

KINO LORBER

WHYNOTPRODUCTIONS

PRESENTS

FRANÇOIS CIVIL
NADIA TERESZKIEWICZ
CHARLOTTE RAMPLING

TWO PIANOS

A FILM BY ARNAUD DESPLECHIN

with

HIPPOLYTE GIRARDOT
ALBA GAÏA BELLUGI
ANNE KESSLER
JÉRÉMY LEWIN
MARIANNE POMMIER

AND INTRODUCING
VALENTIN PICARD

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FRANCE | 2025 | 115 MINS | FRENCH WITH ENGLISH SUBTITLES

PRESS MATERIALS



SYNOPSIS

After years of exile, Mathias Vogler returns to France. His former mentor, Eléna, invites him to perform a series of piano concerts with her at the Auditorium de Lyon.

But soon after his arrival, a chance encounter with a child who looks just like him, throws Mathias into turmoil, threatening to drag him down, and leads him back to Claude: his first love.

INTERVIEW WITH ARNAUD DESPLECHIN

This drama came into being from two separate stories you had. What were they?

Two years ago, over a single summer, I became obsessed with two different story ideas. I had started making notes for a story of impossible love, which I called “*An Affair to Remember*” in homage to Leo McCarey. It was the tale of a woman whose fate was sealed when she was very young because she had a child. The forbidden lover was inspired by Daniel Day Lewis in Scorsese’s *The Age of Innocence*. Two key scenes came to me immediately: one in which the woman tells a painfully clumsy anecdote at her husband’s funeral and another during the Shiva when the lover suddenly turns up...

The other story came from Kamen Velkovsky, an American friend who I met while making *Jimmy P*. Everything took place in the world of classical music - a world which fascinated me. Kamen told me about a pianist who returns to his home country and catches sight of a child who is his exact double... It sounded like a German fairy tale, steeped in mystery.

When I told Kamen about “*An Affair*” (former title of the film) he suggested it should be the second part of his own story. So, we began building a narrative whose foundations were already in place.

Once you had the foundations of the story, how did you develop it?

To expand on those initial scenes, I collaborated with Ondine Lauriot dit Prévost. It was great fun to work with someone much younger than me! It’s a classic tale but we needed to roughen up the edges a little.



The film opens with Claude. Who is she?

She's a woman who, when very young, had two lovers, then got pregnant and decided to have the child without overthinking it. She scares herself with her own recklessness and lets fate carry her along. She falls into marriage and agrees to become the "wife of". In short, she chooses to follow reason rather than passion, but when her husband dies prematurely, the madness embodied by Mathias comes knocking at her door.

A young widow is always a romantic figure.

These are types of women I have known. My grandmother and my aunt were both widowed young, and I owe a lot to them. The character of the young widow has always seemed very mysterious to me. I thought there was something very cinematographic about it..

In what way is Claude transgressive?

Her choice to have the child was transgressive. She probably didn't realise it at the time. She just wanted to amuse her friend Judith. She saw it as a sort of challenge. Then years later, when she sees that Mathias is still madly in love with her, Claude is intoxicated by the power she has over him. She can do whatever she wants with this man. She had become such a reasonable person and suddenly her passion resurfaces. This wildness reminds me of Mathilde de la Mole, the haughty aristocrat in Stendhal's *"The Red and the Black"*.

But at the same time, Claude must shoulder her widowhood, organise the burial even though she knows little about her husband's families religious rites - that is why she forgets the Tallit her dead husband is supposed to be buried with. She has

to fit in with all these conventions, care for her child... she makes me think of Madame de Rénal, the married woman whose youthful spirit lingers under the surface. Claude's transgression lies in this blend of juvenility and enforced maturity. The two different ages coexist in one complex character which Nadia Tereszkievich could portray perfectly, with her incredibly expressive face.



Who is Mathias?

