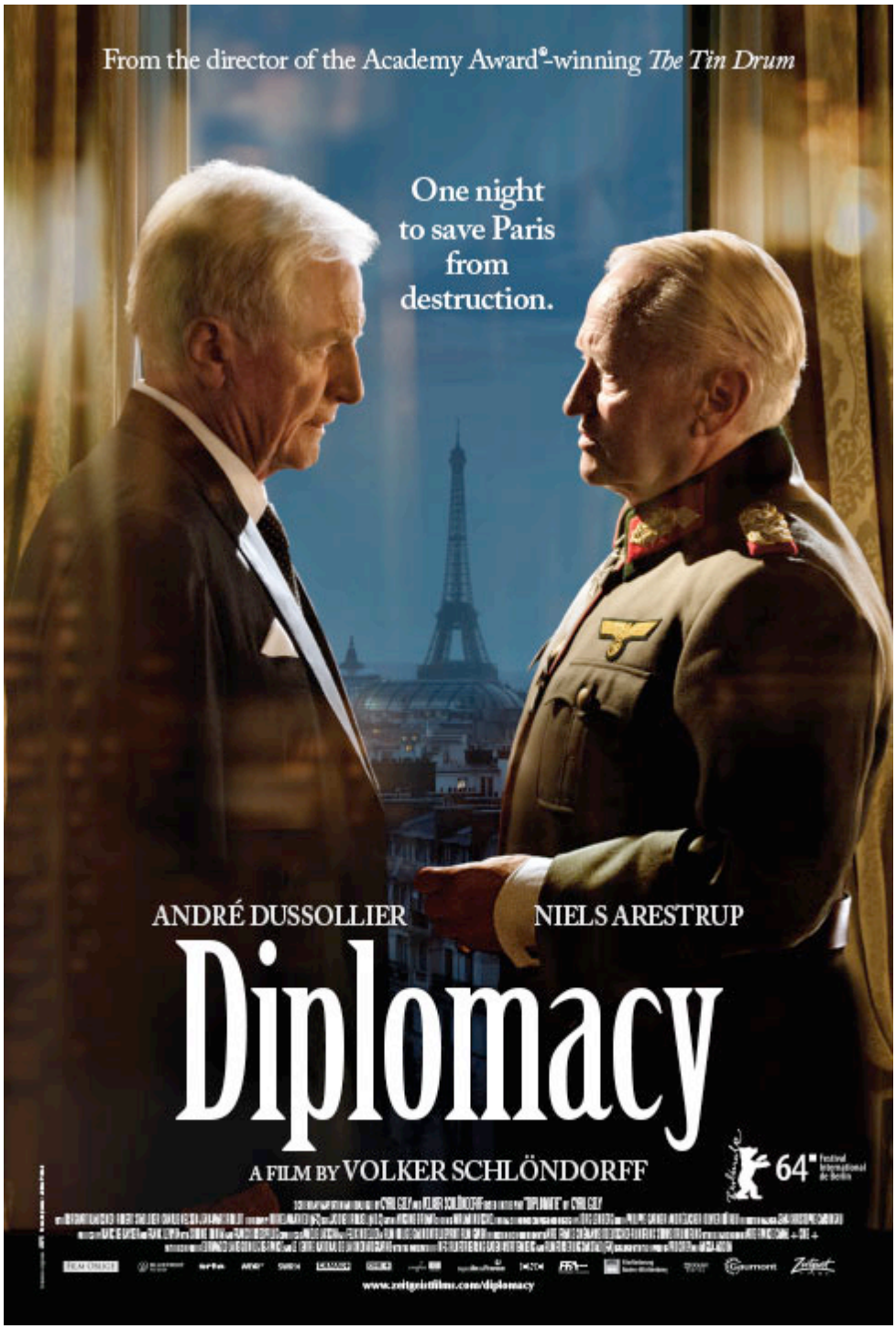

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A ZEITGEIST FILMS RELEASE

SYNOPSIS

As the Allies march toward Paris in the summer of 1944, Hitler gives orders that the French capital should not fall into enemy hands, or if it does, then ‘only as a field of rubble’. The person assigned to carry out this barbaric act is Wehrmacht commander of Greater Paris, General Dietrich von Choltitz, who already has mines planted on the Eiffel Tower, in the Louvre and Notre-Dame and on the bridges over the Seine. Nothing should be left as a reminder of the city’s former glory. However, at dawn on 25 August, Swedish Consul General Raoul Nordling steals into German headquarters through a secret underground tunnel and there starts a tension-filled game of cat and mouse as Nordling tries to persuade Choltitz to abandon his plan.

