I got the idea to make a very human comedy where the main character was not from the north and would discover the ch'ti culture and environment, the humanity of the northern people, their sense of welcome, of sharing, of generosity. All of which is summed up by the proverb: «A stranger who comes to the north cries twice: once when he arrives, and once when he is leaving.» I knew I wouldn't do two films like this, about the north, about the essence of what makes me who I am. So it's a very, very important film for me. It's a popular art film.

How did the writing of the script go?

D.B. - I wrote alone for a year, and I had the story, the characters and a good number of scenes which went into the movie. And then, at a certain point, I felt like sharing it with other writers, Franck Magnier and Alexandre Charlot

in this case. I've known Franck Magnier for a long time. At one time, he was writing sketches and I remember going to his home in the suburbs so he could present them to me. My entourage wondered why I was bothering with some unknown. But I thought he was a good guy, and funny. And Franck is from the north and he's the one who introduced me to Alexandre Charlot, who's not from the north but who's married to a ch'ti. They're very talented screenwriters and our work together was very constructive. It took us three months to work to a final draft, which we kept revising right up the last minute.

What problems did you have in the writing?

D.B. - The main one was making a comedy out of all this. That's what I mostly sweated over for a year. With a live audience, when I do characters from the region, it's easier because it's self-derision. I do sketches with characters that are like caricatures, they're exaggerated. But that's the convention and people laugh about it. In the movies, because you show things, you're in a reality and it has to be credible. And my main character has an apocalyptic view of the North - the view of people I met in 15 years of touring, as soon as I was anywhere south of Paris!

Did you cast yourself in a supporting role so you could concentrate more on the direction? Could you have been only the director?

D.B. - Oh no, I wanted to be in the film! But even though my character, Antoine Bailleul, bears one of my family's names, I don't think about what actors will play which roles when I write. At no point did I think, «Hey, I'm going to have a less important role.» As it happens, it's true that, out of 53 days of shooting, Kad had 52 and I only had 30 - but 30 is a lot - and it's true it did leave me a little more time. On the other hand, the producers fretted over it. They told me, «Your character only arrives on page 15 of the screenplay.» I answered, «No, I have to be the ch'ti. I can't be the guy who comes from the south, it's not possible.» And the scenes in the beginning are important to set up the situation and show what people think about the North.

How was it shooting in your home region ?

D.B. - How can I say it? When I go walking around Lille, if I'm not wearing my cap, it takes me a half hour to walk one block. So on the shoot in Bergues there were lots and lots of people! But the people of the North region were absolutely fantastic. When there were hundreds and hundreds of people watching the shoot and we asked for silence, there was silence. And that is rare. On the other hand, every evening after the shoot I spent more than an hour signing

autographs. But it was great. And I always say yes when people ask for my time because I feel that's just part of this business. You do this job for them and thanks to them. Without the public, we are nothing. We are at home, alone.

Once WELCOME TO THE STICKS was finished, were there aspects of the film that surprised you?

D.B. - No, because I wrote it, directed it, shot it and edited it. I watched it come together and I didn't have the good fortune of discovering the movie. The only thing that escaped me was just how hard audiences would laugh during the first test screenings and the emotion elicited by the film's ending. I was floored, but through the audience. It's like when my mother comes to see my show - she doesn't laugh when she looks at me, she laughs when she looks at the people laughing. Seeing how audiences laughed with WELCOME TO THE STICKS, I thought, «Wow, my film is funny.» And at the end I was very moved. It made me very happy for everyone who went along with me on this film, for my region, and for myself. I made the film I wanted to make so, whatever the success or lack thereof the film may have... OK, I'll be much happier if it's a success! But I'm thrilled. It's a very lively, human film and I hope it will endure and promote a fairer and more favorable image of what is my native region, the Nord-Pas de Calais.







INTERVIEW WITH **KAD MERAD**



Did you know Dany Boon before doing this film with him?

Kad Merad - Not really. We might have been on a TV set together, I'm not even sure... But I had seen his show at the Olympia (Theater in Paris). I don't even know if he knew I was there. Dany is the kind of person you're happy to go say hello to. We're colleagues - we're in the same business, we entertain.

What do you like about his work as a comedian?

K.M. - He's capable of doing a lot of things - burlesque, he can be tender, he's a musician and singer... He's a complete performer, and there aren't many of them. There aren't many in France, in any case. At the Olympia, I was enthralled by his show. He's a real artist. I like having a friend who's a performer and to be a fan of the performer. It's a real pleasure.

