



FESTIVAL DE CANNES
OFFICIAL SELECTION

ULZHAN

A FILM BY
VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF



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VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF

Language: French and Kazakh
Nationality: French, German and Kazakh
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Format: Scope (2:35)

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synopsis

Somewhere in the endless steppes of Central Asia lies a treasure. One man holds the key to it, a fragment of an ancient map. But in his restless quest, Charles isn't looking for fame or glory. He's looking for a way to heal his wounded soul. Ulzhan felt it the first time she laid eyes on him...



interview

Volker Schlöndorff

How would you describe Charles, the mysterious main character of the film?

"I never knew a sorrow so great that an hour of reading wasn't able to dissipate..." I, too, used to believe that. But the loss of a child, a wife or a friend, through death, isn't that kind of sorrow. The thirst for life can be lost through that kind of experience. The most intense example is certainly the loss of an entire family. In choosing distress of that caliber, Jean-Claude Carrière wanted to raise the bar as high as possible. A man so afflicted has but one desire - to disappear. To do that, we provided him with the most expansive, least populated, least known land: the steppes of Central Asia.

That's where the miracle of life is accomplished. The more alone he is, the more desolate the surroundings. But, also, the hotter he is, the colder he becomes. And the more he walks, the more life sweeps him back up again. He thought he wanted to die and, by walking, his body teaches him that he is, in fact, a man who loves life.

Isn't it love that saves him?

Oh, we'd really like that... Ulzhan's love certainly helps, but I think the truth is more visceral. It's in our senses, in our muscles, in the fact of moving without stopping. "Once they stop, they don't take off again," he's told about the nomads. And that's my belief, too.

Why did you choose Philippe Torreton?

From the three-page synopsis, I thought that the quest for ultimate meaning, the search for a mythic place at the ends of the earth, the desire to flee, to disappear in the face of overwhelming grief... all that could seem very pathetic - esoteric bordering on the ridiculous. So we needed a very pragmatic man for the lead role.

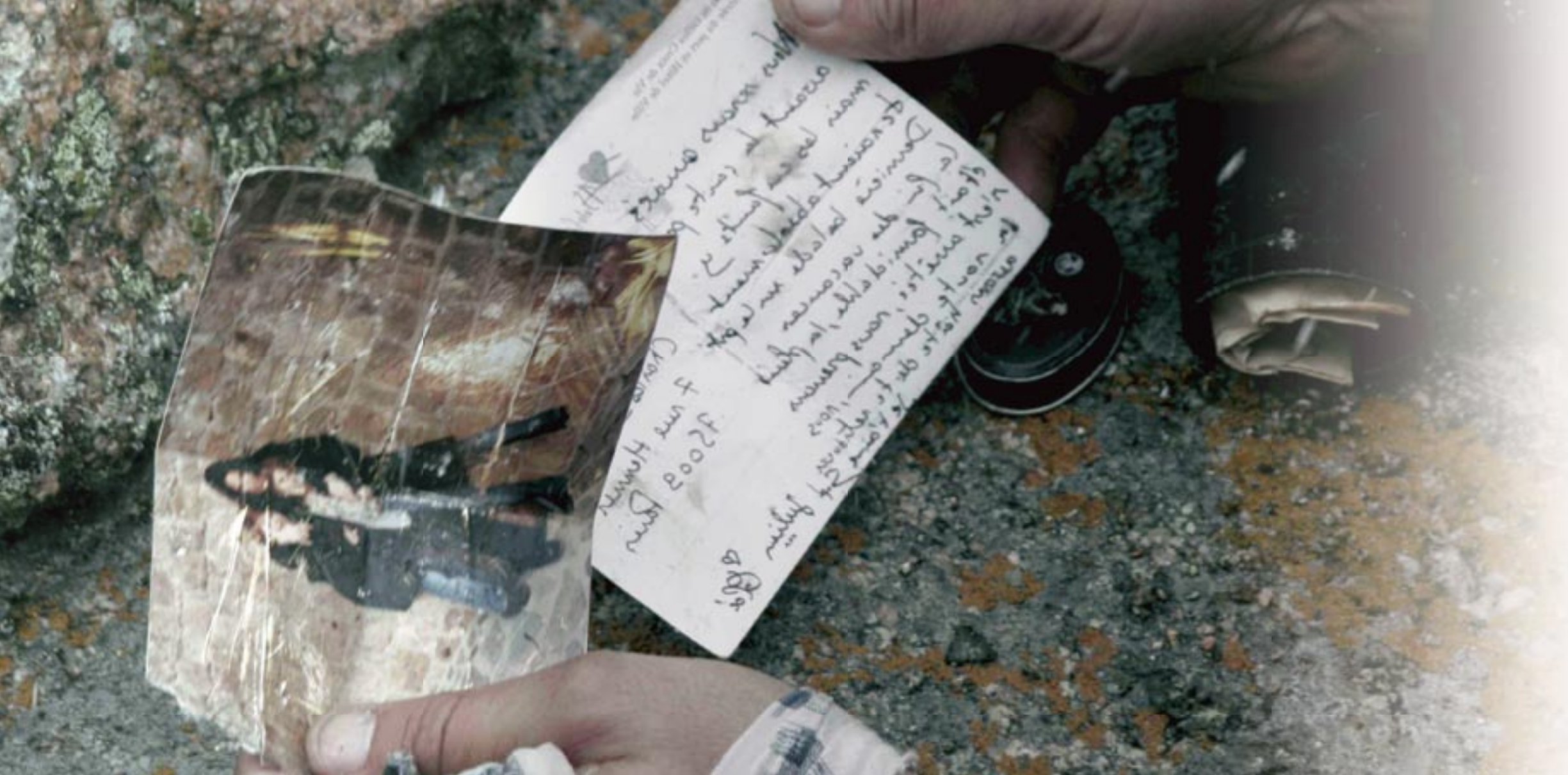
I immediately thought of Philippe Torreton, who's very down-to-earth. He's not an actor who "suffers." He's very physical without being sullen, and as stubborn as a mule. He plunges into despair headfirst. He's capable of forcing himself to walk thousands of miles. He's sensitive yet completely ignorant about