In this passionate and emotional adaptation of the stage success by Cyril Gély, the great Volker Schlöndorff (Academy Award winner THE TIN DRUM) has created a psychologically elaborate game of political manners between two highly contrasting characters. While Choltitz entrenches himself behind his duty to obey unquestioningly all military orders, Nordling tries everything he can to appeal to reason and humanity and prevent the senseless destruction of the beloved 'City of Light.'

A BRIEF HISTORY

In 1933, Hitler accedes to power in Germany. Haunted by the rancor and humiliation his country was subjected to under the Treaty of Versailles following WWI, the Führer dreams of extending his power to all of Europe. On September 1st 1939, he invades Poland. Two days later, France and Great Britain declare war on Germany.

In June 1940, WWI hero Marshal Pétain signs the armistice with Hitler, beginning the French occupation and collaboration.

The same year, Hitler visits Paris and falls under the spell of its beauty, admiring in particular the Opera House, the Panthéon, the Louvre, the Palais de Justice and the proportions of the buildings on the rue de Rivoli. He shares his enthusiasm with Albert Speer, his chosen architect, and asks him to draw on the harmony and majesty of Paris in his plans for a "Great Berlin."

When Berlin is destroyed by the Allies, Hitler cannot bear the idea that Paris— which he refers to as "that whore"—should still be standing. After surviving the plot fomented by Wehrmacht officers on July 10th 1944, the Führer names one of the rare generals he still trusts, General von Choltitz, governor of Paris. He orders him to defend Paris to the end or to leave the enemy nothing but rubble.

Von Choltitz

Dietrich von Choltitz was born in 1894 to an aristocratic family of Prussian officers. In 1940, he commands the troops that take Rotterdam, inflicting high civilian casualties. In June 1942, he takes part in the Battle of Sevastopol after which 30,000 Jews are executed. Later he joins the Battle of Kharkov and fights on the Italian front and in Normandy. Because he was not a part of the Generals' Plot against Hitler, he is named Governor of Paris on August 7th 1944. He capitulates August 25th, after refusing to destroy the city. Imprisoned in England and later the United States, he is released in 1947. He returns to his family, which has survived the reprisals against the Nazis, and dies in 1966.

Nordling

Raoul Nordling was born in Paris in 1882 to a French mother and Swedish father. Named Swedish Consul in Paris in 1926, he takes part in a number of peace talks between the belligerents throughout WWII. As of August 18th 1944, he negotiates the release of some 3,000 prisoners and later the cease fire between the French Resistance and the Germans, with General von Choltitz. Thus he prevents the bombing of the Police Prefecture. He dies in 1962.

THE LIBERATION OF PARIS: A TIMELINE

Tuesday 1st August 1944 – The French 2nd Armoured Division debarks in Normandy.

Tuesday 15th August 1944 – A Franco-American army debarks in Provence. Paris police strike.

Thursday 17th August 1944 – Radio Paris (collaborationist) suspends broadcasting. Raoul Nordling concludes an agreement for the liberation of political prisoners with von Choltitz.

Friday 18th August 1944 – Rol-Tanguy's posters calling for popular insurrection appear all over city walls.

Saturday 19th August 1944 – First insurrectional fighting. Occupation of the Police Prefecture followed by district town halls, ministries, buildings and newspaper offices. Germans attack the Police Prefecture. Nordling negotiates a truce with von Choltitz for the Police Prefecture until the next day.

Sunday 20th August 1944 – Street fighting continues. Marshal Pétain leaves Vichy for the East under German escort. Negotiations at the Swedish Consulate in view of extending the truce and discussions within the French Resistance.

Monday 21st August 1944 – Street fighting continues despite the cease-fire. General Leclerc, commander of the 2nd Armoured Division, sends a detachment to Paris. The truce is broken.

Tuesday 22nd August 1944 – The French have erected barricades all over Paris. General Bradley gives General Leclerc the order to march on Paris. "Colonel Rol" orders "everyone to the barricades."

Wednesday 23rd August 1944 – Hitler orders von Choltitz to raze Paris. The 2nd Armoured Division makes its way toward Paris. Fire at the Grand Palais. Von Choltitz threatens to attack public buildings with heavy artillery.