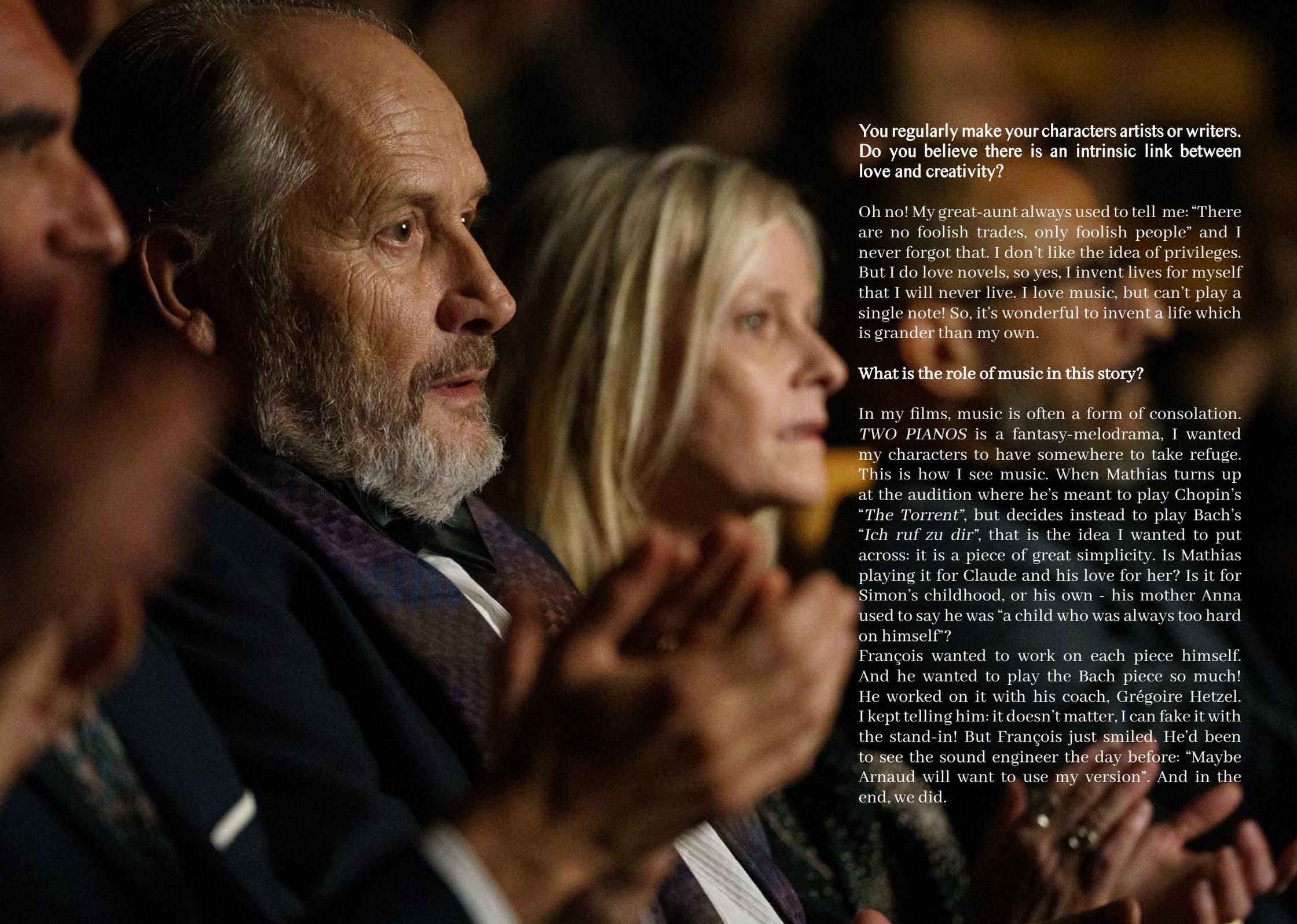
“Just a musician”, as he says in the opening scene on the plane! He is also a thwarted lover, incapable of conquering the object of his desire. In any case I don't like the expression “to conquer” a woman - either she accepts you or she doesn't. Mathias lays his weapons at Claude's feet...

He drifts between the regrets of his life: early career success, exile, teaching, returning to performing, or perhaps settling for the duller prospect of rehearsal pianist? Chamber music has taken him on the road. But like many male characters in my films, before casting I didn't really know much about my leading man, not even his age. All I knew was that he was hopelessly in love.

