

Nord-Ouest presents

The Clearstream Affair

(L'enquête)

a film by **Vincent Garenq**

with Gilles Lellouche, Charles Berling

Laurent Capelluto and Florence Loiret Caille

France / 2014 / 110 min / Color / Scope / DCP / 5.1

International Sales
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SYNOPSIS

2001. The journalist Denis Robert sets the world of finance ablaze when he exposes Clearstream Banking's opaque operations. In his search for the truth and his attempt to reveal the 'affair of all affairs', he ends up crossing paths with Judge Renaud Van Ruymbeke, well-known for his commitment to the fight against corruption, and in charge of the investigation for the Taiwan Frigate Affair.

Their parallel enquiries will lead them to the heart of a dark political financial machine called the Clearstream system, severely shaking up the French governing class.

INTERVIEW WITH VINCENT GARENQ

What was the motivation behind *The Clearstream Affair*?

Something shifted in my mind when I stopped writing autobiographical narratives and when I started speaking about others. Incidentally, that was when my screenplays started attracting the interest of producers. In fact, I often find that there is nothing more interesting than other people's lives. For example, when you read case reports from judicial investigations, there are always fascinating slices of life to discover. That's how I come up with a screenplay, since I don't like "made-up" stories, written by screenwriters whose imaginations are filled with clichés and movie references. When adapting something from real life, you avoid clichés and can construct truly original plots. I often find the inspiration for my stories in books: I discovered Alain Marécaux's work by accident, and it was also by accident that I came across Denis Robert's *La boîte noire* [*The Black Box*] which I felt was bound to unearth a few skeletons.

Which direction did you give your research in relation to the writing of the screenplay?

After *La boîte noire*, I read all of Denis Robert's books; I liked his personal style as well as his main subjects of interest: exposing corruption in France, specifically the collusion between the political world and the business world. His *Clearstream* investigation is the logical continuation of what he has been denouncing in France, since corrupt money flows through tax havens. Stumbling upon a financial institution from Luxembourg that handles exchanges between all banks, Denis touched upon the operational hub of what he has been condemning on a worldwide level. As a result, there's a story there, one that makes sense. And as his story also crosses paths with another person who had been fascinating me for a very long time, the Judge Renaud Van Ruymbeke - nothing less than the epitome of the fight against corruption in France - I was really spoiled! The problem was that then Imad Lahoud popped up in the story, which entirely distorted its meaning. So I had to make sure the movie kept the deeper overall meaning that interested me: the difficulty of investigating and taking on corruption and financial scheming.

Why did you open the film with Denis Robert's arrest in his home?

This opening scene, in which Denis Robert narrates in voice-over, had disappeared over various versions of the script. But it suddenly came back to me during the editing process, at a moment of doubt when I was stuck: it was then clear to me that this was the beginning of the film, which hadn't struck me at all when we were in the thick of shooting it. It returned like an absolute necessity, for what is said in this sequence announces what is to follow in a moving and condensed way.

Were you ever worried about bringing out into the open the extremely sensitive and complex issues at stake in international finance?

It was very difficult to write the screenplay for *The Clearstream Affair*. I began by focusing on Denis Robert's first investigation where in my mind the backbone of the film lies. And I wrote several versions of the script that I gave to my producers to read – they didn't understand a word! (laughter). Afterwards, the screenwriter Stéphane Cabel nudged me along with these simple words: *"This story can't be restricted to only one character's point of view as you did for Alain Marécaux."* Immediately all the other characters took shape in my mind, starting with Van Ruymbeke, which pleased me immensely as he is someone who has always fascinated me. Happily, after *Guilty*, this character allowed me to show another side of the Justice system, shining a light on an investigating magistrate who did positive work. The screenplay was completed in just six weeks! In the end, the film helps the audience understand the workings of this extremely complex case, which until now only an initiated few had been able to untangle. But financial secrecy remains, as does our powerlessness faced with this tentacular system made up of tax havens, leading international banks, intangible flows of capital, and money laundered by the mafia with everyone's knowledge. What touches me in this story is that the main protagonist believes he has reached the Holy Grail, the very center of the world's financial system, that which is responsible for all the world's evils. And then "pfft," everything goes up in a puff of smoke - nothing happens. It's a reflection of our times. We know the source of our troubles, but nobody acts on it.

Denis Robert's character is driven by an unwavering determination.

I like this hero's candidness and nonconformism; he is someone who dares to stand up against the system and won't hesitate to sacrifice himself for his ideals. In the 90s, Denis Robert wrote a scathing book - *Pendant les affaires, les affaires continuent* – which exposed

corruption in France. Nobody wanted to publish it for fear of being sued, because it told all: the names of the companies handing out bribes along with the politicians who were involved with them. In the end there wasn't one single indictment and the book was a bestseller! Denis Robert is a modern hero – an idealist, a rebel, an agitator, who tries to shake things up and expose the system. I love his impertinence and his nerve. Even if he has made mistakes, going at things excessively, we know that underneath it all he is exposing profound truths about our society. In our time period, when people are so resigned, it's almost impossible not to empathize with such a person.