Thursday 24th August 1944 – French radio announces the arrival of the 2nd Armoured Division.

Friday 25th August 1944 – Colonel Billotte's troops enters Paris. General Leclerc installs his war room in Montparnasse. Billotte sends an ultimatum to von Choltitz through Consul Nordling. Leclerc receives von Choltitz's surrender at the Police Prefecture, then the German commander signs the cease-fire at the Montparnasse train station. General de Gaulle arrives at Montparnasse.

Saturday 26th August 1944 – General de Gaulle is acclaimed by the people of Paris, from the Arc de Triomphe all the way to Notre-Dame. Shooting breaks out on the Cathedral square. Aerial bombing of Paris.

VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF

One of the most internationally renowned and culturally significant German filmmakers, Volker Schlöndorff was born in Wiesbaden, Germany, on March 31st 1939. His family soon relocated to Paris, where he spent most of his youth and completed his schooling, excelling at philosophy and economy and graduating with a degree in political science all while also studying film. He eventually served as an assistant director to the likes of Louis Malle, Alain Resnais and Jean-Pierre Melville.

Schlöndorff's directorial debut came in 1964 with *Young Törless*, which received not only awards, but also recognition as one of the first international successes of New German Cinema. His box-office breakthrough in Germany though came in 1975 with *The Lost Honor of Katharina Blum*, which he co-directed with his then wife Margarethe von Trotta. Schlöndorff's biggest success to date, and one of the most important films of post-war Germany, was his 1979 film adaptation of Nobel prize winning author Gunter Grass' *The Tin Drum*. The film won the Palme d'or in Cannes and the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film. This afforded him new opportunities in international film production. His first English language film, shot in France and released in 1984, was *Swann in Love*, an adaptation of the first two volumes of Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*. He went on to work in the United States, first adapting Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1985) and Ernest J. Gaines' *A Gathering of Old Men* (1987) for American television, and then returning to theatrical films in 1990 with the Hollywood sci-fi film, *The Handmaid's Tale*.

Aside from working in film, Schlöndorff has directed operas and stage plays as well. He has also been active in politics, both through his filmmaking and in his personal life; many of his films are socio-critical in nature, and he publically supported Angela Merkel during her campaigns for the position of German chancellor in 2005 and 2009. He strongly supported the preservation of the Babelsberg film studios when plans to destroy them emerged in the early 1990's, even mounting a one-man campaign to keep them open, thereby conserving a piece of cinema history. He then served as the Chief Executive of Studio Babelsberg from 1992 until 1997. Before that, in 1973, he formed his own production company called Bioskop Film. Schlöndorff also teaches film and literature, and conducts an intensive Summer Seminar, at the European Graduate School in Saas-Fee, Switzerland.

Ambitious and entertaining in equal measure, Volker Schlöndorff's films have exhibited his enthusiasm for filming what many others might have thought to be unfilmable, bringing German and international literary classics to the screen in a way that is accessible and understandable to audiences all over the world.

ANDRÉ DUSSOLLIER

André Dussollier was born in Annecy, France in 1946. He has acted in over 140 films since his debut in 1970. International audiences first saw him in 1973 in Francois Truffaut's *Such a Gorgeous Kid Like Me*. His subsequent film work included Eric Rohmer's *Perceval* (1978), and the comedy *2 hommes et un couffin* (1985), one of his most successful films at the box office which was remade in Hollywood as *Three Men and a Baby*. Dussollier's career has spanned French theater and television as well as film; he was a regular in the films of Alain Resnais (from *Life is a Bed of Roses* in 1983 until Resnais' final film, *Life of Riley,* in 2104), and more recently films such as *A Very Long Engagement* (2004), and *Micmacs* (2009) have introduced Dussollier to a new generation of international moviegoers. He was also memorable as the voice of the narrator in *Amelie* (2001). In *Diplomacy* he plays Raoul Nordling, the Swedish consul-general who campaigned to save the city of Paris from destruction.

