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PRESENTS

SUMMER
A FILM BY OF 85
FRANÇOIS OZON

2020 – FRANCE – 100 MINUTES – FRENCH WITH ENGLISH SUBTITLES

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LOGLINE

A seaside summer fling between Alexis and David lasts just six weeks, but casts a shadow over a lifetime in François Ozon's sexy, nostalgic reverie of first love and its consequences.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

When Alexis (Félix Lefebvre) capsizes off the coast of Normandy, David (Benjamin Voisin) comes to the rescue and soon opens the younger boy's eyes to a new horizon of friendship, art, and sexual bliss. Their seaside summer fling lasts just six weeks, but casts a shadow over a lifetime in François Ozon's sexy, nostalgic reverie of first love and its consequences.

LONG SYNOPSIS

When Alexis (Félix Lefebvre) capsizes off the coast of Normandy, David (Benjamin Voisin) comes to the rescue and soon opens the younger boy's eyes to a new horizon of friendship, art, and sexual bliss. David's worldly demeanor and Jewish heritage deliver an ardent jolt to Alexis's traditional, working-class upbringing. After Alexis begins working at the seaside shop owned by David's mother (Valeria Bruni Tedeschi), the two lovers steal every possible moment for a fugitive kiss, a motorcycle ride, or a trip to the cinema. Their relationship is soon rocked by a host of challenges, including an unexpected sexual rival (Philippine Velge) and a romantic oath that transcends life itself.

Adapted by François Ozon from Aidan Chambers's groundbreaking LGBT young adult novel "Dance on My Grave," "Summer of 85" is a sexy, nostalgic reverie of first love and its consequences from one of France's most versatile filmmakers. Their summer fling lasts just six weeks, but casts a shadow over a lifetime.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I read the novel in 1985, when I was seventeen years old, and I loved it. It spoke to me personally. The book is playful and inventive. It has drawings, press clippings, changing points of view ... I so much enjoyed reading it that, when I started directing short films, I thought: "If one day I make a feature film, my first will be an adaptation of this novel" (...) Films are made when they're supposed to be made.

This story needed time for me to mature so that I would know how to tell it. In the end, I remained faithful to the novel's narrative structure. I adapted the story's background to make it French and I transposed it to the time period when I first read the book. The movie encompasses both the book's reality and my memories of what I felt when first reading it.

—FRANÇOIS OZON

FRANÇOIS OZON FILMOGRAPHY

EVERYTHING WENT FINE (Tout s'est bien passé) - 2021
SUMMER OF 85 (Été 85) - 2020
BY THE GRACE OF GOD (Grâce à Dieu) - 2019
DOUBLE LOVER (L'amant double) - 2017
FRANTZ - 2016
THE NEW GIRLFRIEND (Une nouvelle amie) - 2014
YOUNG AND BEAUTIFUL (Jeune et jolie) - 2013
IN THE HOUSE (Dans la maison) - 2012
POTICHE - 2010
HIDEAWAY (Le refuge) - 2009
RICKY - 2009
ANGEL - 2007

TIME TO LEAVE (Le temps qui reste) - 2005
5x2 - 2004
SWIMMING POOL - 2003
8 WOMEN (8 femmes) - 2002
UNDER THE SAND (Sous le sable) - 2000
WATER DROPS ON BURNING ROCKS
(Gouttes d'eau sur pierres brûlantes) - 2000
CRIMINAL LOVERS (Les amants criminels) - 1999
SITCOM - 1998
SEE THE SEA (Regarde la mer) - 1997
SUMMER DRESS (Robe d'été) - 1996



INTERVIEW WITH FRANÇOIS OZON

"Summer of 85" was originally a novel by Aidan Chambers: "Dance On My Grave."

I read the novel in 1985, when I was seventeen years old, and I loved it. It spoke to me personally. The book is playful and inventive. It has drawings, press clippings, changing points of view... I so much enjoyed reading it that when I started to direct short films, I thought: "If one day I make a feature film, my first will be an adaptation of this novel."

And thirty-five years later...

It didn't occur to me until now to make this film because the truth is, more than anything, I wanted to see it as a moviegoer! And I was convinced that someone else was going to make it – an American filmmaker. But to my surprise, it never happened. After wrapping up "By the Grace of God," I reread the book out of curiosity and I was shocked, because I realized that I had already filmed many of the book's themes: cross-dressing in "A Summer Dress" or "The New Girlfriend;" the scene at the morgue in "Under the Sand;" a relationship with a professor in "In the House;" the cemetery in "Frantz."