who he really is. These are all the qualities that I indeed found in Philippe, day after day. And we truly made this film "four hands."

Where did this "word merchant" character, Shakuni, come from?

At the beginning, that was 100% Jean-Claude Carrière. He's a literary character lifted directly from the Mahabharata. We imagined that, in our slightly imaginary Central Asia, the Occidental dream was quite capable of producing a character from the Indies. Working in Almaty with poet and director Bolat Atabeken, Shakuni became more anchored in the real. He's one of those countless talents who were considered dissidents and marginalized under the Soviets, and who, in today's Kazakh turbo-capitalism, once again falls through the cracks.

He claims to trade rare words for food, but who knows if he doesn't simply live off the charity of the nomads? In the steppe, no one can purchase bread



or water; it's offered. What Shakuni gives them in exchange are a few shaman rituals handed down by his father. The real tragedy isn't just that languages are being lost, but also beliefs and rituals. When Shakuni finally returns to his father's home - a genuine return of the prodigal son - the man is dying. It's too late to acquire his knowledge. And that's why almost everywhere in the world, and certainly in Central Asia, ancient knowledge is disappearing today.

Why did you choose David Bennet?

We've never lost contact since *THE TIN DRUM*. That film marked each of us in a different way. For me, it was a life-long calling card, for him the role he's had to free himself from, over the years, so he could become an adult actor. He especially worked very hard with Peter Brook - therefore with Jean-Claude Carrière, as well - and has been fantastic. He's had a strong on-stage presence in Germany, in particular with Shakespeare, once again. But, despite all that, he can't shake off his Oscar for *THE TIN DRUM* as far as the film industry is concerned. And I hope that Shakuni will prove, once again, what a powerful on-screen presence he is. Carrière had already thought of him while writing, and I could never imagine another actor in the role. I knew that, with him, this character, who could seem trivial, had the potential to take on a Beckett-like dimension. The rest is friendship and the joy of working together again.

What have you done since *THE OGRE*?

Four or five films, some theater, some opera. In other words, I've been busier than ever. But culture doesn't circulate as well as money in Europe. Curiously, I

haven't done a single literary adaptation in the past ten years. *RITA, THE NINTH DAY, STRIKE* - I really like these "little films," shot while waiting to direct "big projects" like *POPE JOAN*, which I've been working on for seven years. After the inevitable meanderings of life, these very personal films have allowed me to hook up with my beginnings, and *ULZHAN* is perhaps the film that is closest to me. I'm not afraid of revealing my feelings anymore. The thirst for life, the tenderness toward people encountered, the tears belong to me as much as to the character.