What did he say about **WELCOME TO THE STICKS the first time?**

K.M. - He wasn't the first to talk to me about it. I'm not afraid to say that I wasn't Dany Boon's wish in the first place. It wasn't he who chose me at the outset, it was Pathé's Richard Pezet. He called me in Marseilles where I was at the time and asked me what I was doing the next few weeks. It must have been about a month before the shoot. I told him I was supposed to be doing a movie - I had given my OK in principle to the director, but the contracts weren't signed yet



and nothing was decided. Actually, in the movie business, until you get your first call for the first day of shooting, and as long as you haven't started shooting, nothing is decided. Richard Pezet then spoke to me about Dany Boon's second film. That's when something happened. He sent me the script, which I read very quickly and realized I was being offered the lead role. I knew I had to read fast and that I couldn't pass this up. After I read it, I called Dany and I said, «I just read your script and I adore it. I'm interested. I think it's great.» I was very enthusiastic. And he was glad about that. I felt like this film was a gift for me. And then Dany and I did a first read-through, and I felt like he was happy, smiling. I think that's when I landed the role.

Tell us about your character, Philippe Abrams. Who is he?

K.D. - He's an average Frenchman, a post office manager, but he's also a man in love. This film is primarily a love story for me. It's out of love that he does all that nonsense to get transferred further south and winds up in the North regions with the ch'tis. He could be me. He's a man who lives a normal life with his wife and his kid and who just wants to keep making his wife happy by constantly doing things to demonstrate his love for her.

Did you know the North region, or were you, like your character, transported there for the first time for the shoot?

K.M. - No, I had lived like my character. Before that, I knew Lille but that was it. I live in Marseilles so it's not exactly my story! Marseilles has its own, very strong cultural identity and people there don't need Paris. They have their own sense of self, their way of life. Well it's exactly the same in the North. They're good people. And they are very warm. We were shooting right in the middle of the main squa-

re of the fortified town of Bergues. There were 20,000 people gathered to see Dany Boon direct his film. And when they were asked to be quiet for the take, there was not a sound! One day, a crew member asked if he could deposit some equipment in this woman's storefront. She said, «It's simple. I'll leave you the keys to the store and tomorrow morning you can open it to get your equipment back.» That's not going to happen in Paris!

And the ch'timi language?

K.M. - There's the rub! (Laugh) It is a real language. They say da brun for shit, carette for car... A Frenchman who shows up there and speaks to a real ch'ti won't understand.

Did you, as it's said in the film, cry twice, once upon arriving in the North, and once when you were leaving?

K.M. - The problem is we didn't finish shooting the film in the North. We finished in the studio. And I cried. I liked it in the North. I had a little house near Dunkerque and I had recreated my life, my family unit... Yes, I was moved when leaving the region. The North is something special. I'm anxious to get back there to promote the film, have people there see it. It was made for them. Of course it's not only a film made for people from northern France, but they are going to be happy.







**Dany Boon's film
plays on stereotypes -
in the flatlands,
it's always raining,
people drink like fish
but they're generous...
so...**

...True or false ?

Terrible Weather ?

Well, OK, it isn't great. But it's not as bad as people think. (The French national weather service) Météo-France records an average of 126 rainy days per year in the North region and 128 in the Pas-de-Calais, compared to 56 in the (southerly) region of Bouches-du-Rhône. But it's worse in the (westerly) Finistère region and comparable - and this is a little known fact - to the (Bordeaux wine region) Gironde, with 128. Sunshine? As for the temperatures, the average is 50.7°F in the North and 50.9°F in the Pas-de-Calais. It's certainly a far cry from the Var (61.3° F) but it's better than Vosges (49.1°F), and much better than Lozère (46.2 °F) : it's not THAT cold!

A Penchant for the Bottle ?

The ch'tis aren't alcoholic, of course, but they do drink more than the average Frenchman. Of all the cities in continental France, Dunkerque is where they consume the most beer, while Lille and Valenciennes follow close behind!

A Region Deserted by Civil Servants ?

Deserted, no. Disdained, yes. The North - Pas-de-Calais is the least sought-after posting among civil servants. On the other hand, once they're assigned they don't really leave. At least not in comparison with the Ile-de-France (Parisian) region where the turnover rate is, by far, the highest in France!