This book had been fueling my imagination, yet I'd never made the connection. I had forgotten about the novel's scrapbook-style, which also seemed very cinematographic to me. And I remembered that when at the age of eighteen I had written a first draft of the script with a friend, I had only focused on the love story and had removed everything that seemed secondary at the time, such as the social worker, the professor, the parents, Judaism, and the flashbacks.

Perhaps I couldn't handle all the different elements back then. Films are made when they're supposed to be made. This story needed time for me to mature so that I would know how to tell it. In the end, I remained faithful to the novel's narrative structure. I adapted the story's background to make it French and I transposed it to the time period when I first read the book. The movie encompasses both the book's reality and my memories of what I felt when first reading it.

The book's tone is rather offhand. You approach it from a more dramatic and romantic register.

Some scenes were slightly more humorous when we were shooting, but during the editing stage I tended to tone down the comical side to be wholly with the boys, to experience their love story straightforwardly. And in the second half of the movie, with the mourning and what their pact entailed, there was even less room for comedy. It was important to establish a genuine rapport with the characters and to convey the emotion I had felt as a teenager.

It sometimes seemed like I was remaking a first film, but with the maturity I had acquired from making all my other films. This lent clarity coupled with a tender nostalgia for the time period to the process. If I had been closer to my characters' ages, my approach would undoubtedly have been more distant.

"Summer of 85" is firstly a love story before being a story about gay love.

I was faithful to the book which never problematizes gayness, never makes it an issue, which is very beautiful and modern for the time period. Alex and David love one another and the fact that they are two boys is beside the point. That's the reason why I dreamed of being able to go see this film when I was a teenager. Depictions of gay people in the movies in the 1980s were very dark and painful, even before AIDS.

Following the codes of the teen movie genre was important to me while making the film. I shot the romance between the boys in a very classic way, without irony, in order to make this a universal love story.

"Summer of 85" could have become a teenage saga, but you have transformed the material, playing on the suspense of what really happened...

That's the big difference the film has with the novel, in which we know from the onset what Alex did and why. The movie lets the mystery dwell and creates false leads, which allow the audience to imagine several different possibilities. I adopted the same approach when adapting Ernst Lubitsch's Broken Lullaby for "Frantz."

The scene with the Walkman is an homage to "La Boum (The Party)," the 1980s French teen cult movie, but also foreshadows how David and Alex are out of synch with each other.

This dance scene is clearly the heart of the film: Alex and David aren't dancing to the same music. One is fidgeting about and laughing while the other is daydreaming, staring at the ball hanging from the ceiling. At this point in the story, we experience this disconnect as if it were a game between them, not suffering. It's only in retrospect that we can re-interpret the scene as the early warning signs of their separation.

To be truthful, I wasn't even conscious myself of this while shooting the scene, which was shot very quickly and improvised in order to integrate the Rod Stewart song.

The re-creation of the time period is very realistic, at times giving the impression that we are watching a film made in the 80s.

The scenery is realistic, but the 80s are a little idealized as far as the costumes are concerned. Pascaline Chavanne and I were very much inspired by American films of the time period whose eighties folklore I wanted to replicate. I made the film thinking about the moviegoer I was, and of the film I would have liked to see at the time.

And the choice to shoot on film?

Today we're used to digital cinematography, but when making a period movie, film is a must! I had already made this decision for "Frantz." I was thrilled to return to Super 16, which was the format I used for my first short films. I like its grain which is so specific to this kind of film stock. The result is very beautiful and sensual on the skin in closeups. There is a subtlety in the color that can't be achieved with digital, which tends to dull things down.

The film takes place in Le Tréport...

Le Tréport would be the equivalent of the novel's Southend-on-Sea in the south of England. It's nothing like the French Riviera. I felt it was important to anchor the story in the social realities of this working-class seaside town in Upper Normandy. Le Tréport is a city that has largely retained its character – it hasn't been overly renovated. It's a very photogenic place with wide and long pebble beaches, cliffs, and 1960s low-income housing complexes running alongside the jetty.

Is young Kate's English nationality an allusion to the book?

Kate's character is Norwegian in the book. I made her English especially because my 1980s experience was heavily influenced by British pop culture, like most teenagers at the time. The soundtrack to our lives was all New Wave: The Smiths, Depeche Mode, The Cure, whose music opens the movie.

Why did you decide to make David's family Jewish?

The family in Aidan Chambers' book is Jewish, and I kept it. When I asked him about it, he explained that the town of Southend-on-Sea (where the novel is set) has a large Jewish community. It therefore seemed natural for David to be Jewish, and at the same time set him apart from Alex with respect to their social and cultural backgrounds. I like the fact that it is never an issue. Just like being gay, it belongs to the narrative just like its other parts. There is also a narrative reason, which has to do with Jewish post-mortem and funeral rituals. In Judaism, the body should be buried as soon as possible, the funeral usually taking place within one or two days after the death.