When I met François Civil, I confessed my worry about giving him such a passive role. Because an actor exists to carry out actions, to act! But François brushed all that aside: “No worries, it's an easy paradox to solve: the moment a man chooses to be passive, it becomes an action, because he is making a choice! He is actively choosing to be in love.” And this is true: Mathieu acts against his impulses, his violence, his excesses.

On set, I was fascinated by his screen presence. From the very first day of camera tests, where we had decided to use the time to shoot some silent scenes, François was luminous. The first shot we did: Mathias is on the platform at an underground station and catches a glimpse of a child between passing train carriages. I had mentioned Friedkin's *The French Connection*, with the policeman tailing his quarry. François stood on the platform looking morose, waiting for the train to arrive. Time seemed to stretch endlessly, and he captured the moment perfectly! He already knew exactly who Mathias was.





You regularly make your characters artists or writers. Do you believe there is an intrinsic link between love and creativity?

Oh no! My great-aunt always used to tell me: "There are no foolish trades, only foolish people" and I never forgot that. I don't like the idea of privileges. But I do love novels, so yes, I invent lives for myself that I will never live. I love music, but can't play a single note! So, it's wonderful to invent a life which is grander than my own.

What is the role of music in this story?

In my films, music is often a form of consolation. *TWO PIANOS* is a fantasy-melodrama, I wanted my characters to have somewhere to take refuge. This is how I see music. When Mathias turns up at the audition where he's meant to play Chopin's "*The Torrent*", but decides instead to play Bach's "*Ich ruf zu dir*", that is the idea I wanted to put across: it is a piece of great simplicity. Is Mathias playing it for Claude and his love for her? Is it for Simon's childhood, or his own - his mother Anna used to say he was "a child who was always too hard on himself"?

François wanted to work on each piece himself. And he wanted to play the Bach piece so much! He worked on it with his coach, Grégoire Hetzel. I kept telling him: it doesn't matter, I can fake it with the stand-in! But François just smiled. He'd been to see the sound engineer the day before: "Maybe Arnaud will want to use my version". And in the end, we did.

Charlotte Rampling is perfect in the role of the pianist.

I was afraid she'd turn down the role! When we met, she said, with her characteristic humour: "I read the script three times: the first time I thought it was incomprehensible, the second time I said to myself that there might be something there after all. The third time, I thought I'd understood, but I had one big problem: in the dressing room scene, Elena says she's afraid. But I am Elena, and I am never afraid. I don't like changing scripts, so what are we going to do?!" When she said "I am Elena" I realised that she was accepting the role, but the way she put it floored me. I'd never heard an actor express it so beautifully.

What is the nature of the relationship between Mathias and Max?

Oh, Max is magical! From his very first scene, at the police station, he cannot help mothering Mathias, who actually has three mothers, Anna, Elena... and Max! Max is larger than life, the agent who guides Mathias. Hippolyte Girardot was the obvious choice. Because he knows exactly how to approach the whimsical, romantic side. We were so delighted to work together again!

Through the different journeys your characters go through, you explore the idea of freedom...