NIELS ARESTRUP

Niels Arestrup was born of French and Danish descent in 1949 in Montreuil, France. Interested in acting from a young age, he studied drama under legendary instructor Tania Balachova. He first found work acting on stage, but quickly moved to film (although his involvement in theater still continued). Some of his most noteworthy films include Alain Resnais' *Stavisky* (1974), Chantal Akerman's *Je, tu, il, elle* (1976), and Jeanne Moreau's *Lumière* (1976). Arestrup also starred in Marco Ferreri's *The Future is Woman* (1984) and Istvan Szabo's Karin Anderson biopic, *Meeting Venus* (1991). Although already prolific in both film and theater in his native France—he is the only actor to have ever won three Best Supporting Actor Césars—it wasn't until 2009 that he reached greater international recognition with his unforgettable role as the Corsican prison boss in Jacques Audiard's *A Prophet* (2009). He also had supporting roles in Julian Schnabel's acclaimed Jean-Dominique Bauby biopic, *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*, and Steven Spielberg's *War Horse* (2011). In *Diplomacy* he stars as General Dietrich von Choltitz, the Wehrmacht commander of Greater Paris who is ordered to reduce the city to "a field of rubble."

Q&A WITH VOLKER SCHLONDORFF

What drew you to the project?

War places men in extreme situations and brings out the best and worst in humanity. These days a conflict between France and Germany is so unthinkable that I found it interesting to recall the past relationships between our two countries. If, God forbid, Paris had been razed, I doubt that the Franco-German bond would have formed or that Europe would have pulled through. Besides, what appealed to me was the opportunity to pay tribute to Paris. I've hung around the city since I was 17, and I know each and every bridge and monument - I think that during all those years when I was assistant director to Louis Malle and Jean-Pierre Melville I explored more streets than a Paris cab driver! Besides, I love Paris and being asked 50 years later to celebrate its survival was a real privilege.

Did you do research into the 'meeting' between Consul Raoul Nordling and General Dietrich Von Choltitz?

The meeting we filmed did not actually take place. As a matter of fact, Nordling and Choltitz did meet several times, once just a few days prior to August 24, at the Meurice Hotel and at the Kommandantur to negotiate an exchange of German political prisoners in return for French Resistance prisoners. And the meeting worked out very well. On the other hand, between August 20 and 24, the two men had agreed to a sort of cease-fire. Resistance fighters had managed to invade the Paris police general headquarters but they feared that the Germans were going to retaliate, since they still had troops on the ground. The consul and the general negotiated a truce so that the Germans might travel through Paris without running into ambush attacks and the Resistance fighters might reorganize themselves. During the meeting, there was also talk of the beauty of Paris and the danger of its impending destruction.

There exist biographies of the two men, written in the 1950s. As they include personal testimonies where each man seeks to make his role look good or in the case of the general to clear his own name, one has to take them with a grain of salt.

At what point did fiction take over?

Fiction plays quite a big part in the film. This is what most interested me. However, one element is historical and Cyril Gely used it as a starting point: the two men did know each other and had talked about the ultimate fate of Paris. That was why the Allies made use of the consul, asking him to bring a letter to the general, probably written by General Leclerc, which included a proposal to Von Choltitz to surrender and liberate the city without destroying it. As is shown in the film, the general allegedly rejected the ultimatum. We based the narrative on those few historical facts and tried to figure out the German general's state of mind. The room with a secret passage and a hidden staircase through which the mistress of Napoleon III supposedly entered the hotel is a pure invention. I liked the light comedy tone and the humorous dialogue. The confined space points to a fictionalized situation. We didn't intend to be true to facts. However, onscreen as opposed to onstage, one needs a point of view, one needs to know who is telling the story and why he or she is telling it. In this case it could only be the consul. That's why we started with him walking in the streets of Paris at night,

haunted by the images of the destruction of Warsaw and obsessed by a nagging question: how to talk the general out of carrying out the dismal order given by Hitler the day before. And our narrative perspective was that of the consul who rounds up the story when he leaves with the doorman after betraying the general in order to save Paris. Without any second thoughts. If Paris is in jeopardy, anything goes.

How did you develop the characters?

Without being a martyr, far from it, Von Choltitz was in a difficult predicament: he was one of the Führer's loyal soldiers, he allegedly participated in the massacre of the Jews in Eastern Europe and of the destruction of Rotterdam, which are war crimes at odds with the traditions of Prussian soldiers. Indeed, the general embodies the third or fourth generation of a long lineage of officers and his identity is epitomized by such military rules as obedience--the basis of an effective army--the love of one's country and family honour. So much so that when in August 1944, even though all the German generals had stopped believing in victory, Von Choltitz received the order to destroy Paris, he responded by having an asthma attack: he was incapable of carrying out the order, but he didn't know how to shun his duty. It was a question of free choice yet he had no choice. He knew what he ought to do, but he didn't have the strength to do it. He couldn't make up his mind and his body took over instead.