What part does journalistic reporting play in the film?

Nothing comes out of reporting in *ULZHAN*. I traveled extensively in Kazakhstan and I took a lot of notes, because I knew nothing. I vaguely situated the story near Mongolia, between the Caspian Sea and the Himalayas... Central Asia is the last blank spot on my mental map - as big as India, with only 14 million inhabitants. I told Jean-Claude what I had seen. We introduced everything that had any connection with our character into the screenplay, but nothing to "inform" people about the country, particularly no geographic or historical exposition. Everything the camera shows was "directed," at times in the studio on constructed sets. If the character and the film crew covered thousands of kilometers, this nevertheless remains an inner journey, a quest. The treasure that he's searching for, the light of the Nestorians, isn't hidden anywhere in the steppe... It was exciting to make a film on a tabula rasa, where there's nothing but three characters who form a fairly odd bunch.

ULZHAN is a fairly contemplative film, which reflects upon the juxtaposition of that grandiose landscape and the traces of its history - gulags, kolkhozes, nuclear test sites, the dried-up Aral Sea, oil prospecting... The ruins that the character crosses are the gulags where Lev Kopelev and Alexander Solzhenitsyn were held, which Dostoevsky had already referred to as *The House of the Dead*. The deserts aren't deserts just due to the climate, but because more than 500 atomic bombs were set off there, as tests. The death of the Aral Sea was determined by men as indifferent to the agony of nature as nature is indifferent to human agony. The Khan Tengri magic mountain, at a magnificent height of 7,000 meters, towers over the endless steppe. They say the souls of shamans who went to die there fly around the summit. All that comes out of the realm of poetry rather than reporting.

But the love story is indeed real?

I hope so. However, it's not love at first sight. Ulzhan simply says, "I'm following you because you came to me." That's love. There's no choice. At first, we might even think she's following him because of the horse. As for him, he mostly tries to get rid of her. Only the babka, the old grandmother, sees the situation clearly. "He has death on his face" she recognizes it immediately. So Ulzhan has an obligation to rescue this man in distress. And to make him realize that he is, in fact, more attached to life than to death. She leaves him the horse and, as the last lines of the screenplay read, "The horse waits. In that immense landscape. He awaits a man who, the woman is convinced, will come back."



biography

Volker Schlöndorff

Born in 1939 in Wiesbaden, the son of a family of doctors, Volker Schlöndorff was sent in 1956 to a Jesuit boarding school in Brittany. After leaving school he studied Political Science in Paris. From 1959 on he had close ties with the directors of the Nouvelle Vague, and worked as AD to Louis Malle, Alain Resnais and Jean-Pierre Melville. It was then that Schlöndorff wrote his first film *YOUNG TORLESS*, which became the first international success of the young German cinema. In 1966 the film won the International Critics' Prize at Cannes.

With *THE LOST HONOUR OF KATHARINA BLUM* (1975) adapted from the novel of the same name by Heinrich Böll (co-director: Margarethe von Trotta), Schlöndorff scored another international success. Hans-Werner Henze wrote the music for "Katharina Blum". The contact with the composer inspired Schlöndorff to direct several operas between 1974 and 1984. Among these were: Henze's *WE COME TO THE RIVER*, *KATIA KABANOVA* and *THE HOUSE OF THE DEAD* by Leos Janacek, *LA BOHÈME* by Giacomo Puccini and *LADY*

MACBETH FROM MZENSK by Shostakovich.

His 1979 adaptation of Günter Grass *THE TIN DRUM* (*Die Blechtrommel*) was the first film by a German director to be awarded the Golden Palm at Cannes. Likewise, it was the first German film since 1927 to win the Oscar. Schlöndorff has also directed several Franco-German co-productions, notably *SWANN IN LOVE* (1983) adapted from the novel by Marcel Proust.

In 1984 he shot a filmed version of *DEATH OF A SALESMAN* by Arthur Miller with Dustin Hoffman in New York. This film gave him the opportunity to work with John Malkovich for the first time. In the United States, where he lived for several years, he also made *A GATHERING OF OLD MEN* (1985) with Holly Hunter and *THE HANDMAID'S TALE* (1990) from a screenplay by Harold Pinter.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, he decided to return to Germany to film *HOMO FABER* (*Voyager*) with Sam Shepard. At the same time he took charge of saving the

old UFA/DEFA film studios at Babelsberg. From 1992 to 1997 he has dedicated himself exclusively to the rebuilding of the studios.