Alex could not mourn with the body, nor could he be among the mourners. These restrictions increased his emotional trauma and fueled his psychological need to dance on David's grave. It was the only way for Alex to express his profound sorrow and let everything out. If David had been Christian, Alex would not have had to endure the same torments following David's death. Everything would have been simpler, more straightforward, and thus less interesting to me.

How did you go about casting the couple of Alex and David, whose physiques are extremely different?

I started casting quite early on, before I'd even finished the script. I told myself that if I couldn't find the actors, I wouldn't make the film. I very quickly met Félix Lefebvre. I immediately knew he was Alex when he auditioned, with his roundish face, childish smile, and his liveliness. He has a melancholy look in his eyes which gives him an air of River Phoenix that corresponds perfectly to the era and the character. Félix is a quick, clever actor, which was vital for the role. We have to believe in Alex's intelligence, and in his ability to become a writer.

Then I had to find David. The contrast between him and Alex was important. I wanted David to physically dominate Alex, to have an effortless poise and naturally be at ease with himself. David is a bit like a wild animal while Alex is a lamb whose demeanor is awkward, whether he's walking or sailing a boat. Benjamin Voisin had auditioned for the role of Alex, but when I saw him act, I had a hunch that he could be David. Although I had been looking for someone who was more physically imposing and sturdily built, at the same time, when we see David from Alex's point of view, he is indeed like that. There was true chemistry between Benjamin and Félix from the first screen tests, which was vital. They were on the same page – two kindred spirits. Then we did several readthroughs and rehearsed scenes together. And one month before the shoot, they left to spend a week sailing with each other in Le Tréport.

What about choosing the other actors?

For Kate, I was at first looking for a girl who exuded more sexuality than Philippine Velge, but her tomboy, Jean Seberg side immediately appealed to me. Philippine is Belgian-English, and she has both the grace and maturity that I was looking for in this character, who helps Alex through the mourning process. Like most people, I discovered Isabelle Nanty in "Auntie Danielle" and I'm tremendously fond of her. She radiates a great sense of humanity. We've rarely seen her in a dramatic register, and I wanted to place her in a different context to show another facet of her personality and work.

As for Melvil Poupaud and Valeria Bruni Tedeschi, with whom I have already worked, they were the obvious choices for these roles. After "By the Grace of God," it was fun to make Melvil a flirty professor – the professor all of us have had at one point or another in our lives – really nice but a little bit creepy. Valeria was the ideal person to bring some humor and a pinch of craziness to this extroverted mother; she's able to make us accept her more dramatic transformation. For this character, I thought about the monstrous and conniving mother in Tennessee Williams' "Suddenly Last Summer" played by Katharine Hepburn in Mankiewicz' film – a mother who lures boys and reels them in for her son, and whose possessive, devouring, incestuous nature is later revealed.

"Swimming Pool," "Angel," "In the House"... This isn't the first time you're tackling the figure of an author.

I'm interested in depicting the artistic vocation. How a character is driven to go through self-transcendence as part of the creative process, and what he draws upon for inner nourishment. What I find beautiful about Alex's situation is that he discovers writing almost accidentally: he is incapable of talking about what happened and so is told to write it down in order for the judge to understand what he did and why.

"Sometimes, things we have a hard time voicing are easier to write down," his professor tells him. Especially at that age. As he has a gift for writing, this works in his favor. By becoming a writer, Alex is doubly saved: before the judge and because he has found his vocation. Alex has a very resilient side thanks to his writing, which allows him to transform the ordeal he has gone through and move forward.

How did you put together the dance on the grave?

First, we had to find the music. In the book, it's the Laurel and Hardy theme song, music that evokes a cuckoo clock – hence the French title of the book "La Danse du Coucou [The Cuckoo Dance]." For the movie, it was Félix who suggested using the Rod Stewart song "Sailing," which is in fact from 1975. As soon as I listened to it, I knew it was the right song, at once for its rhythm and lyrics. I immediately thought of Angelin Preljocaj for the choreography, but as he is in the south of France, logistics were a little complicated. He then referred me to a dancer with whom he works, Virginie Caussin.

I wanted the dance to feel genuine and be inspired by Félix's own body language. At first, he gets on his knees and caresses himself as the rhythm gradually takes over his body. We asked Félix to dance naturally to the music in order to incorporate his own body movements, as well as gestures that are reminiscent of the way people danced in the 80s. This was coupled with other moments when he lets go completely, giving off pure energy, but channeled by a choreography that evokes a tribal, funerary dance.

