



Presents

THE NAMES OF LOVE

Directed by Michel Leclerc

Screenplay by Baya Kasmi and Michel Leclerc

Produced by Caroline Adrien, Antoine Rein and Fabrice Goldstein-Delante Films
and Kare Productions

**Official Selection 2010 Cannes Film Festival
Opening Night, International Critics Week**

**César Awards 2011
Best Actress – Sara Forestier
Best Original Screenplay – Baya Kasmi and Michel Leclerc**

Press information available at: <http://www.musicboxfilms.com/the-names-of-love>

Running Time: 102 Minutes. In French with English Subtitles.

Rated R for sexual content including graphic nudity, and some language.

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THE STORY

Her father is from Algeria; his mother is a Jew. She's a free spirit, he's a complete square. She's provocative, he is discreet. She's shameless, he carries several generations' worth of guilt on his shoulders. She doesn't hesitate to use sex to turn conservatives into liberals; he is a one woman man. Baya Benmahmoud and Arthur Martin are as different as two people can be. So when they fall in love, sparks fly...

SYNOPSIS

Baya Benmahmoud (Sara Forestier), a young, extroverted liberal, lives by the old hippie slogan: "Make love, not war" to convert right-wing men to her left-wing political causes by sleeping with them. She seduces many and so far has received exceptional results – until she meets Arthur Martin (Jacques Gamblin), a Jewish middle-aged, middle-of-the road scientist. Bound by common tragic family histories (the Algerian War and Holocaust under Vichy), the two improbably fall in love. Amid the humorous lasciviousness and zany moments, filmmaking duo Michel Leclerc and co-writer Baya Kasmi inject satirical riffs on such hot-button sociopolitical issues as Arab-Jewish relations, anti-Semitism, immigration, and racial and cultural identity.

INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR MICHEL LECLERC AND CO-WRITER BAYA KASMI

The Names of Love is a comedy, like your first film, *J'invente rien*. Why did you choose comedy?

Michel Leclerc: When you talk about yourself, or at least when you want to use autobiographical material, humor allows you to step back enough to avoid falling into narcissistic indulgence. To talk about yourself, for sure, but make fun of yourself at the same time so others can get into the story. That is the main reason why I do comedies: it seems to me like the only classy way to talk about personal matters without becoming self-absorbed.

Who are your influences?

MC: In a recent interview, Woody Allen lamented the fact that young filmmakers are more inspired by Scorsese and Tarantino than by him. Yet for years I've been trying desperately to be inspired by him - especially by Annie Hall and Radio Days for *The Names of Love* - but no one notices. My ultimate goal would be to copy all his films one by one, but I'm afraid I won't live long enough to do that. I secretly hope he'll end up suing me for plagiarism, which might give me a chance to actually meet him!

How did the adventure of *The Names of Love* begin?

MC: When I met Baya almost ten years ago, she told me her name and I answered, "Is that Brazilian?" and she answered, "No, it's Algerian." After that she asked me my name and when I told her she said, "At least you can tell where that's from!" So the starting point of the film also coincides with the starting point of our personal relationship.

Baya Kasmi: We wanted to respond to that whole deterministic line of reasoning about identity and communities, which we can't stand and don't identify with.

MC: In France, the question of origin is complicated and obsessive. How do you stay faithful to your roots without subscribing to the community mentality? How can you be an atheist without rejecting your origins? We are fascinated by these questions.

So it is highly autobiographical?

MC: Yes, because it was in telling each other stories about our families that, despite our differences, we recognized similarities when it came to certain neuroses and obsessions of our parents. Basically, love relationships depend a lot more on that common family ground than on a supposed sense of belonging to a community. Arthur Martin defines himself as "better than everyone else, but not the pick of the market."

ML: I really love characters who are a little too rigorous to be likeable, whose inflexibility ends up making them asocial. Arthur Martin is one of those men who have a certain moral righteousness - rigidity, even - which keeps them from making concessions. We liked the idea of having a very serious character with no sense of humor in a comedy.

How did you get the idea of making Arthur an ornithologist who works for the French Bureau of Animal Disease?

ML: For Arthur, we looked for a profession that would reflect his obsessive nature. The principle of taking precautions to minimize all possible risk corresponds to his personal philosophy of life - to the point that he's made a career of it.

BK: When we researched that profession, we realized there could be many echoes with his personality type. For example, we found out that in case of the risk of bird flu, his job is to give orders for the mass slaughter of chickens, which have to be gassed first. There was obviously an echo there with Arthur's problems and preoccupations.

Baya embodies total commitment.

ML: Baya is a courageous character. She believes that it's always better to take action - even bad - than to do nothing at all. She is an activist who thinks her actions can change the world. But what makes her special is that she makes no distinction between her political commitment and personal commitment, since she sleeps with her political enemies! She is a character with a mind of her own.

BK: So she is also the kind of person who simplifies things out of necessity. The world today is so complex that to be committed, you have to have a clear approach and stick to it. That's what makes

her say ridiculous things sometimes, like, "quads are totally fascist, leftists are okay and right-wingers are all fascists," without ever being never ashamed of it! It may seem juvenile, but for her it's a conscious choice: she makes herself follow that line of thinking to not lose energy in action. It's a challenge.