Just as in your film *Guilty*, there is the theme about an individual crushed by the system.

I have to admit that injustice is a very important subject for me. I can still see myself at the age of 15 proclaiming during a dinner that it was not fair that an investment banker who stole 2 billion got a six-month suspended sentence while a small-time thief has to spend two years in prison for stealing a car radio. It's visceral for me, almost naïve.

What is fascinating is the contrast of “clock speed” between the slowness of the justice system and the rapidity of illicit financial flows, which occur instantaneously.

The global financial system is based on these hindrances in the justice system. That's what Van Ruymbeke explains at the beginning of the film: today, in just ten clicks on a computer, you can transfer your money to ten different tax havens. And each click will take the judge six months to indentify. That's what several European judges were denouncing in the book of interviews by Denis Robert, which is mentioned in the film.

How did you shape your fictional characters? Did they come from real life?

When you follow a character that embodies values and a legitimate struggle, you identify with him or her. You can't help but become attached to Denis Robert and the Judge Van Ruymbeke who, from a certain point of view are “the righteous.” And, as they don't achieve what they're aiming to do, we love them all the more for it. In my mind, a character is above all embodied by what makes him or her tick. That's what makes them human and endearing. For the scenes with Denis Robert's family, I took a lot from his personal life and my meetings with his daughters and his wife. Yet it is the most fictional part of the film because I took great

liberties with those scenes, even if they were inspired by reality. I wanted to show how his wife and their children suffered from his relentlessness. It was also my way of showing that we are the ones, the individuals and the families, who end up suffering from this world.

Tell us about the casting process.

When I gave the screenplay to Gilles Lellouche, he was my first choice. I felt he had the required charisma to carry the story: he has a very strong natural aura that is visibly captured by the camera. He wonderfully portrays this journalist who has a "bad boy" side to him – he was a natural choice.

Charles Berling is also an excellent actor. All he needed to become the perfect Van Ruymbeke was a little mustache. He's a politically committed actor, who is very touched by this sort of story and he joined the project without the slightest hesitation.

David Bertrand, the casting director, was the one who introduced me to Laurent Capelluto, whom I'd never met, for the role of Imad Lahoud. After an extensive casting process, it became obvious that he was the person for the role.

As for Denis' wife, the role was extremely delicate because it was the role of a housewife which, if poorly acted, could very quickly end up resembling a "trophy wife." In offering the role to Florence Loiret-Caille, I knew that she would know how to transform it, that she would bring her own world with her, her own experience, and I have to say she is wonderful. You believe in this family straightaway.

What were your scenery choices?

The more I grow in this profession, the more demanding I have become in the choice of scenery. I love working with the set designer and the director of photography to scout out locations, confronting ideas and exchanging with them. It's not just about finding beautiful scenery; it has to ring true. It was also important to me to mix universes, countries,

languages and accents. This kaleidoscope, rich with images, is consistent with the film's intentions, the international dimension of the story and globalization's elusiveness.

How did you work with the lighting?

As my director of photography, Renaud Chassaing and I had just done a very bleak and dark film, *Guilty*, where we accented neon lights and a radical documentary style, here we wanted to be more generous, have a more romantic image, which the story naturally lent itself to. Yet, we wanted to keep the freedom and spontaneity afforded by the documentary style, always having a hand-held camera at-the-ready. We were inspired by 1970s American independent cinema. I always encourage Renaud not to settle into some comfort zone: I just want us to remain free, quick and spontaneous, always. For example, I never use a Steadicam – it is too perfect, too flashy, without emotion—or car traveling shots, which don't correspond to any real-life point of view. I'd rather have the camera in the car next to the actor: it's less artificial, truer to life. Renaud doesn't look for the most sophisticated cameras with the highest definition: he'd rather have an imperfect camera, which is closer to the emotional feel of 35mm. He uses natural light sources as much as possible in order to light as little as possible.

What were your intentions for the music?

I had just finished a radical film, *Guilty*, that didn't have a single note of music. For *The Clearstream Affair*, I felt that the technical nature of the dialogue would never be able to convey on an emotional level this vertiginously unfathomable world and its ubiquitous paranoia - only music could convey this emotion. Music can add tension and yet bring unity to the interwoven plots because, in the end, the film is talking about the same thing, in two parallel investigations. What I like about the composer Erwann Kermorwant is that his music doesn't sound like anything that is known: it resembles him and nothing else. He constantly surprised me with his originality and accuracy in relation to the images. It was a true encounter, a relationship of trust that we established from the get-go, as was also the case with the director of photography and the casting director from my prior film.

How did you approach the editing process?