Why did you bring in Jean-Benoît Dunckel to compose the music?

I wanted music that was sexy, romantic and nostalgic; something that would remind us of the 1980s and the beginnings of electronic music. All these aspects can be found in Jean-Benoît's music. I have always enjoyed the work he did when he was in the band Air. And it turns out that in an interview where he was asked to give the title of a song he liked when he was young, he'd answered: "Stars de la pub," [an 80s hit pop song], saying that it was a really well produced song.

I took this coincidence as a sign because it was also one of my favorite songs when I was a teenager. So I contacted him, and I explained that I wanted to use the very song he'd mentioned in my film. I gave him the script, from which he composed themes without having seen the images. It's quite extraordinary because during the editing process we used the melodies exactly as they were written.

And the film's title?

The French title of the book, "La Danse du Coucou [The Cuckoo Dance]," didn't work because we changed the music for the grave scene. The original title of the book is very beautiful: "Dance On My Grave," but it revealed too much about the movie's storyline, which is unlike the book, where you learn everything from the onset. So I simply connected it to the date when I read the book and when The Cure song, which opens the film, "In Between Days," came out. This song really marks the heart of the 80s while also remaining timeless. It's an extremely joyful song, but fundamentally melancholic. It corresponds to Alex, to his enthusiastic discovery of life, but to its dark side as well.

1985 is also the year Rock Hudson died, and AIDS suddenly appeared in everyone's daily life. It's the last year of carefreeness and innocence, when it was still possible not to be aware of the disease, and not to worry about it.

"The only important thing is that somehow we all escape our history," says Alex in voice over at the very end of the film.

It's the last sentence in Aidan Chambers' book; it's beautiful and enigmatic. I identify with it completely.

INTERVIEW WITH FÉLIX LEFEBVRE (ALEXIS)

How did your first meeting with François Ozon go?

I first auditioned with his casting director, then I was called back the next day to meet François. He explained some of the plot to me, which I knew nothing about apart from the two scenes I was given for the audition. I didn't even know that Alex was the leading role!

François asked if I felt able to take on the lead. And if I felt comfortable with gay characters on screen. Perhaps if it had been a year or two earlier, while I was still in high school, it may have been an issue. But I've grown up and above all I promised myself a long time ago that I would never let fear get in the way of my doing something I wanted to do.

What was your reaction to the script when you read it?

I saw a very beautiful, well-written story: the awkwardness of the first time, discovery, first love, becoming a man, opening yourself up... Alex's journey takes place over a summer where many important things happen to him, both beautiful and tragic, which give him strength to move forward and grow up. François then asked me to read Aidan Chambers' book, on which he based the screenplay. The book gave me precise information about Alex, but I mostly based the character on the script.

How did your first meeting with Benjamin Voisin go?

When I first saw Benjamin, I said to myself: "He doesn't look like David at all! Plus, we look so much alike we could be brothers." And then I thought afterwards that it was a shame, because I enjoyed acting with him straightaway. It's quite rare to listen to your acting partner with so much chemistry from the start. This synergy is very reassuring; it makes you want to act. Benjamin is a great partner and so I was thrilled that François saw beyond our physiques and chose him.

You don't really look that much alike on screen.

To create a more obvious difference between us, and make Alex appear younger and inexperienced, François asked Benjamin to gain some muscle and me to lose a little weight, like a teenager who is slimming down as he shoots up in height. He also asked me to lighten my hair color, certainly to accentuate the contrast with Benjamin. I think he found it nicer-looking, more summery. In the end, I believe this fraternal aspect served the relationship. Alex projects onto David, who represents a sort of big brother, or model, a fantasized image of what the future could be.

Alex is fascinated by death.

I spent my entire childhood being anxious about death: I was afraid of the dark, afraid of never coming back. I couldn't grasp it. I think, everyone in their own way is intrigued by the mystery of death. It is also what defines life. For Alex, death is akin to his archenemy – he needs to understand it so as not to be caught unaware. He wants to confront it, have an idea of what is waiting for him. To do that he studies funerary rituals, Egyptian traditions, which I also read up on. For the Egyptians, death is not an ending but a new and truthful beginning. Life is merely preparation for death, which is a battle to reach immortality. This research allowed me to better understand how Alex derives strength from thinking about death.

David, who is fatherless, has a more intimate knowledge of death. Is that what attracts Alex to him?

Unlike Alex and his book knowledge of death, David really saw someone die. In Alex's eyes, he represents the warrior capable of conquering death. In fact, everything about David fascinates Alex. It's a passionate, all-consuming love! And this love is understandable because David is charming and handsome. He lives in a beautiful house and is a captivating person. Upon seeing him, Alex feels an evident fascination and very quickly falls in love with him.

