

LORBER

f i l m s

PRESENTS



ARMY OF CRIME

A film by Robert Guédiguian

Official Selection, Cannes International Film Festival

2009, 139 minutes, 1.85, 35mm

Publicity Contact: Julia Pacetti
JMP Verdant Communications
(917) 584-7846 / juliapacetti@earthlink.net

Press Materials: <http://www.lorberfilms.com/press>

A Lorber Films Release
from Kino Lorber, Inc.
333 West 39th Street, Suite 502
New York, NY 10018
(212) 629-6880

LORBER

f i l m s

SYNOPSIS

A taut, revealing thriller about the early days of the French Resistance, a time when so many of the movement's leaders and foot soldiers were often foreigners — Poles, Jews, Armenians, Spaniards, Italians — who had to fear French collaborators as well as the Germans. Armenian poet Missak Manouchian (a stand-out performance by Simon Abkarian) and his French wife Mélinée (Virginie Ledoyen) lead a ragtag assortment of volunteers against the German occupiers and their French allies.

Varying in their actual homelands and in their reasons for joining the struggle, the one thing that unites them is the understanding that the Nazis oppression will only increase unless it is squarely confronted. To that end, they hatch a plot to assassinate a general, and show that resistance is indeed possible, but their activity attracts the attention of the German high command, which decides to teach the French population a different kind of lesson.

CREDITS

Missak Manouchian..... Simon Abkarian
Mélinée Manouchian..... Virginie Ledoyen
Marcel Rayman..... Robinson Stévenin
Thomas Elek..... Grégoire Leprince-Ringuet
Monique Stern..... Lola Naymark
Police Captain David..... Yann Tregouët
Madame Elek..... Ariane Ascaride
Inspector Pujol..... Jean-Pierre Darroussin

Directed by Robert Guédiguian
Produced by Dominique Barneaud, Marc Bordure & Robert Guédiguian
Written by Robert Guédiguian, Serge Le Péron & Gilles Taurand
From a story by Serge Le Péron
Adaptation and dialogue by Gilles Taurand
Cinematography by Pierre Milon
Edited by Bernard Sasia
Production Design by Michel Vandestien
Costume Design by Juliette Chanaud
Sound by Laurent Lafran & Gérard Lamps
Original Score by Alexandre Desplat

LORBER

f i l m s

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

Born to a German mother and an Armenian father, **ROBERT GUÉDIGUIAN** has lived and worked almost exclusively in Marseilles, often casting the same actors in his films. He first saw international success in the late 90s, with films such as *The Town Is Quiet* (2000), *Charge!* (2000), *Where the Heart Is* (1998) and *Marius and Jeannette* (1997). His more recent credits include *Lady Jane* (2008), *Journey Armenia* (2006), *The Last Mitterrand* (2005), *My Father Is an Engineer* (2004) and *Marie-Jo and Her 2 Lovers* (2002), and his many international honors include nominations for the César Award for Best Film, Best Director and Best Screenplay for *Marius and Jeannette*, the Golden Bear at the Berlin International Film Festival for *Lady Jane* and *The Last Mitterrand*, and the Golden Palm at the Cannes International Film Festival for *Marie-Jo and Her 2 Lovers*.

ABOUT THE CAST

SIMON ABKARIAN (MISSAK MANOUCHIAN) was born in Gonesse, Val d'Oise, of Armenian descent. He has appeared in more than thirty films, including Atom Egoyan's *Ararat* (2002), Sally Potter's *Yes* (2004) and the James Bond entry *Casino Royale* (2006).

VIRGINIE LEDOYEN (MÉLINÉE MANOUCHIAN) started shooting advertisements at the age of two and made her film debut at the age of ten; starting in 1993, she was nominated for the César for Most Promising Actress three years in a row, for *The Groundhogs*, *Cold Water*, and *A Single Girl*. Since then, she has worked both in France and abroad; her most well-known films include *Jeanne and the Perfect Guy* (1998), *Late August, Early September* (1998), *The Beach* (2000), *8 Women* (2002) and *Shall We Kiss?* (2007).

ROBINSON STÉVENIN (MARCEL RAYMAN) is the son of the legendary French actor/writer/director Jean-François Stévenin. He was nominated for the César for Most Promising Actor for *Bad Company* in 1999, and won the same award for *Gender Bias* in 2001; other credits include *His Brother* (2003), *Little Lili* (2003), *The Colonel* (2006) and *Actresses* (2007).