Generous People ?

OF COURSE! Well... it's not quite that simple. The Fondation de France places the North 57th and Pas-de-Calais 77th on the list of cash donations by department. Explanation? Statistically speaking, those who share the wealth tend to be Catholic, rich and older. The North - Pas-de-Calais region, it turns out, though rather religious, is very poor and very young. But the image of altruistic northerners is not completely dispelled. According to local charities, money is tight but donations of time and merchandise are very abundant.





*Michel Felin, with Pierre Falga - extracts - l'express 13/03/08

Poor Inhabitants ?

There is no doubt about this. The North - Pas-de-Calais is 22nd out of 22 of the mainland French regions in terms of inhabitants' revenues. They are 16% lower than the national average and 38% lower than Ile-de-France, according to the tax department. That doesn't mean there aren't a few isolated patches of tidy fortunes - in Croix, for example, where some of the highest ISF (Impôt de Solidarité sur la Fortune, France's tax on personal wealth) is paid.

An Industrial Region ?

Of course, it's been a long time since (Emile Zola's novel) Germinal, the mining villages have disappeared and some slag heaps have been converted to ski slopes. For several decades now, the North - Pas-de-Calais has been evolving toward a service economy. It nevertheless remains France's fourth most industrial region in terms of employment, with prominent contributions from the automobile, metallurgy and plastics sectors.*

«A stranger who comes to the north of France cries twice - once when he arrives, and once when he leaves.» Dany Boon.



B.O.: \$180 000 000

and still counting...

CAST

PHILIPPE ABRAMS	KAD MERAD
ANTOINE BAILLEUL	DANY BOON
JULIE ABRAMS	ZOE FELIX
ANNABELLE DECONNINCK	ANNE MARIVIN
FABRICE CANOLI	PHILIPPE DUQUESNE
YANN VANDERNOOUT	GUY LECLUYSE
NATIONAL POLICEMAN	PATRICK BOSSO
MOMO	ZINEDINE SOUALEM
INSPECTOR LEBIC	JEROME COMMANDEUR

With the participation of

LINE RENAUD in the role of MRS. BAILLEUL

MICHEL GALABRU in the role of JULIE'S GREAT UNCLE

STEPHANE FREISS in the role of JEAN



CREW

PRODUCTION
Claude BERRI and **Jérôme SEYDOUX**

PRODUCER	Richard PEZET
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER	Eric HUBERT
ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY	Dany BOON
	Alexandre CHARLOT
	Franck MAGNIER

BASED ON AN ORIGINAL IDEA BY **DANY BOON**

ARTISTIC COLLABORATION	Yaël BOON
LINE PRODUCER	Bruno MORIN
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY	Pierre AÏM (A.F.C.)
EDITORS	Luc BARNIER
	Julie DELORD
SET DESIGN	Alain VEISSIER (A.D.C.)
SOUND	Lucien BALIBAR
	Franck DESMOULINS
	Roman DYMNY
	François GROULT
	Florence SADAUNE
	Nicolas GUY
	Philippe MORLIER
	Philippe ROMBI
	Gérard MOULEVRIER

COSTUMES	Florence SADAUNE
1ST ASSISTANT DIRECTOR	Nicolas GUY
PRODUCTION MANAGER	Philippe MORLIER
MUSIC	Philippe ROMBI
CASTING	Gérard MOULEVRIER

A French co-production:
HIRSCH / PATHE
TF1 FILMS PRODUCTION
LES PRODUCTIONS DU CH'TIMI
CRRV NORD-PAS DE CALAIS
with the support of La Région Nord-Pas de Calais
with the participation of CANAL +
and Le Centre National de la Cinématographie
with the participation of CINECINEMA
and in association with Banque Populaire Images 8



WELCOME TO THE STICKS Breaks French Box-Office Record

April 12th, 2008 by Andre Soares, Alternative Film Guide

Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis / *Welcome to the Sticks* (literally, *Welcome to the Land of the Ch'tis*), a comedy about French regional stereotypes, has been seen by more than 17.4 million people since its February 27 release. That makes it the most successful French production in history. (According to an **Agence France Presse** report, the previous record was held by the 1966 Louis de Funès comedy *La Grande Vadrouille*, which sold 17.3 million tickets.)

If ticket sales remain strong, *Welcome to the Sticks* will likely surpass the 1997 romantic disaster-epic *Titanic* (20.7 million entries) to become the most successful film ever at the French box office.