In the novel, Alex is a rather brazen and experienced young man. In the movie, it seems like it's his first time.

It is his first time; that's what François, Benjamin, and I thought. David helps Alex discover many things; he's practically a mentor. Sexually, Alex isn't particularly comfortable with himself nor does he know very much. Thanks to David, he learns to open himself up and he blossoms.

How do you interpret the break-up scene?

Alex is naive and madly in love. He threw himself body and soul into this romance! Naturally, when you give so much of yourself you want to receive in return. And he does receive a great deal from David, but he realizes that David's love isn't as strong. David is having a fling. He isn't in love and as he's afraid of hurting Alex he prefers to end it before it goes too far. His flirting with Kate is also a way of saying to Alex that he doesn't belong to him. Alex and David look at love differently. Despite how harsh the breakup scene is we can sense that David does love Alex. Their relationship is unique and at the same time universal. What is striking with Alex isn't his attraction to men, but that he's attracted to David. In fact, I didn't even work on his sexual orientation, but rather on his passion for David.

How did you approach your character?

One of the first things I did was read "Catcher in the Rye," because in his director's statement, François had explained that when writing the Alex character, he had thought about Holden Caulfield, the captivating main character in J.D. Salinger's novel. So, I read it and now it's one of my favorite books!

François also advised me to watch films that reflect the atmosphere of the 80s, as well as films that Alex would have watched: documentaries on death, but also the French 1980s movie "La Boum [The Party]," "Grease," "Stand by Me" – movies that were popular back then. I was quite inspired by "Summer of '42," with its awkward teenagers who discover their sexuality and love. And then I wanted to watch films that depict love between men, such as: "My Own Private Idaho," "Call Me by Your Name..." I also listened to pop music from the 80s, that I wasn't familiar with. Funnily enough, my mother knew all the songs. It brought her whole youth back!

What was it like to work with Isabelle Nanty, who plays your mother?

She is someone who immediately puts you at ease and makes you feel like you can trust her. Isabelle is thoroughly compassionate and generous. She's the opposite of the self-involved actress stereotype. When I read the screenplay, I immediately knew that the scene where Alex asks his mother to have a cup of coffee with him would be one of my favorites. It's so commonplace yet makes for such a telling sequence that I had just one wish: to play the scene with Isabelle.

One of François' great qualities is to capture everyday moments that become universal. As for Valeria, I have always found her to be an excellent actress, extremely true. It is incredible to have a partner like her. She allows you to better understand how you should be playing your own part.

How would you describe François Ozon's direction?

François' directing style is very precise, yet he listens to the actors' suggestions and leaves them a lot of space for expression and creation. He cultivates a relationship that is not only professional, but also one of friendship and trust. I felt very comfortable telling him what I thought. And the same went for him, without either of us taking it the wrong way.

François is efficient and concrete. That's great for an actor. You don't sit and wonder whether you can do something, you just do it. He works quickly, but it's easy to follow his pace, especially if you are there every day.

The choreography on the grave truly recounts the battle upon death that you were describing.

Before the dance, Alex has literally become the living dead. He is huddled up into himself; he writes, thinks about David, and vomits. When he dances, he throws himself into the battle. Of course, it's David who must lead this post-mortem fight, but Alex, in his own way, gives him the energy to get there. I approached this dance as if it were a gift for David, a way of encouraging him for the journey ahead. Hence Alex's frustration when the cops come and interrupt him: He still had so much more strength to give David.

François had told me right away that he wanted this moment to be liberating and joyful. I had to reach a state of overexcitement, a kind of powerful release and elated trance. After the dance, Alex can overcome David's disappearance and return to living his life.

How did you approach the dance?

Upon reading the script, I understood that this scene was a powerful moment, but there was no description of the choreography itself. I watched videos of ritual and shamanic dances, but they didn't inspire me. I'm not much of a worrier, but as we got closer to the shoot, I would ask François: "What are we going to do about the dance ?!" François has the intelligence to understand that the actor is the one who knows most about his character. I think that is the reason why he took his time before he had me work on the dance. He was waiting for me to be inspired by my character.

Finally, one day, he asked me to come to his office and he said: "Ok, dance!" I began an improvised, abstract sort of dance to which François wanted to add structure and some dance steps from the 80s. He asked Virginie Caussin, a dancer and choreographer who works with Angelin Preljocaj, to work with us. Suddenly, the dance became something tangible and I was reassured. Virginie suggested dance moves that instantly worked for me and little by little we integrated my own movements so that the dance became Alex's.

What do you think of the experience of the film shoot as a whole?