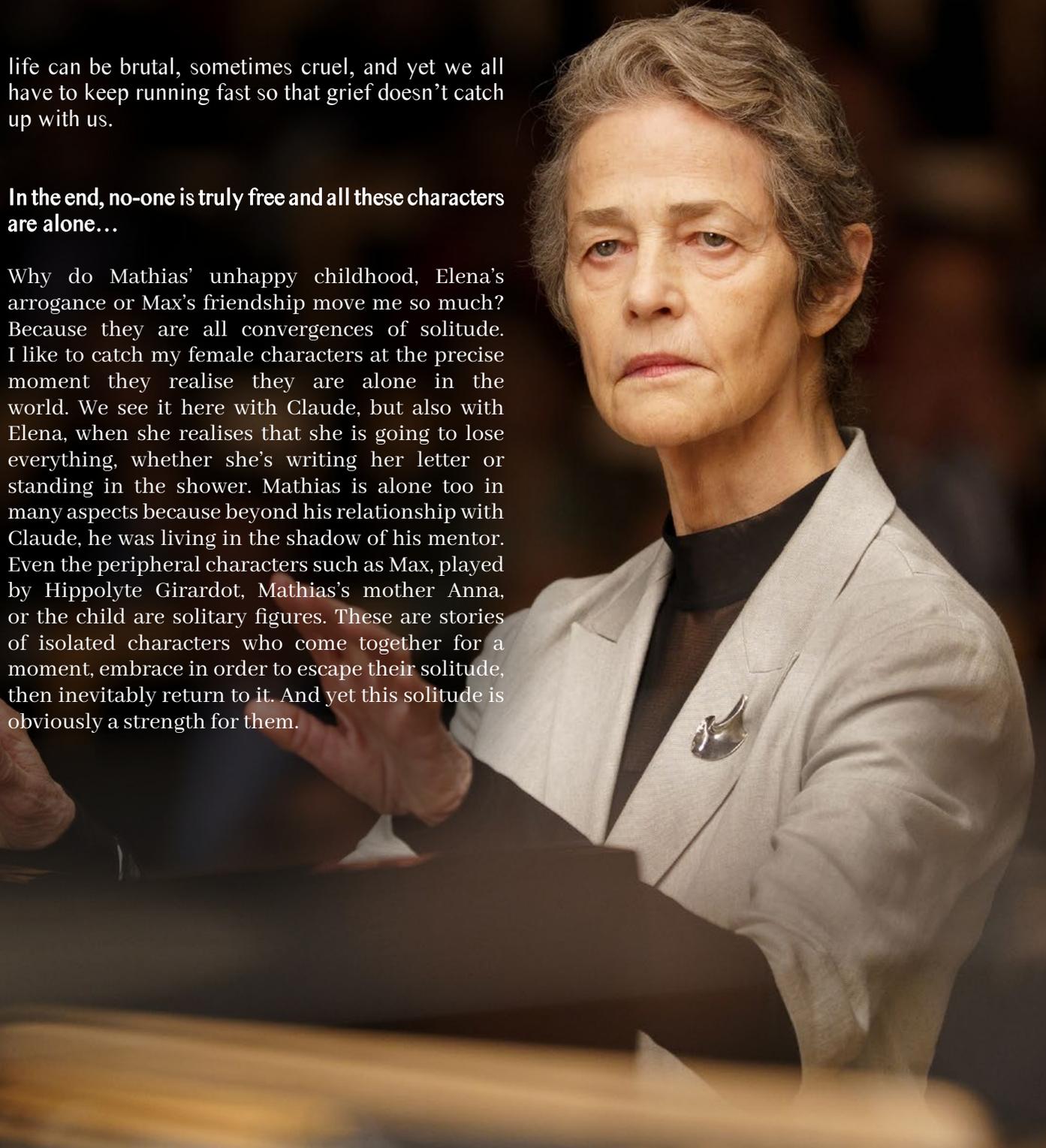
I am not sure we are as free in our feelings as we would like to believe! Take Claude for example, so young, weighed down by grief, guilt and motherhood. Beyond that, I'm not so sure.

I do love that enigmatic phrase from Judith, Claude's friend: "Unhappiness is a waste of time." Of course

life can be brutal, sometimes cruel, and yet we all have to keep running fast so that grief doesn't catch up with us.

In the end, no-one is truly free and all these characters are alone...

Why do Mathias' unhappy childhood, Elena's arrogance or Max's friendship move me so much? Because they are all convergences of solitude. I like to catch my female characters at the precise moment they realise they are alone in the world. We see it here with Claude, but also with Elena, when she realises that she is going to lose everything, whether she's writing her letter or standing in the shower. Mathias is alone too in many aspects because beyond his relationship with Claude, he was living in the shadow of his mentor. Even the peripheral characters such as Max, played by Hippolyte Girardot, Mathias's mother Anna, or the child are solitary figures. These are stories of isolated characters who come together for a moment, embrace in order to escape their solitude, then inevitably return to it. And yet this solitude is obviously a strength for them.