How did you choose Jacques Gamblin?

ML: We thought of him right away. I thought he was right for the part because he is a remarkable example of that self-controlled, closed type who still exudes a compressed sort of humanity. He also has a body that can offer very strong comic potential, which hasn't been exploited very much up until now.

And Sara Forestier?

ML: We wrote the part of Baya like a kind of Arab Marilyn. So at first we were looking for an actress of Arabic descent. But we couldn't find anyone who expressed all the different aspects of her character: funny, vivacious, spontaneous and uninhibited. So we opened up the casting call to non-Arabic actresses. When we met Sara Forestier, even though she didn't correspond to the character as we had imagined her, we immediately knew she was it. Because she has that fun and boisterous witty side we imagined, without being vulgar. From there, we rewrote the part for Sara, giving her that opportunistic side we spoke of earlier.

BK: Thanks to Sara, without even trying we came back to the complexity of a character who suffers from not looking Arabic, though her father is from Algeria. Which is more like me.

The actors are astonishingly natural...

ML: I tremendously enjoyed directing the actors because I felt like they were very involved in the film. So they were open to improvisation. For me, it's fundamental to keep a space open for freedom when it comes to a highly written script. For example, I used the activist side of Carole Franck, who plays Baya's mother: in the scenes where she gets mad about nuclear power and where she insists that Arthur agree to a marriage of convenience, she was improvising.

What were your objectives as a director?

ML: I wanted to play with contrast between some of the serious themes - politics and childhood trauma - and the glamorous style of the cinematography. For example, when Arthur and Baya are walking through fallen leaves after their marriage of convenience, they debate about the duty of memory and the Algerian War. I found it amusing to play with the counterpoint between a wide shot typical of romantic comedies - wedding dress, bottle of champagne in hand - and the subject of conversation. On the other hand, I wanted to avoid over-editing and systematically cutting to close-ups, typical of your standard comedy. I preferred shooting wide shots to frame the characters' bodies and not over-lighting the scenes, even if that meant losing certain comic effects. The scene where Arthur puts Baya's clothes back on is very poetic.

ML: For Baya, nudity is totally unimportant: she acts the same way naked as she does in clothes - she doesn't make it sexual. Because of that, we had to make her nudity ordinary and make putting her clothes back on sexy. It was a real challenge to direct. --Michel Leclerc and Baya Kasmi

ABOUT THE CAST

JACQUES GAMBLIN

Jacques Gamblin is one of France's most popular actors, whose many film credits include Bertrand Tavernier's "Safe Conduct" for which he won the Berlin Film Festival's Best Actor Award, and Claude Chabrol's final film, "Bellamy." Mr. Gamblin just completed filming Gianni Amelio's "The First Man" based on the novel by Albert Camus.

SELECT FILMOGRAPHY

- 2011 "The First Man" by Gianni Amelio
- 2010 "The Names of Love" by Michel Leclerc
- 2008 "Le premier jour du reste de ta vie" (The First Day of the Rest of Your Life) by Rémi Besançon
- 2006 "Les brigades du tigre" (Tiger Brigades) by Jérôme Corneau
- 2005 "Hell" by Danis Tanovic
- 2004 "Holy Lola" by Bertrand Tavernier
- 2002 "Safe Conduct" by Bertrand Tavernier
Best Actor Award at the Berlin Film Festival 2003

SARA FORESTIER

24 year-old rising French star Sara Forestier first got noticed for her performance in Abdellatif Kechiche's "Games of Love and Chance" which earned her the César for Best Female Newcomer in 2005. She has since alternated work on commercial and "auteur" films with directors such as Michel Deville, Bertrand Blier, and Alain Resnais. She will next be seen in the US as French pop star France Gall in Joann Sfar's "Gainsbourg: A Heroic Life." Ms. Forestier won the 2011 César for Best Actress for **THE NAMES OF LOVE**.

SELECT FILMOGRAPHY

- 2010 "Gainsbourg: A Heroic Life" by Joann Sfar
- 2010 "The Names of Love" by Michel Leclerc
- 2009 "Wild Grass" by Alain Resnais
- 2005 "Combien tu m'aimes" (How Much Do You Love Me?) by Bertrand Blier
- 2003 "Games of Love and Chance" (L'Esquive) by Abdellatif Kechiche
César Award 2005 for Best Female Newcomer

CAST

Baya Benmahmoud
Arthur Martin
Cécile Benmahmoud
Mohamed Benmahmoud
Annette Martin
Lucien Martin

Sara Forestier
Jacques Gamblin
Carole Franck
Zinedine Soualem
Michèle Moretti
Jacques Boudet

CREW

Director
Screenplay
Producers

Production Assistant
Director of Photography
Editor
Original Music

Michel Leclerc
Baya Kasmi and Michel Leclerc
Caroline Adrian, Antoine Rein and Fabrice Goldstein-Delante
Films/Kare Productions
Alwine Deleule
Vincent Mathias-AFC
Nathalie Hubert
Jérôme Bensoussan and David Euverte