THE OGRE, adapted from Michael Tournier's novel *THE ERL KING*, is his first film since 1991. It is also Studio Babelsberg's first large-scale production. The film causes a controversy in Germany, but got excellent reviews in America. In 1998 Volker Schlöndorff made the "Film Noir" *PALMETTO* in Florida. Parallel to this, he and Wolfgang Kohlhaase had been developing *THE LEGEND OF RITA* since 1993, the story of a west german terrorist hiding in East Germany. The picture was awarded the Blue Angel for best European production at the Berlin Film Festival in 2000, both actresses sharing a Silver Bear for best performance. Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt's play *THE ENIGMA VARIATIONS* marked his return to the stage in 2004, and he adapted the same play for television, shooting on location in Norway. In 2004 he also directed a production of *HOUSE OF THE DEAD* for the Berlin Opera.



filmography

Volker Schlöndorff

- | | | | |
|-------------|--|---------------|--|
| 1965 | DER JUNGE TÖRLESS / YOUNG TOERLESS / LES DÉSARROIS DE L'ÉLÈVE TOERLES | 1989 | THE HANDMAID'S TALE / DIE GESCHICHTE DER DIENERIN / LA SERVANTE ÉCARLATE |
| 1966 | MORD UND TOTSCHLAG / A DEGREE OF MURDER / VIVRE À TOUT PRIX | 1991 | HOMO FABER / THE VOYAGER / LE VOYAGEUR |
| 1967 | (short film) DER PAUKENSPIELER / THE DRUMMER / LE JOUEUR DE TAMBOUR | 1996 | DER UNHOLD / THE OGRE / LE ROI DES AULNES |
| 1969 | MICHAEL KOHLHAAS - DER REBEL | 1998 | PALMETTO |
| 1970 | DER PLÖTZLICHE REICHTUM DER ARMEN LEUTE VON KROMBACH / THE SUDDEN WHEATH OF THE POOR PEOPLE OF KOMBACH / LA SOUDAINNE RICHESSE DES PAUVRES GENS DE KOMBACH | 2000 | DIE STILLE NACH DEM SCHUSS / THE LEGEND OF RITA / LES TROIS VIES DE RITA |
| 1971 | DIE MORAL DER RUTH HALBFASS | 2001 | TEN MINUTES OLDER / ENLIGHTENMENT / THE CELLO |
| 1972 | STROHFEUER / A FREE WOMAN / FEU DE PAILLE | 2003/4 | DER NEUNTE TAG |
| 1974 | ÜBERNACHTUNG IN TIROL | 2005 | STRAJK OR THE PATRON SAINT OF THE SHIPYARDS |
| 1975 | DIE VERLORENE EHRE DER KATHARINA BLUM / THE LOST HONOUR OF KATHARINA BLUM / L'HONNEUR PERDU DE KATHARINA BLUM | 2007 | ULZHAN |
| 1976 | DER FANGSCHUSS / THE COUP DE GRACE/ LE COUP DE GRÂCE | | |
| 1977 | NUR ZUM SPASS – NUR ZUM SPIEL / PORTRAIT OF VALESKA GERI | | |
| 1978 | DEUTSCHLAND IM HERBST / GERMANY IN AUTUMN / L'ALLEMAGNE EN AUTOMNE | | |
| 1979 | DIE BLECHTROMMEL / THE TIN DRUM / LE TAMBOUR | | |
| 1980 | DER KANDIDAT / THE CANDIDATE | | |
| 1981 | DIE FÄLSCHUNG / CIRCLE OF DECEIT / LE FAUSSAIRE | | |
| 1982 | KRIEG UND FRIEDEN / WAR AND PEACE / GUERRE ET PAIX | | |
| 1983 | UN AMOUR DE SWANN / EINE LIEBE VON SWANN / SWANN IN LOVE | | |
| 1985 | DEATH OF A SALESMAN / TOD EINES HANDLUNGSREISENDEN /MORT D'UN COMMIS- VOYAGEUR | | |
| 1987 | A GATHERING OF OLD MEN / EIN AUFSTAND ALTER MÄNNER / COLÈRE EN LOUISIANE | | |