Because there is also the question of paternity, who is the real father? As Pagnol said: "is it the one who loves?"

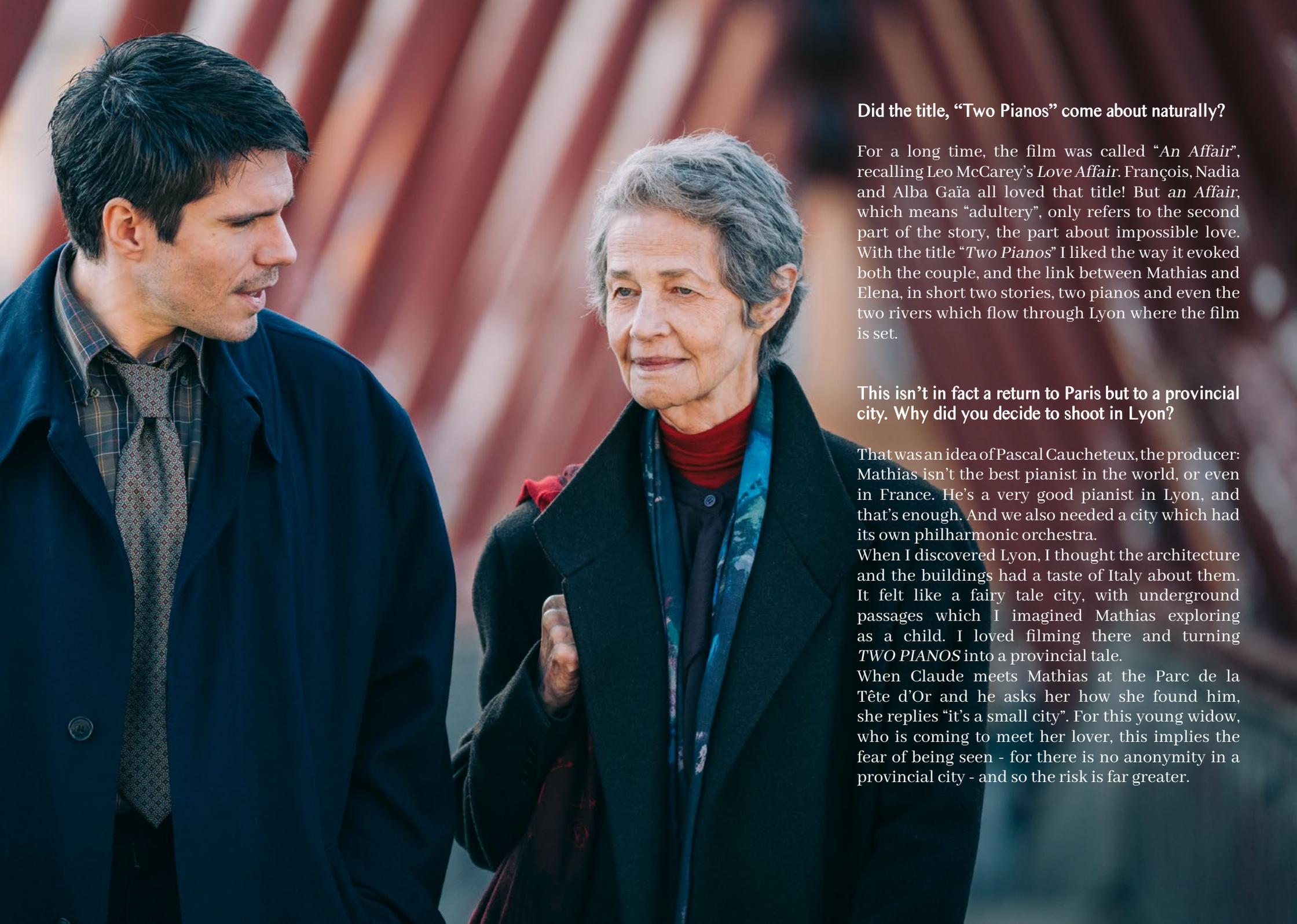
On a personal level - therefore completely debatable - I don't know what the paternal function is. I don't believe that we are born a mother or a father, we make ourselves into one, we invent ourselves as such. Does giving birth automatically make one a mother? Of course, some women bear children. But then they must invent a father...

