

What did you do before going into movies ?

I served as lieutenant in the Algerian army. Then I was a model for Catherine Marley for about ten years. And I got into movies in 1968 while still modelling.

How did you get interested in making movies ?

I got fed up with being in front of the camera so I got behind it. When you model, you always work with the same crews that you end up getting to know well. You help them out by moving lights around and get the other models set up. After a while, I knew everybody and became an assistant director. Then I did a lot of commercials while assisting such directors as Gérard Pirès or Pierre Grimblat before directing some myself. Writing a script based on your own story makes the directing a lot easier because you already know the characters, the way they move and behave, the way they talk and their attitudes. When I worked in the States, I was just a director, not a scriptwriter. You don't have the rights to meddle with the script. You direct and that's it. Each to his own job, otherwise the guilds come down on you.

How did you produce and direct your short movies ?

I got by on my own. I used 35mm film scraps that I stole from other locations. Les Chercheurs d'or was selected for the 1968 Cannes Film Festival, imagine that, my first short movie in Cannes ! In 1970, I made Quatre pattes about my daughter that I liked a lot better. She was about one year old and ate out of a dog bowl. After that, I shot Mon ennemi mon frère which is a western. I made a lot of those, actually. There aren't many westerns in France besides the ones by William Wyler or Jacques Tourneur. Mine was more of a parody and shot in the woods at Fontainebleau.

Your first feature length movie, Unsatisfied, made in 1971, was a sexy thriller.

It started out as a regular thriller but an american co-producer who had planned to invest \$50000 backed out. A buyer came forward but demanded that erotic scenes should be added. My producer went to see some lady friends who worked for Madame Claude and a couple of them agreed to shoot those scenes. It was very soft back then but the movie sold very well all over the world. When I realized how easy it was, I kept making erotic movies. The shoot began during the winter and ended in the summer. No one noticed.

How did this project come about ?

I had a friend who owned an old house and who also kept horses. I made changes to the script and we shot everything at his place. We slept in the hay and picnicked in the countryside. My assistant lived nearby. Despite having a script, we made things up according to our means. We shot in Rouen with friends and some really nice prostitutes. We were on a low budget and when we went to Etretat, each had to pay for his own food while I paid for gas. It was a small crew, there were only five or six of us besides the actors. We were at the top of the cliffs and the weather was beautiful. We shot for a few days there. Some camped out on the beach.

While making My Body Burns in 1972 in the middle of the Bruay-en-Artois scandal (1), what problems did you have with the law ?

I thought it was disgusting that the notary killed that girl. It hasn't been proved but everybody knew. In my opinion, the movie was banned because I had hit the truth. Claude Sendron resembled the judge like a twin brother. His face really stood out on the poster but that was on purpose. I think that's another reason the movie got banned. I had to break in through the courthouse windows during the night with the complicity of the night watch to get hold of the master copy. I told the night watch I'd forgotten to put in the credits and he told me to make sure I brought the movie back first thing in the morning. I cut out the word « notary » from the whole movie and nobody was none the wiser so I didn't get convicted. Back then, the notary assigned anyone who talked about him. The movie did very well, though, even on tape. Actually, all my movies have always done well on tape.

Did you have other problems with the law or the censors ?

I did with my first movie, Unsatisfied Some scenes were a bit too real. The censors told me to cut out some of the sighs from the soundtrack so I did. It was all simulated, there's no real penetration. Back then, hardcore movies weren't legal. The actors rolled around in the hay but the cowboy kept his pants on. Patrice Cuny also kept his pants on except for one scene where he's in bed but that was still really soft. Nowadays, movies are a lot more explicit, even softcore movies. But we made tons of money. Hardcore movies weren't allowed in theatres. We made softcore, added some hardcore scenes and put them out anyway. We always got away with it without having to pay the taxes stated by law. When we knew that the inspectors were snooping around and talking to my friends Jean Luret, Gérard Kikoïne, Claude Mulot, Jean-François Davy and so on, we notified each other by phone. We got our copies back and sent them to the lab so that when they seized the movies, there was no hardcore left. In 1975, those movies got rated X and taxed by 33%. And they were only shown in specialized theatres.