GRÉGOIRE LEPRINCE-RINGUET (THOMAS ELEK) has been nominated for the César for Most Promising Actor three times, for *Strayed* (2003), *Love Songs* (2007) and *La Belle Personne* (2008); he was also a member of the choir at the Opéra National de Paris from 1998-2002.

LOLA NAYMARK (MONIQUE STERN) won the Lumiere Award and was nominated for the César for Most Promising Actress in 2004 for *A Common Thread*.

ARIANE ASCARIDE (MADAME ELEK) has appeared in most of Guédiguian's films, and was nominated for the César for Best Actress for *Marius and Jeannette* (1997); her other credits include *My Life on Ice* (2002), *Sequins* (2004) and *Change of Address* (2006).

JEAN-PIERRE DARROUSSIN (INSPECTOR PUJOL) has appeared in most of Guédiguian's films; his other credits include *The Taste of Others* (1999), *Red Lights* (2003) and *A Very Long Engagement* (2005).

INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT GUÉDIGUIAN

The subject of the film seems perfect for you, but the idea of making it did not come immediately. Why?

I think the choice was too obvious, in fact. Manouchian the Armenian, the German occupation (my mother was born in Germany) and communism – the combination of those three elements probably brought it too close to home. Ever since I was born, I've heard Manouchian's story. He's up there in the pantheon of communist Resistance heroes. I particularly remember reading, as a kid, the letter he wrote before he died. For Manouchian for say, "I die with no hatred of the German people," reassured me about my dual origins and humanity in general.

You made the film as a way of keeping their story alive, passing it on...

Yes. I think the worst thing that's happening to us is that the strands have been broken. In the last 25-30 years, there has been a break with five or six generations of struggle and counter-culture. Today, people are disoriented. Probably the most serious consequence of the gradual removal of the Communist party from the French political landscape is the disappearance of a counter-model that structured class-consciousness in towns and factories.

Jokingly, I say that *Army of Crime* is national people's cinema, in reference to Jean Villar's National People's Theatre. Because the film is a concentrate of culture, legend and wonderful historical characters – these Jews, Armenians, Hungarians, Romanians, Poles, Italians and Spaniards fighting for the same cause set an example in our world of striking inequality, and religious and culture sectarianism. And I have no problem in saying that my approach is also educational.

How do you make fiction out of real-life events and people who actually existed?

I didn't hesitate to take a few liberties, which I am sure do not contradict history. The overall impact of the characters – what they did and their place in history – is respected. I changed certain events or reworked the chronology so that my story would work.

At the beginning, the film chronicles society and family life of the period...

Yes. From the start, I wanted to simultaneously develop the three major strands: Rayman, Elek and Manouchian. Showing where they lived, how their parents, brothers and sisters lived... Yes, it chronicles society, it's the antithesis of an action movie, but it allows us to identify with the characters. They're not abstract heroes who pop out of nowhere. They are demystified heroes. The film shows precisely how the young members of the Manouchian group came to join the Resistance – individually, these very young men and women want to fight back because they can't bear what's happening. They're indignant, rebellious. But there is also a predisposition to act this way: generally, their parents, from Central Europe, Armenia, Italy or Spain, have suffered from discrimination and oppression.

Early in their lives, these young people are struck by an idea of freedom, by what France represents to them – the cradle of human rights. Their actions derive from universal moral principles that are above the law. They soon join the FTP-MOI (immigrant, working-class partisans), where they have discipline drilled into them in order to be more efficient.

They needed organizing because a lot of them were very young and inexperienced, slightly hot-headed, and they continued to live their lives. They were sometimes careless, arrogant almost in the sense that

LORBER

f i l m s

they felt invincible. I like that aspect of their characters, which is redolent of the libertarian spirit. They are not sheep, who will blindly follow and obey. I told myself that I had to draw these young people towards something definitively modern by making them respond to eternal questions: What is our capacity for revolt? What do we oppose? How do we behave in a group?

Death is never banal in the film – how did you construct your ethical take on violence?

I think there are two ways of obscuring violence. The first and more prevalent derives from a sort of indulgence in naturalism, by which the violence becomes a spectacle. The Americans are very good at that. The second, more European way, is to show nothing – or only in a very euphemistic way. In both instances, violence is not denounced. I don't think we should dodge the subject. Resorting to violence should continue to shock us, to seem like something that we can and must try to avoid. We have to manage to combine the spectacular, demanded by the audience, and the crucial denunciation of violence. In each scene, there is probably only one way of doing this, and you have to find it.