Mathias faces a question which was already brought up in *Kings and Queen*. Here, Mathias is the biological father but what does that mean today? Because blood or genetics don't mean anything, and Simon is indeed Pierre's son in every way. Claude was loved by two men and chose to give Pierre a son. I thought it more elegant, more noble, to return the child to Pierre in the final scene.

Did the structure of the film emerge naturally from the photography and the direction?

There was an event which had nothing to do with the film, but which turned out to be a determining factor. It happened at my parents' house - I often bring them DVDs of films I have enjoyed. My dad had been enthralled by Lars von Trier's *Melancholia*, so I decided to show him *Dancer in the Dark*. He was so enthusiastic about it that I asked him to explain what it was that enchanted him so much. He replied that the constant camera movements created an unbearable suspense.

That same evening, I emailed Paul Guillaume to tell him that we would shoot *TWO PIANOS* without dollies, without tracking shots and without a tripod. During the shoot, Paul, camera on his shoulder, was constantly on the lookout for every wide or tight shot to counter the classicism of the story we were telling.



Did the title, “Two Pianos” come about naturally?

For a long time, the film was called “*An Affair*”, recalling Leo McCarey’s *Love Affair*. François, Nadia and Alba Gaña all loved that title! But *an Affair*, which means “adultery”, only refers to the second part of the story, the part about impossible love. With the title “*Two Pianos*” I liked the way it evoked both the couple, and the link between Mathias and Elena, in short two stories, two pianos and even the two rivers which flow through Lyon where the film is set.

This isn’t in fact a return to Paris but to a provincial city. Why did you decide to shoot in Lyon?

That was an idea of Pascal Caucheteux, the producer: Mathias isn’t the best pianist in the world, or even in France. He’s a very good pianist in Lyon, and that’s enough. And we also needed a city which had its own philharmonic orchestra.

When I discovered Lyon, I thought the architecture and the buildings had a taste of Italy about them. It felt like a fairy tale city, with underground passages which I imagined Mathias exploring as a child. I loved filming there and turning *TWO PIANOS* into a provincial tale.

When Claude meets Mathias at the Parc de la Tête d’Or and he asks her how she found him, she replies “it’s a small city”. For this young widow, who is coming to meet her lover, this implies the fear of being seen - for there is no anonymity in a provincial city - and so the risk is far greater.



CAST

François CIVIL	Mathias
Nadia TERESZKIEWICZ	Claude
Charlotte RAMPLING	Elena
Hippolyte GIRARDOT	Max
Alba Gaïa BELLUGI	Judith
Anne KESSLER	Anna
Jeremy LEWIN	Pierre
Marianne POMMIER	Rosa
Valentin PICARD	Simon

CREW

Director Arnaud DESPLECHIN

Screenplay Arnaud DESPLECHIN and Kamen VELKOVSKY

Screenplay adaptation Arnaud DESPLECHIN, Kamen VELKOVSKY
and Ondine LAURIOT DIT PREVOST

With the collaboration of Anne BEREST

Director of Photography Paul GUILHAUME – AFC

Editor Laurence BRIAUD

Original music Grégoire HETZEL

Production design / Art Direction Toma BAQUENI

Costume design Judith DE LUZE

Casting director Alexandre NAZARIAN and Laura CASELLI

Sound Daniel SOBRINO, Sylvain MALBRANT,
Margot SAADA and Emmanuel CROSET

First Assistant director Marion DEHAENE

Production manager Julien BRUN

Executive producer Martine CASSINELLI

A coproduction by WHY NOT PRODUCTIONS, ARTE FRANCE
CINÉMA, AUVERGNE-RHÔNE-ALPES
CINÉMA and ALAZ FILM

With the essential support of CANAL+

With the participation of CINE+ OCS, ARTE FRANCE, LA RÉGION
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With the support of PROCIREP

In association with CINÉIMAGE 19, ENTOURAGE SOFICA 3,
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French Distribution LE PACTE

International sales GOODFELLAS