I approached this film with the very lazy fantasy that I would find an excellent editor that would do the work all alone. And then by the end of the edit I had the exact opposite wish. It's the most complicated film I have ever had to edit, because it covers three narratives, three main characters and nebulous worlds like high finance and weapons contracts. As a result, in order to achieve this fluidity, I had to invest myself more than I ever had before, working hand in hand with the two editors. It was very difficult, tedious even, but I found it highly enjoyable and for the first time I had the feeling of bringing something to its rightful end, of having the time to digest every inch of footage to have tried everything, and matured. I've come away from this editing process with zero frustration. The edit was a veritable "writing process", and I'm not just saying that, it's the absolute truth. There is a lot of inventiveness at this stage, everything is possible and there are no limits. In the future I will always be present, more than ever, at this stage, because I want to always be able to digest my films from beginning to end.

Did you encounter any difficulties putting the project together or were you subject to any pressure?

I was afraid of what Luxembourg's reaction would be as we had sought funding from them: I was pleasantly surprised by the support we received from the Film Fund Luxembourg, without which the film undoubtedly would never have been made. The decision makers in Luxembourg reacted with rare pertinence and intelligence; I was the first to be astounded that they would back us in such a project. It also should be said that when the banking sector found out about it, the reactions were sharp. And it isn't over: the film is going to be released there, which is crazy, actually. But thanks to this support, and support from Belgium, we were able to shoot the film in Luxembourg, with actors from Luxembourg – an extraordinary opportunity for the film's veracity.

Did you encounter the same benevolent support in France?

Absolutely not. I was never able to obtain a copy of the case records from the Taiwan Frigate investigation. Nobody was willing to give it to me, although today it is ancient history. Nor did I expect the magistrates to forbid me from shooting at the Paris courthouse, even though the film shows Judge Van Ruymbeke in a very positive light. Most certainly the magistrates wanted to censor me because we dared to tell the story of one of their own who was caught

making a judicial error, judged by his peers, and then “absolved” of all responsibility. Yet judges are at times forced to cross the line if they want to obtain results – it’s common knowledge – and that is what the film shows with the greatest care and sensitivity. But visibly the French judicial world would rather censor the truth than face it. The Judge Van Ruymbeke himself had trouble accepting the idea of being judged. My producer, Christophe Rossignon, and I met him: he is an extremely nice man, and, with a bit of hindsight, now, he made this delightful confession, with a dash of irony: *“in the end, it is a very interesting experience for a judge to be judged.”* Oh, if only this wonderful idea could make its way into the National School of Magistrates... But in the meantime, we were forced to shoot all the trial scenes in Belgium.

VINCENT GARENQ

Vincent Garenq studied films at La Fémis in Paris, and has directed short films, documentaries and films for TV before directing feature films.

Selective Filmography

2015 **KALINKA** *in production*, with Daniel Auteuil, Marie-Josée Croze and Sebastian Koch

2014 **THE CLEARSTREAM AFFAIR** (L'enquête) with Gilles Lellouche, Charles Berling, Laurent Capelluto and Florence Loiret Caille

2011 **GUILTY** (Présumé coupable) with Philippe Torreton, Wladimir Yordanoff and Noémie Lvovsky

Best European Film, Label Europa Cinema - Venice Days 2011

2008 **BABY LOVE** (Comme les autres) with Lambert Wilson, Pilar Lopez de Ayala, Pascal Elbé and Anne Brochet

Audience Award, Special Mention – COLCOA, Los Angeles 2009

Best First Film – COLCOA, Los Angeles 2009

CAST

Denis Robert	GILLES LELLOUCHE
Judge Van Ruymbeké	CHARLES BERLING
Imad Lahoud	LAURENT CAPELLUTO
Géraldine	FLORENCE LOIRET CAILLE
Regis Hempel	CHRISTIAN KMIOTEK
Laurent Beccaria	GRÉGOIRE BONNET
Forian Bourges	ANTOINE GOUY
Jean-Louis Gergorin	ERIC NAGGAR

CREW

Director	VINCENT GARENQ
Screenwriters	VINCENT GARENQ, STÉPHANE CABEL
With the participation of	DENIS ROBERT
Producers	CHRISTOPHE ROSSIGNON, PHILIP BOËFFARD
Co-producers	CLAUDE WARINGO, PATRICK QUINET
Original Music	ERWANN KERMORVANT
Cinematography	RENAUD CHASSAING
Production Design	VÉRONIQUE SACREZ
Costume Design	CATHERINE MARCHAND
Executive Producer	EVE FRANÇOIS MACHUEL
Production Manager	LAURENT SIVOT
Post-production Manager	JULIEN AZOULAY
Sound Engineer	PHILIPPE KOHN
Sound Editor	FRANÇOIS DUMONT
Mixing	THOMAS GAUDER
1st A.D.	THIERRY VERRIER
Casting	DAVID BERTRAND A.R.D.A
Film Editing	VINCENT GARENQ, ELODIE CODACCIONI, RAPHAËL DE MONPEZAT

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