From that point of view, Missak Manouchian is an emblematic character, a non-violent man compelled to violence...

Yes. He returns to the scene of the bombing to consider what he has done, to see the corpses of the German soldiers. He says, "I have become a true fighter." And he cries. It's an absolute contradiction of his violent act. One of the characters in the film sums it up: "We kill because we are partisans of life." It's because they don't want to kill that they kill. Manouchian takes that paradox to its further limit.

The film has no archive footage, but you use a lot of radio archives. These propaganda messages being read by the voices of the period add to the sense of disgust that they provoke.

In the film it's mostly the voice of Philippe Henriot, a notorious collaborator, that we hear on the radio. What is said is even more brutal because we don't see the face of the person talking. The content is stripped bare almost. The arguments are horrifying. How can anyone express such abject ideas, in a very pompous voice, moreover, with such bombastic diction, and above all how could people swallow such a pack of outrageous lies?

Even if it's not the crux of the movie, the presentation of the group as the "Army of Crime" on the famous red poster also allowed me to show how opinion is manipulated. Which is why I chose those extracts because they reveal how lies are spread about who's an immigrant, who's a leader, and so on. These methods of disinformation, relatively speaking, are still in use today.

Did you have any problems shooting on location in modern-day Paris?

It's increasingly complicated. The buildings or places in Paris of the period have been gentrified, repainted and rehabilitated. We scouted locations for three months. It's a painstaking task to blend studio and location work. After the shoot, we resorted to digital techniques exactly 133 times. It's all very costly. This film's budget is two and a half times my usual budget.

How did you approach recreating history?

A director must have an opinion on how it is recreated, on the sets and costumes. Excuse the pun, but I wanted the film to show the army of light, the light that only these young people glimpse in a world going through the darkest period of its history. That's why I wanted the film to be sunny and colorful. Once

LORBER

f i l m s

that's been defined, it's not up to the director to take care of it; his preoccupations should be the storytelling, actors and scene structure.

In your early films, you separated realism and stylization, but now you tend to combine them more and more.

If the storytelling is good, you can do what you want. Of course, it has to be justified. I simply resorted to forms that have been around in movies for a long time—combining black & white and color, superimposition... If I tried to tell the story by more conventional means, I'm not sure I could, in just one scene, at least. I'd probably have to add a couple more explanatory scenes. You can use the locations to add stylistic elements, also. For example, Manouchian and Epstein's arrest: I wanted it to look good, stylish. We looked for an unusual location without worrying about historical reality—they weren't at all arrested where we shot—and we found this stretch of water on top of a building in Paris, level with the rooftops. It's an amazing place. It's a theatrical approach that tells you more than the simple process of an arrest.

When they are arrested, the two characters gaze at each other and half smile. Why?

I got that idea on set. I didn't ask Simon Akbarian and Lucas Belvaux to express anything in particular. In fact, all the members of the group died with a smile, extremely proud of what they had done, writing in their last letters that they were convinced that the final months of misery had come and that the survivors and their descendants would soon live happily in a much better world. Rayman wrote that he couldn't stop feeling joyful. So, through Manouchian and Epstein's smiles at their arrest, I wanted to emphasize the faith that they all shared.

LORBER

f i l m s

TIMELINE

June 1941: Manouchian is arrested as a communist and held in a camp for several weeks.

April 1942: The FTP-MOI forms the first armed resistance groups.

February 1943: Manouchian joins an FTP-MOI armed unit in Paris.

March 1943: Manouchian becomes the group's military commander.

March - November 1943: Under Manouchian's command, FTP-MOI units launch almost 230 attacks in Paris.

July 28, 1943: Manouchian's group assassinates General Von Schaumburg.

August 18, 1943: Manouchian's group assassinates Major Wallenher.

September 28, 1943: Manouchian's group assassinates SS General Julius Ritter.

November 16, 1943: Manouchian is arrested by the French secret police.

December 1943: On a famous red poster, Nazi propaganda portrays Manouchian's group as The Army of Crime. Manouchian is described as "Armenian, gang leader, 56 attacks, 150 dead, 600 wounded."

February 17, 1944: The show trial of Manouchian and his 22 comrades begins.

February 21, 1944: Missak Manouchian and 21 comrades are executed by firing squad at Mont-Valérien just outside Paris.

May 10, 1944: Olga Bancic, the group's only woman, is beheaded in Stuttgart.