It was a very powerful experience that allowed me to delve deeply into my character. I think I changed as much as Alex did over the course of the film shoot. When you play a character like this one, you no longer wonder if you can make it work, but just focus on your acting, and what you are saying. I was proud and happy to be part of this project. A movie is about sharing too; it's also for others.

INTERVIEW WITH BENJAMIN VOISIN (DAVID)

How did your first meeting with François Ozon go?

I came to the audition ready to read for the role of Alex. I had come to the conclusion several months earlier that I no longer wanted to be boxed into roles of fragile, shy, oversensitive characters that people tended to offer me. This frame of mind must have been influencing the way I handled myself at the audition because the next day I was asked to come back to read for the role of David!

And the day after that, I met François. We talked about who I am, who he is, and what I like. It was a very warm encounter. We discussed cinema and work. The meeting went so well that when I left, I thought: "We could become friends, but are we going to make a film together? I have no idea!"

David is an ambiguous young man, at once very attractive yet disturbing.

For weeks after I learned I had the role, it all seemed a little vague to me – I had a difficult time figuring out my character. François and I had many discussions about it, and what stuck with me from our conversations was when he compared David to a scorpion, a slow, weird and mesmerizing animal – at first you're attracted but if you look up just a bit, you can see its venomous tail, ready to strike at any moment.

The goal was thus to become this scorpion. The audience meets David in very ordinary circumstances, but from his first smile I wanted to bring danger into it, for people to sense that there is something corrosive about him and that Alex is going to suffer. I followed an intense program of physical preparation to become David. Although staying lean, I had to thicken up to create a physical contrast with Alex and exude a natural self-confidence.

David and his mother can also form a toxic pair.

David pushes Alex into his mother's arms – and she undresses him in the bathroom. There's a moment when we see this mother and son together in a shot, both with a tiger's piercing and predatory look in their eyes: "We're going to eat him up!" I loved working with Valeria Bruni Tedeschi. You have to learn how to live with all her energy, but we laughed so much on set.

Did you read the book by Aidan Chambers from which "Summer of 85" is adapted?

I enjoyed reading the book, but I didn't discover much that wasn't already in the screenplay. Instead, I searched for inspiration in other books, notably Rimbaud's "A Season in Hell." I also watched interviews with [French actor] Patrick Dewaere, notably the last one he gave, two days before his death. There's something rather ghostly about him, the way he moved around, and I drew inspiration from this for David's last scenes. This proximity with death was truly my guiding thread.

And the fact that David has lost his father?

The father was an important element. I tried to imagine him, to make him a spirit on which I could rely during the film shoot. I told myself that there was a direct legacy from him to David, and that David was just reproducing what his father had been.

Did François Ozon recommend any films for you to watch?

François asked me to watch "Stand by Me," and "My Own Private Idaho." On my own I watched "Good Old Daze" ["Le Péril jeune"] by Cédric Klapisch. Tomasi, the main character, is very different from David, but they have mystery and charm in common. I told myself that David was a bit like Tomasi would have been if he had found love, sunshine, passion, which doesn't prevent the end from happening.

David likes motorcycles and speed...

I ride bikes too. In fact, it may be the only thing I really have in common with David. François and I spoke about it the first time we met, and he added motorcycle scenes. I have a license, so why not take advantage of it! Everything David says about speed in the film is something I can relate to personally.

Do you think his motorcycle accident was indeed an accident, or a suicide?

I think it was a suicide, but something more subtle than simply wanting to kill yourself. The act was fueled by David's emotion overwhelming him, which sent him into a frantic state. Something snapped, he only had one thought in mind: I must go find Alex, and if I can make it there faster by never braking, well then so be it.

Did you also know how to sail before the film?

Not at all! François sent Félix and me to Le Tréport for a week to take sailing lessons. I love learning how to do physical things for a film, it's an opportunity to touch upon other intimate aspects of the character, but in the end I was especially interested in soaking up the atmosphere of this city where David lived for 19 years. Félix and I would stop young people who lived there and ask them if there were places to go and hang out. Everyone answered us with a bored sigh. All of that gave me a lot to work with: David, with his personality, his desires and feelings, how could he not crack up in a place like that?

How did the film shoot go?

I'm impressed with François' ability to be completely in the present. He may joke around in real life, but once his eye is behind the camera, immediately a more delicate and gentle sensibility comes through.

On set, François directs everything, but he also hears everything that is going on around him and takes anything that could elevate his idea into account. It's a great feeling to have someone who manages to associate a highly directive style with his listening skills! I felt entirely free to make suggestions to him, I never had any fears.

Do you believe that depicting the time period of his own adolescence brought a more emotional aspect to his work?