It was at that point that Consul Nordling showed up, almost as a savior, even if the general regarded him at first as an intruder sneaking into the suite like a burglar. The thing is, each time the consul was about to leave, Von Choltitz had an asthma attack, as if to hold him up: it is the voice of his unconscious. The consul wanted to put an end to the war. According to him anything goes to achieve his aim and, by the way, the diplomats' methods are hardly less noxious than those of the military authorities, although admittedly they are not as lethal. Therefore, my purpose was to pay tribute to the courage, dedication and craft of this successful diplomat, the real hero of the film. He is the embodiment of human values which go beyond state laws.

The two characters face each other gingerly as if they were playing a game of chess.

It is even more like a five- or six-round boxing match. Each contender carefully prepares the next blow but there are no knock-outs. I divided the script into several musical movements. After an andante introduction, during which the two characters size each other up to figure out how the opponent will respond, come the furioso rounds-- the tempo quickens at breakneck pace-- followed by calmer moments. It is not common to find such compelling performances in actors who do not seek to outperform each other. Quite the contrary, Niels Arestrup and André Dussollier used their talent and skills to serve the plot.

They are inhabited by their characters.

During the rehearsals, I immediately realised that not only is Niels an amazing actor, he also has a strong personality which he brought to the role. He sort of offered it as a gift to the general by totally immersing himself in the role. So much so that at some point it became scary. He had become unreservedly this German general more than any German actor could have been, with his conflicting feelings, his stubbornness and his loyalty to the traditions of the army. He was so inhabited by the role that he seemed almost hypnotised, as though he was not in control of his acting. Opposite him, Dussollier is a great

artist who has everything under control and whose acting became more sophisticated take after take. Sometimes it was a little difficult to synchronize the two types of approach, each with its own dynamic and pace. But their mutual trust and camaraderie, which they shared with me, helped us avoid tension. The only tension we sometimes had was inherent in filmmaking.

Their mutual understanding was made easier by the fact that they had portrayed the same roles onstage.

Of course it was an advantage because they knew the parts back to front, but it could have been a drawback because their performance risked being perceived by the camera as mechanical. In cinema, actors must act out their scenes as if 'for the first time'. It was necessary to regain spontaneity, some sort of virginity. To do so, they had to rehearse over and over again. That's what we did before the shoot began, then during production, on Saturdays we would rehearse the scenes that were to be shot 4 or 5 days later. We were helped by the setting which is quite sophisticated: thanks to the lay-out of the various rooms of the suite, we were able to separate the characters, re-invent gestures and intonations in this new space, moments of hesitations and weakness, moments when they spy on each other, and at other times when either character is alone, lost and disheartened, and definitely exhausted after long hours of shooting...

How did you direct them?

Without any psychological premises. As a happening. The consul was my accomplice helping me to bring the general out of his shell. The latter's reactions are unpredictable. Niels is in turn in genuine despair or quite ostentatious when the general embraces the posture of a flamboyant persona. It is as if we switched from a documentary to an opera, with abrupt changes of tone to fit the narrative and follow its pace.

Besides, I shot with two mobile cameras and booms to capture the astounding voices of my actors.

What is the role played by Paris?

Paris is by no means the backdrop of the story, it is the third character! The city had to be ubiquitous, either when darkness gave way to the light of dawn or when the bright lights of the Meurice Hotel were replaced by the semi-darkness caused by the power cut.

Paris is the city of light, by night and by day, and it is immersed in a vibrant clamor. However the city remains an "outsider". But as soon as we leave the confined space, the story becomes less tense. It was important to underline the sense of confinement, by briefly breaking away from the hotel and then heading back inside.

When the general makes his final decision, which is the climax of the film, the camera is on the rooftops of Paris – the splendor of the Louvre comes into full view, and so do the imposing Grand Palais, and the Sacré-Coeur and Opera House in the distance. Only then do we discover this third character in all its splendour and feel its compelling presence , which is what the movie is all about – Paris. Together with the cinematographer Michel Amathieu and the production designer Jacques Rouxel we sought to have Paris be part of the plot – I even thought of using transparent partitions through which the city could appear. In the end, we were inspired by pictures and paintings and so we chose to film the suite with contrasting and often clashing lights. It was important as we wanted

to convey the notion of time elapsing and of the denouement drawing nearer – when it's broad daylight again, we know for a fact that the Allies are in town.