Philippe Torreton

Actor

- 1991** LA NEIGE ET LE FEU / SNOW AND FIRE by Claude PINOTEAU
1992 UNE NOUVELLE VIE / A NEW LIFE by Olivier ASSAYAS
L 627 by Bertrand TAVERNIER
1993 OUBLIE MOI / FORGET ME by Noémie LVOVSKY
L'ANGE NOIR / THE BLACK ANGEL by Jean-Claude BRISSEAU
1994 LA SERVANTE AIMANTE by Jean DOUCHET
L'APPÂT / THE BAIT by Bertrand TAVERNIER
1995 CAPITAINE CONAN / CAPITAIN CONAN by Bertrand TAVERNIER
César for Best Actor
1998 CA COMMENCE AUJOURD'HUI / IT ALL STARTS TODAY
by Bertrand TAVERNIER
César Nomination for Best Actor
1999 TÔT OU TARD / SOONER OR LATER by Anne-Marie ETIENNE
2000 FÉLIX ET LOLA by Patrice LECONTE
2001 VERTIGES DE L'AMOUR by Laurent CHOUCHAN
2002 MONSIEUR N by Antoine de Caunes
2004 L'ÉQUIPIER / THE LIGHT by Philippe LIORET
César Nomination for Best Actor
2005 LES CHEVALIERS DU CIEL / SKY FIGHTERS by Gérard PIRÈS
2006 LE GRAND MEAULNES by Jean-Daniel VERHAEGHE
2007 JEAN DE LA FONTAINE by Daniel VIGNE
ULZHAN by Volker SCHLÖNDORFF

David Bennent

Actor

- 1979** THE TIN DRUM by Volker Schlöndorff
1984 DOG DAY by Yves Boisset
1985 LEGEND by Ridley Scott
2003 I SET MY FOOT UPON THE AIR AND IT
CARRIED ME by Ralf Schmerberg
2004 SHE HATE ME by Spike Lee
2005 TRAUMSCHATTEN by Steffen Groth
2007 ULZHAN by Volker Schlöndorff

Ayanat Ksenbai

Actress

- 2001** LEILA'S PRAYER by Satybaldy Narymbetov
2003 KOCHEVNIK / NOMAD by Ivan Passer,
Talgat Temenov and Sergei Bodrov
2004 MAN-WIND by Huat Ahmetov
2005 HOPE by Anton Gonapolskii
2007 ULZHAN by Volker Schlöndorff



Jean-Claude Carrière

Scriptwriter

Born in 1931 in Colombières-sur-Orb (Hérault, France) in a winegrower's family, Jean-Claude Carrière is a former student of the École Normale Supérieure in Saint-Cloud. Graduated in Literature and History, he soon turns his back to his historian vocation to dedicate himself to drawing and writing. In 1957, he published his first Novel, *Lézard* and meets Pierre Etaix and Jacques Tati. He co-writes his short and long features. His collaboration with Luis Buñuel lasts nineteen years until the death of the latest. Jean-Claude Carrière never dedicates himself to screenwriting only. In parallel, he carries out a career of playwright and adapter, in particular with Jean-Louis Barrault and Peter Brook.