I can't compare, as it's my first movie with François, but his producers, the Altmayer brothers, said that they had rarely seen him so joyful and so close to his actors. Probably because Félix and I were a little bit like looking in the mirror, as some of the boat or nightclub scenes reminded him of things he experienced when he was our age.

David breaks up with Alex in a very mature way...

Personally, I thoroughly understand the idea of freedom that David is attached to. If he ever were to let someone put him in a cage, he would be less appealing. He would no longer be a scorpion, but a tamed animal. And that's perhaps the worst thing that could happen to him.

David cries during the breakup scene.

I didn't know that I was going to cry. It came because I was open to feeling this emotion. Félix and I were immediately well matched because we rely on being spontaneous. If we forgot a bit of dialogue, we didn't try at any price to retrieve it, but instead we took advantage of this opportunity to give in entirely to the feelings that were present at the moment, even if it meant going a little off course.

We share the same interests in real life. So, before the film shoot, we started hanging out. We would go out for drinks together; we started to become friends. I think this friendship served our characters well. If you take away the fact that they sleep together, David and Alex are also linked by a friendship that contributes to the power of their love.

This love story happens between two young men, but it is above all a universal love story.

"Summer of 85" goes beyond notions of genre. François isn't trying to make a point about anything.

Two people meet, spend time together, love one another, and it doesn't matter whether they are two boys, two girls, or a boy and a girl. What matters is that François was able to place his camera in the privacy of their relationship in a very beautiful and universal way.



INTERVIEW WITH AIDAN CHAMBERS

What was the genesis for "Dance on My Grave"?

One day in 1966 I read on an inside page of the Guardian a brief news item. It reported that a sixteen-year-old boy had made a second appearance at the Magistrates' court, charged with desecrating a grave.

On his first appearance he had refused to say anything about what he had done and why. The boy was too young to be named and no other details were given. The magistrate had remanded him while a social worker tried to find out what had happened.

At the second appearance the social worker reported that the boy had sworn an oath with a friend that if one of them died the other would dance on his grave. The report left a lot of questions unanswered. For example, how did the police know he was going to be in the cemetery in the middle of the night and were waiting for him? Why had the boy refused to explain?

So it's not autobiographical?

At the time I was a teacher of secondary school boys and girls and getting started as a writer of novels about young people. Some of my pupils trusted me enough to tell me secrets about themselves that they didn't tell anyone else. It was because of what I'd heard from some of the boys that I felt I knew what had really happened, that it wasn't what the social worker had told the magistrate, and instantly I felt I must tell the story. I wanted to tell it because I had never read anything like it in fiction.

The story isn't autobiographical. There are a few incidents adapted from my life. For example, the boy – called Hal in my novel and Alex in the film – capsizes in a storm when he's sailing single-handed. That happened to me. But apart from these few events I could quote Hal when his teacher asks whether a story he has written was fact or fiction: 'I've felt all these things but invented the story.'

Were you familiar with the work of François Ozon? Were you involved in the adaptation?

I knew François' films and admired them. I was delighted when he asked for the rights, sure he would make a film that was faithful to the book and was the kind of treatment I'd like. I wasn't involved in the adaptation. Even if asked I'd have refused. I know he's totally dedicated to his art, and often uses his own stories and scripts. It was best that I didn't get in his way.

The film is set in France, and François Ozon made quite a few other changes. What were your impressions when you saw the film?

I was extremely nervous during my first viewing. I was so affected by confused emotions that I needed time to calm down before viewing it again. The second time I could see it as a film in its own right rather than as an adaptation of my novel.

I was extremely pleased and very moved. Proud, in fact. I was delighted by how close François kept to the novel. The changes were in tune with the novel and sometimes were better.

I enjoyed the acting, the use of music, and particularly all the games in the *mise en scène* about mirrors, reflections, doubles, eyes. This pleased me very much, because they are woven through the book. The word 'reflection' is thematic: in the sense of consideration, thought, contemplation.

For me, the story is about reflection. It is Hal (Alex) thinking through, and about, what has happened to him. The story is memory combined with an attempt to make sense of it. It's an act of meditation. It's not merely a record of experience but telling the stories of our experience that makes us who and what we are and changes us – adds to us, makes us more than we were at the time of the experiences.

This is at the heart of the novel, and it seems to me it is at the heart of the film. We are – more accurately, we become – the stories we tell about ourselves, whether they are an attempt to 'tell it like it was' or are those we invent. All memory is invention. François understands this and made it one of the main themes of his film.

Your treatment of gay characters in a story for young people seems very modern for the time. Were you aware of this?