The production design is highly sophisticated.

The contrast between an upscale luxury hotel and a soldier with his bleak project to destroy whatever he sees out of his window is stunning and definitely cinematic. The Meurice Hotel is not a glittering palace but a sophisticated venue typical of the 1700s. And it stands in even greater contrast to the general. The suite is in the style of Napoleon III, who by the way is another secret character of the film! He kept his mistress there and so he could call on her through a hidden staircase. I wanted the room to feel like it had been occupied by other characters than the general in previous eras, and that there were still traces of that past floating in the air. Outside the room, people are fighting for the liberation of Paris and the hotel is a bit similar to the Titanic that has just hit an iceberg – all of a sudden, this cosy place, cut off from the world, is hit head-on by the war that may destroy everything in its wake.

Q&A WITH ANDRE DUSSOLLIER

What drew you to the project?

What I found interesting was to deal with a relatively unknown chapter of history. You realize that Paris was a breath away from absolute disaster. Cyril Gely and Volker Schlöndorff managed to showcase the importance of the men's consciences and their ability to confront each other as well as to transcend themselves - the two protagonists represent their nation and their people. And what is most noteworthy - and dangerous for both of them - is that they deliberately overstepped their bounds. We must bear in mind that Sweden was neutral during the war and that Hitler wanted to destroy Paris.

In what manner do Nordling and Choltitz confront each other?

They are smart and subtle. Nordling, as the sophisticated diplomat he was, uses all the devices at his disposal because, when it comes to diplomacy, the end justifies the means. He uses a fine blend of genuine arguments and lies. However, at the end of the day, what really matters is to be able to seize the opportunity, to have the proper behavior and exploit what has remained unspoken. The film unfurls on the night of August 24-25, 1944 during which Nordling and Choltitz engage in a tough battle with each other and disclose their vulnerabilities. We understand how narrowly Paris escaped a dire fate...

That long night of negotiations was extremely tense…

Yes, and this is one of the reasons why I felt like portraying the Nordling character. I love it when you must overcome a hurdle and you can use all the weapons at your disposal, play cat and mouse with your opponent and keep your cards well hidden. What I find exhilarating is the clever and devilish ability to play with your opponent in order to achieve your goal. As a matter of fact, the decisions are taken on the spur of the moment, it is like playing a game of chess in which you have to find a way out. It all trickles through as the negotiations move forward and you hold your breath even though there is no real suspense as everybody knows that Paris was not destroyed, and yet the question remains on how they came to an agreement.

Were you familiar with the Nordling character?

I came across the character – portrayed by Orson Welles – in *Is Paris Burning…?*. I did plenty of research on what had been going on during the two weeks of diplomatic negotiations and I learnt a lot about their relationships and affinities. Nordling notably negotiated the release of German prisoners in return for which the French police Prefecture was not bombarded by German aviation. Thanks to Nordling's intervention, Paris was not burnt down and dire consequences, including thousands of casualties, were avoided. I came across a newspaper dated August 25, 1944, stating that mines had been placed in Paris in several monuments, such as The Senate, The Odeon Theatre, The Arc de Triomphe or The Trocadero as well as several strategic sites.

Could you describe Nordling's personality?

His father was Swedish and his mother French. He was born in France and became the Consul of Sweden in Paris. He was an unpretentious, slightly clumsy fellow, which makes him rather likeable. Although his country was neutral during

the war, he chose to take advantage of being a foreigner to personally fight for the liberation of France. He did his utmost to save Resistance fighters and to avoid the destruction of Paris. France, contrary to Sweden, expressed its deep gratitude to him for his interventions as a foreign diplomat. What's more, he was a learned man who foresaw the Franco-German alliance to come.

What was it like to be working with Niels Arestrup?

I was delighted to work with Niels. I appreciate his search for truth in acting. We sought to be true to our characters. We enjoyed honing each sequence and we totally inhabited our roles to make the best possible film. We were on the same wave length when it came to highlighting a scene or some implicit element. In our eyes, what mattered was the result and our encounter which helped us attain it.

What's your take on the relationship building between Choltitz and Nordling?

These two men are poles apart, and yet you realize that they have the same humane feelings and can empathize with each other. Little by little, you realise that not only their way of confronting each other but also agreeing with each other will allow them to solve the issue at stake. And by the way, Nordling seems to have struck a responsive chord in Choltitz.