- 1962** THE SUITOR, by Pierre Etaix
- 1964** DAIRY OF A CHAMBERMAID by Luis Buñuel
- 1965** YOYO, by Pierre Etaix
- 1965** VIVA MARIA by Louis Malle
- 1966** BEAUTIFUL OF THE DAY by Luis Buñuel
- 1966** THE THIEF, by Louis Malle
- 1968** THE GREAT LOVE by Pierre Etaix
- 1969** THE MILKY WAY by Luis Buñuel
- 1970** BORSALINO by Jacques Deray
- 1971** LIZA by Marco Ferreri
- 1971** A LITTLE SUN IN COLD WATER by Jacques Deray
- 1971** TAKING OFF by Milos Forman
- 1972** THE DISCREET CHARM OF THE BOURGEOISIE by Luis Buñuel
- 1972** THE OUTSIDE MAN by Jacques Deray
- 1973** FRANCE INC. by Alain Corneau
- 1974** FLESH OF THE ORCHID by Patrice Chéreau
- 1974** THE SPECTER OF FREEDOM by Luis Buñuel
- 1974** THE WOMAN WITH RED BOOTS by Juan Luis Buñuel
- 1974** SERIOUS AS PLEASURE by Robert Benayoun
- 1975** WEAK SPOT by Peter Fleischmann
- 1975** SCRAMBLED EGGS by Joël Santoni
- 1975** LEONOR by Juan Luis Buñuel
- 1977** THAT OBSCURE OBJECT OF DESIRE by Luis Buñuel
- 1977** JULIE GLUEPOT by Philippe de Broca
- 1977** THE GANG by Jacques Deray
- 1977** THE DEVIL IN THE BOX by Pierre Lary
- 1978** A BUTTERFLY ON THE SHOULDER by Jacques Deray
- 1979** THE TIN DRUM by Volker Schlöndorff
- 1979** EVERY MAN FOR HIMSELF by Jean-Luc Godard
- 1979** RETURN TO THE BELOVED by Jean-François Adam
- 1981** THE RETURN OF MARTIN GUERRE by Daniel Vigne
- 1981** FALSE WITNESS by Volker Schlöndorff
- 1982** DANTON by Andrzej Wajda
- 1982** ANTONIETA by Carlos Saura
- 1983** A LOVE OF SWANN by Volker Schlöndorff
- 1985** MAX MY LOVE by Nagisa Oshima
- 1987** THE UNBEARABLE LIGHTNESS OF BEING by Philip Kaufman
- 1988** THE POSSESSED by Andrzej Wajda
- 1989** THE MAHABHARATA by Peter Brook
- 1989** MAY FOOLS by Louis Malle
- 1989** VALMONT by Milos Forman
- 1990** CYRANO DE BERGERAC by Jean-Paul Rappeneau
- 1995** THE HORSEMAN ON THE ROOF by Jean-Paul Rappeneau
- 1996** LE ROI DES AULNES by Volker Schlöndorff
- 1997** CHINESE BOX by Wayne Wang
- 1999** SALSA by Joyce Sherman Buñuel
- 2003** BIRTH by Jonathan Glazer
- 2003** RIEN, VOILÀ L'ORDRE by Jacques Baratier
- 2005** GOYA'S GHOSTS by Milos Forman
- 2007** ULZHAN by Volker Schlöndorff

Technical and Artistic List

Bruno Coulais Composer

1996 MICROCOSMOS by C. Nuridsany and Marie Pérennou
César for Best Original Soundtrack

1998 DON JUAN by Jacques Weber
DÉJÀ MORT / ALREADY DEAD by Olivier Dayan

1999 HIMALAYA by Eric Valli
César for Best Original Soundtrack

2000 LES RIVIERES POURPRES / THE CRIMSON RIVERS by Mathieu Kassovitz
COMME UN AIMANT by Akhenaton and Kamel Saleh
SCENES DE CRIME / CRIME SCENES by Frédéric Schoendoerffer

2001 BELPHEGOR by Jean-Paul Salomé
LE PEUPLE MIGRATEUR / WINGED MIGRATION by Jacques Perrin

2002 THE BOY WHO WANTED TO BE A BEAR by Jannik Hastrup

2004 LES CHORISTES / CHORISTS by Christophe Barratier
Academy Award Nomination for Best Title song
César for Best Original Soundtrack
AGENTS SECRETS / SECRET AGENTS by Frédéric Schoendoerffer
GENESIS by Claude Nuridsany et Marie Pérennou

2005 BRICE DE NICE by James Huth
SOMETIMES IN APRIL by Raoul Peck
Emmy Nomination for Best Original Soundtrack
GASPARD LE BANDIT by Benoît Jacquot

2007 TRUANDS / CRIME INSIDERS by Frédéric Schoendoerffer
ULZHAN by Volker SCHLÖNDORFF

Writer & Director
Producer
Coproducers

Volker SCHLÖNDORFF
Régis GHEZELBASH
Volker SCHLÖNDORFF,
Sergey AZIMOV
Gilbert HUS
Jean-Claude CARRIÈRE
Tom FAEHRMANN
Peter ADAM
Aleksandr ROROKIN
Kuat TLEUBAEV
Svetlana NOVAK
Marek BRODSKI
Makhabat SARKITPAEVA
Bakhtikul KASIMJANOVA

Scriptwriter
Director of Photography
Sound Engineer **Editor**
Set Decorator
Costume Designer
Line Producer
First Assistant Director
Casting Director
Make-up

Charles
Ulzhan
Shakuni

Philippe TORRETON
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