When I started to write the story in 1966 being gay was illegal in Britain. I assumed no one would publish a book about two boys, who, as well as everything else that was against it, were below the age of consent, but wanted to write it anyway. And wanted it to be modern in form, using modernist narrative techniques. Over the next few years I tried writing it as a novel twice and once as a play, but couldn't get it right. The fact is I wasn't skilled and experienced enough as an author.

Between 1975 and 1978 I wrote "Breaktime," the first of my novels that belong to my mature work. When I finished it I felt I had learned how to be the kind of writer I am and how to write "Dance on My Grave." I began the published version in 1979 and finished in 1982. By then gay love between consenting adults was legal, but not for boys below the age of twenty-one. Being gay isn't the point of the story. That the boys are gay is never discussed. This was deliberate. Nevertheless, the book was controversial. It was a courageous decision by the publisher to publish it. For a while, it was banned in some libraries and schools.

Why do you think the book is so important to so many readers?

Immediately after publication, I began to receive letters and later on emails from people of all ages, but mainly from young people. From girls as much as from boys. Some of them told me they were gay, some said they weren't, that they liked the story for other reasons. It's about passionate, obsessive emotion as you feel it for the first time when you are in your teens. It's a universal love story.

Being gay was taken for granted, was normal, not 'an issue'. The way Hal thinks 'is the way I think'. And because of 'the way the story is told. I haven't read anything like this before.' For some it was an epiphany: it identified them and helped them understand themselves and feel confident about what they were as gay young men. I remember a letter which moved me very much from an Australian who said he was 86 and wished he could have read the book when he was 16, 'because it would have changed my life.'

The book was published almost forty years ago, in 1982. Why hasn't it been adapted for the screen until now?

From the beginning I wanted the story to be adapted as a film. There have been several attempts but they gave up before they got far. There were three who nearly succeeded. One was a Danish director who died of AIDS before he could start shooting. One was French, and the other an Italian, both of whom failed for lack of money. After thirty-eight years of waiting François has given me what I longed for. The result is a fine film – in my opinion one of his best – which was well worth the wait until I turned 85.

About Aidan Chambers

Aidan Chambers (b. 1934) is an English author of youth novels and plays, critical essays and books on the education of readers. He is best known for his novels that make up "The Dance Sequence" Series: "Breaktime" (1978), "Dance on My Grave" (1982), "Now I Know" (1987), "The Toll Bridge" (1992), "Postcards from No Man's Land" (1999, recipient of the British Carnegie Medal and the American Michael L. Printz Award), and "This Is All" (2005). Among other acknowledgements he was honored with the International Hans Christian Andersen Medal for the body of his work in 2002. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. He lives with his wife, Nancy, in a village in Gloucestershire.



CAST

Alexis Félix Lefebvre
David Benjamin Voisin
Kate Philippine Velge
Mrs. Gorman Valeria Bruni-Tedeschi
Mr. Lefèvre Melvil Poupaud
Mrs. Robin Isabelle Nanty
Mr. Robin Laurent Fernandez
Specialized Educator Aurore Broutin
Luc Yoann Zimmer
Morgue Security Guard Bruno Lochet
Chris Antoine Simony

CREW

Written and Directed by François Ozon
Based on the book "Dance on my Grave" by Aidan Chambers
[Penguin Random House UK]
Produced by Eric and Nicolas Altmayer
Director of Photography Hichame Alaouie
Production Designer Benoît Barouh
Costumer Designer Pascaline Chavanne
Sound Brigitte Taillandier
Sound Editor Julien Roig
Sound Mixer Jean-Paul Hurier
Editor Laure Gardette
1st Assistant Manager Elodie Gay
Script Supervisor Lydia Bigard
Casting Directors Elodie Demey
Anaïs Duran
Key Hair Stylist Franck-Pascal Alquinet
Key Makeup Artist Natali Tabareau-Vieuille
Production Manager Aude Cathelin
Set Photographer Jean-Claude Moireau

MUSIC

Original Score

Jean-Benoît Dunckel

Additional Scores

“In Between Days”

The Cure
(Robert Smith)

“Sailing”

Rod Stewart
(Gavin Sutherland)

“Forest Fire”

Lloyd Cole & The Commotions
(Lloyd Cole)

“Stars De La Pub”

Movie Music
(Frédéric Mercier / David Fairstein)

“Cruel Summer”

Bananarama
(Woodward / Siobhan Maire Deirdre Fahey /
Steve Jolley / Tony Swain)

“Toute Première Fois”

Jeanne Mas
(R. Musumarra – J. Mas / R. Musumarra –
R.Zanelli)

“Self Control”

Raf
(G. Bigazzi / R. Riefoli / S. Piccolo)

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