I met Nordling's grand daughter one evening after a theatre performance. She showed me a photograph in her family photo album where you see her grandfather at Orgeval with Choltitz, eight years after the war. This is evidence that they could have been friends had they not belonged to opposite camps.

How did you prepare for the role?

Contrary to Stalin or De Gaulle whose images are in the public and collective minds, Nordling is a relatively unknown figure. Besides, the film is not so much about Nordling's personal life. And so the point wasn't to be a Nordling look-alike – what I was interested in was the contrived, obsequious attitude he maintained with other people, while proving profoundly adamant. Therefore, it was the persona of the ambassador – and his attitude – that seemed most important to me.

What is the importance of silence and of what is left unsaid about the exchanges between both men?

When there's a lot of dialogue, you enjoy the music of the words, but more important yet were the silences. In those moments, the camera – and the audience – is aware of what's going on. For instance, at some point, I have no choice but to leave the room because Choltitz has dismissed me and I say to him "I was mistaken about you," as if my character was talking to himself and admitted his defeat. With Niels, we made the silence last a long time, without cheating. And as I told him "I was mistaken," I relished having the audience believe that it was I, the actor, who was mistaken. Because silence enfolds words. It is in that space that the actor may best realize and express himself – the camera examines what you're thinking and expressing at that precise moment.

What did you think of Volker Schlöndorff as a director for the film?

He immediately grasped what was essential about the dialogue. The fact that we played in a confined environment was no obstacle for him. We had the impression of using the space according to the various situations of the script and so we "inhabited" the location with him, without having to move from one spot to the next gratuitously. Volker was clever enough to feel the situations. You can expect the director to be your acting's first enthusiastic viewer and he was. Eventually, he paid great attention to us both, and all the while he came up with ideas that matched his vision.

Q&A WITH NIELS ARESTRUP

What first drew you to the project?

For me, the draw was the intense suspense of this story, which paradoxically is based on a situation that's common knowledge - we all know that Paris was not destroyed - as well as the way anxiety is aroused in the viewer's mind. Moreover, I was excited by the idea of working with André Dussollier whom I had never met.

Were you familiar with the historical details on which the script is based?

No, not really. The talks and dealings mentioned in the film did take place, but at the time the goal was different- their purpose was to free political prisoners and then to negotiate a truce with Resistance fighters so that Choltitz wouldn't blow up the Paris Prefecture. This is a historical fact. The rest was created by screenwriter Cyril Gely. Nowadays, everybody agrees that the decision not to destroy Paris was Choltitz's alone and nobody else's.

How would you portray Choltitz's character in the film?

He was first and foremost the son and grandson of military men. He received a very strict upbringing based on the values of courage, sacrifice, discipline and patriotism.

He was a staunch believer in Nazism and enrolled in the Nazi party, although he was not ideologically driven. He was, above all, a soldier and consequently a man who does not disobey, no matter how senseless the order may be. In his eyes, one had to respect discipline in order not to create a precedent - one disobedient officer could have dire consequences for the rest of the army. Having embraced these rules, the mere idea of insubordination never crossed his mind. This was why Hitler appointed him to this post. Consequently the decision he made to save Paris during the last days of his reign were highly surprising.

Even though he wasn't ideologically driven, he admitted to having been involved in the massacre of the Jews in Sebastopol.

He went even further than that! He was responsible for the destruction of Rotterdam and the deportation of a lot of Jews from Russia. He was not a particularly nice guy with whom you would sympathize. Besides, what most amazed me was that the Americans released him in 1947, two years after the war ended. He may have disclosed valuable information to the Allies, but I can't believe that he earned this lenient treatment just because he gave the order to save Paris. During the years after the war, he kept mum about his unexpected liberation.

Did you do research into the character?

I went through his biography and I found online interviews of Choltitz conducted in the 1960s in Baden Baden. His French is basic and not at all fluent. He explains that he had decided to disobey Hitler's order because he thought it was ridiculous to destroy Paris and that even if he did it would not have solved the war issue. He was not a cool guy. At any rate he was not the kind of man you'd want to spend your holidays with! (laughter)

People tend to think that actors have to like the characters they portray. Is it hard to relate with a man like Choltitz?