Directed and co-written (with **Alexandre Charlot** and **Franck Magnier**) by two-time (acting) **César** nominee Dany Boon, who also stars and who is himself a Ch'ti, *Welcome to the Sticks* follows a southerner (**Kad Merad**) who, on orders from his company, moves to the Nord Pas de Calais region bordering Belgium. He's not happy at first, but once he's able to communicate with the locals — who speak an impossible-to-understand French dialect — he discovers that the Ch'tis are a kind-hearted bunch, after all.

So far, *Welcome to the Sticks* — which cost 11 million euros (US\$17 million), has grossed 99 million euros (US\$153 million).

As per the AFP report, the nickname "'Ch'ti' emerged during World War I when soldiers from the region were teased by comrades about their pronunciation [sic] of ch'est ti, ch'est mi instead of c'est toi, c'est moi (it's you, it's me)."

Hollywood Reporter

Warners picks up 'Sticks' remake rights

Overbrook, Will Smith to redo French blockbuster

By BorysKit, May 19, 2008

France's biggest movie is getting the American treatment courtesy of Will Smith. Warner Bros. has picked up the film rights option to remake "Welcome to the Sticks" (*Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis*) with Smith's Overbrook Entertainment to produce.

The original "Sticks," starring Kad Merad and director/co-writer Dany Boon, follows a postal employee from the sunny south of France who gets an unwanted transfer to the rain-soaked north, known as "the sticks," where he eventually is won over by the locals' warm-hearted ways and impenetrable dialect.

Produced and distributed by Pathe, "Sticks" opened in February and has gone on to break boxoffice records in France. It has grossed more than \$180 million and is poised to overtake "Titanic" in the coming weeks to become the highest-grossing movie ever released in the country.

Warners optioned the rights from Pathe International.

James Lassiter, Ken Stovitz and Smith will produce for Overbrook with Agnes Mentre. Lynn Harris will oversee for Warners.

smh.com.au

Sydney Films Festival/ Club Metro blog

Arts | Film | Music | Sydney Film Festival

Welcome To The Sticks

This is a fabulously farcical French tale that plays upon regional divides in language and mannerisms.

Written and directed by Dany Boon, *Welcome To The Sticks* has been immensely popular in France and it is easy to see why. It is a delightfully light-hearted slaptick comedy that manipulates class and regional differences to the maximum. It is wonderful to watch the French poke fun at themselves!

Philippe (Kad Merad) tries to scam his way into a transfer from his post office management position in Salon-de-Provence to the Cote d'Azur to please his unhappy, discontented wife Julie (Zoe Felix). When all of his attempts at transfer based on the fact that he is "handicapped" fail he is disciplined by the bureaucracy and sent to the north instead. To Bergues. A punishment for two years, likened to the North Pole!

He is welcomed to Bergues by Antoine (Boon himself) who is the local postman, and the fun begins. It is a rollicking good ride through jokes about smelly food, regional dialects and local habits. The jokes translate well into English and the subtitling is very well done. With an eclectic support cast and a genuine warmth in its tone, this movie is a winner. Four Stars.

Posted by Lee Winters
June 20, 2008 10:54 PM

New Zealand Film Festival

It seems the northern Pas-de-Calais region has long been regarded by many French citizens from further south as a hell of disused coal mines and rusting factories, and its inhabitants as pale, socially retarded types who live with their mothers until they're 40, eat disgusting cheeses, drink too much and speak an impenetrable dialect, Ch'timi. When comedian Dany Boon (*My Best Friend*) set out to change all this by poking fun at the stereotypes and at the southerners who perpetrate them, he succeeded beyond his wildest dreams: he made the most successful French movie of all time. The film traces the misadventures of a postal worker, Philippe Abrams (*Kad Merad*), who moves north from sunny Provence for work and finds himself unexpectedly charmed by the region's unusual customs and warm hospitality. Convinced that to admit as much to his wife will bring on a divorce, he enlists his new friends in an elaborate charade of extreme provincial backwardness when she visits. Boon himself is the embodiment of Ch'timi charm as Antoine, the bashful local postman periodically emboldened by the bottle. The film is more reminiscent of such classics as *Whisky Galore* and *Local Hero* than of staple French comedy. Though the dialect jokes are a subtitler's nightmare, the good-natured satire of small town clannishness and urban sniffiness needs no translation at all. - BG