The question of empathy with a character does not particularly concern me, and I didn't even try liking the character. What I thought was that it would be worth endowing him with some humanity, so that the audience would not leave the theatre thinking "He was a monster." It was important to allow the viewer to identify with him, be it only slightly. Having said this, endowing him with humanity does not mean liking him.

How did you work the tone and phrasing?

It seemed obvious to me that it was out of the question to copy the ludicrous style of the films of the 1960s and 1970s in which the Germans speak in a ridiculous manner. Choltitz spoke French poorly and it would have been impossible to imitate his accent. I tried not to overdo it and had to make sure that folklore did not take precedence over psychology. But it was not entirely a fictional part.

Volker Schlöndorff says that you were completely inhabited by the part. Were you?

I was taught the Stanislavski method, which means I identify with the character rather than maintain a distance from him. Therefore, I can only inhabit my characters, and I need to believe I do exactly as children do. However, at the end of a shooting day, there is nothing left in me of the character I portrayed for long hours.

What was it like to work with André Dussollier?

What drew us closer together was that we are both extremely demanding: we are both anxious people and we both wanted to do our utmost. We were heading in the same direction and on many occasions we agreed that we could go ahead and outperform ourselves. André is a very hard worker who likes rigor. And I humbly think that I am too. We had mutual recognition of our work and we both had at heart to achieve a form of perfection for the sake of the audience.

How does Volker Schlöndorff direct his cast?

I think it was not very easy for him because he was dealing with actors who had worked hard on the text, questioned it, interpreted it in many ways and who had an instinctive knowledge of the audience's response. Together with André, we would guess how the audience was going to react to such and such a scene or line and we sensed if the viewer was going to buy into the story or if we lost their attention. We had an in-depth knowledge and a long experience of the text and Volker had the courtesy to acknowledge that. He did not object to what we thought we had understood or guessed during our various past stage performances. He did his best to make his actors happy and comfortable and he was mindful of the issues of pace. He is above all a very modest, gentle, mindful man who pays attention to the others. He is so gracious that he bonds with the team. I cannot say that he was too hands-on, he let us have our own way and he managed to create an atmosphere of mutual trust.

He is also a great film director who did an outstanding job in terms of lighting, editing and directing. But he gave us free rein when it came to acting. I really think that what characterizes this film is the mutual understanding, friendship and respect between Volker and his cast.

CAST

Consul Raoul Nordling	André DUSSOLLIER
General Dietrich von Choltitz	Niels ARESTRUP
Captain Ebernach	Burghart KLAUSSNER
Lieutenant Bressensdorf	Robert STADLOBER
The Concierge	Charlie NELSON
Jacques Lanvin	Jean Marc ROULOT
Caporal Mayer	Stefan WILKENING
Lieutenant Hegger	Thomas ARNOLD
Officer SS 1	Lucas PRISOR
Officer SS 2	Attila BORLAN
The made up lady	Marie DOMPNIER
The Chambermaid	Claudine ACS
Guard Hans	Dominique ENGELHARDT
Young Soldier 18 years old	Johannes KLAUSSNER
Hall Guard	Charles MORILLON
Lieutenant Karcher	Olivier YTHIER
Radio operator	Pierre-Marie ROCHEFORT
Escort soldiers	Jochen HAGELE et Jean-Cyril DURIEUX

CREW

Director	Volker SCHLÖNDORFF
Adaptation, screenplay, dialogues	Cyril GELY and Volker SCHLÖNDORFF
Based on the play	DIPLOMATIE by Cyril Gely
Producers	Marc DE BAYSER and Frank LE WITA With Sidonie DUMAS and Francis BOESPFLUG
Coproducers	Amélie LATSCHA and Felix MOELLER
A Production	Film Oblige & Gaumont
In coproduction with	Blueprint Films Gmbh Arte France Cinéma/WDR/SWR
With the participation of	Canal + et Ciné +
With the support of	Eurimages, du CNC, de la Région Ile-de-France, de MFG, du FFA et de la Procirep-Angoa
Production Director	Jean-Christophe CARDINEAU
Director of Photography	Michel AMATHIEU AFC
Editor	Virginie BRUANT
Set designer	Jacques ROUXEL ADC
Costume designer	Mirjam MUSCHEL
Sound	Philippe GARNIER, André ZACHER, Olivier DO HUU
International Sales	Gaumont

France/Germany • 2014 • 84 mins • Color • Aspect ratio: 2.35:1 • Not Rated
In French and German with English subtitles

Press book interviews and history: Franck Garbarz

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