I think the government back then didn't come down too hard on us because everything went well. They just wanted to scare us so we wouldn't keep making those movies. If the inspectors went to see a movie without warning and found hardcore material, they'd get a legal notification and everyone paid for it: the owner of the theatre, the distributor, the producer, the director. I've been summoned by the police several times but I was always discharged for lack of any real evidence. There weren't that many trials, actually. The French legislation was quite flexible and no one got fined, not even the real hardcore specialists such as the distributors or Mischkind (2). Up until 1974, things went really well but afterwards, we didn't push it. We kept making erotic movies but didn't add any hardcore scenes.

With Erotic Diary of a Lumberjack in 1974, you were « campioni d'incasso » (box office champion) in Italy.

Yes, for seven months.

Was that your most successful movie ?

I can't recall which one of them was. That movie showed on the Champs-Élysées. They all did well but I think that the most successful one in France was either a porn movie or The Man from Chicago. I don't remember how much my movies made. When I got paid, I put the money right into another production. Between 1974 and 1978, I probably made ten or twelve movies. It was just incredible. I would write a script and two weeks later, the shoot began. I also wrote specifically for actors such as André Koob or Claude Sendron but I never saw the finished films. I wrote the script, gave them three weeks and a director and did post-production. Then I'd tell them to do whatever they wanted with the movie and get paid.

In 1974, you made Body Games. How did your collaboration go with Michel Lemoine and Corinne Marchand ?

It went well. Michel Lemoine was great, very focused on his part. He didn't change a word in the script. Corinne Marchand was wonderful. She wanted to help out in the make-up and costume departments. She was always ready and just perfect. They both were. It wasn't a huge project nor a big budget but the shoot, on the isle of Corsica, still went well.

You've touched upon some rather serious subjects such as abortion (Naked and Lustful, 1975), drugs or disintegrating families. Does that stem from personal experience ?

Not really. I've evoked drugs because I was 100% against. I made Naked and Lustful back when there were rumours about prostitutes selling their babies. In the city of Tours, one had sold her kid for a large sum of money but the buyer was hiding because it was totally illegal. If you sold a child, you went to jail. My movie was almost banned. It was held back for months because of that kid having been sold. But some guy from TV made a huge deal out of it and told the censors that the movie would be shown, regardless. So they finally let it go. The woman in the movie dies at the end. If they thought that she'd sold the kid just for money without being in love with the guy who bought it, I don't think the movie would've come out.

In 1978, you made Truck Stop which is your very own version of Homer's Odyssey. Can you tell us about Ajita Wilson?

I never knew the real truth. For a while, I called her Miss, Mister or Beautiful young man. The operation was so well done that you literally couldn't tell if she'd been a man. And I should know. She went off with my assistant, Jean-Claude Stromme and later, she died. I always thought she was a woman because of the way she talked and moved. Some people were jealous because they couldn't have sex with her and so spread the rumour that she was a man. She made several movies which didn't do well. I bought one of the movies she did, Black Aphrodite, and made a great deal of money. I didn't distribute it, I just sold it on straight away. André Koob and a distributor in Bordeaux bought it. The movie made four times the selling price but I couldn't have predicted that. I also got Deep Throat into France, or behind the green Door, Memories within Miss Agie and Bel Ami co-produced by Koop. I edited Truck Stop in Rome with Raimondo Crociani who worked with Ettore Scola. He told me that I had a great subject and a well-made film but that I should cut out the sexy stuff and I'd make a fortune. He was right even though the movie was very soft. Still, the movie did really well wherever it played: France, Italy, Germany and Spain.

Do you have any anecdotes about Gordon Mitchell and Jess Hahn?

Things went so well with those guys. Jess Hahn regretted that Nixon had become president so he had fled the States. He did well in France, he always had work. If you needed an American, Jess Hahn was the one! When I was in Rome, I lived with Gordon Mitchell for two years. Back then, he did a lot of peplums. He was a celebrity and made lots of money. Gordon just wanted to make movies whether he was paid for it or not. One day, Mike Monti, George Guéret and Jacques Insermini were there and Gordon arrived. I proposed they should all make a movie, in Paris. Gordon agreed but didn't want to touch any girls. Gordon and Mike were always there when needed. For Erotic diary of a lumberjack and Truck Stop, Gordon wasn't available, though. He regretted that because he really wanted to play a truck driver.

How did you get to work with Brigitte Lahaie and Karin Schubert?

Brigitte came to my office of her own accord. She was so nice that I told her we'd start shooting the following week! I'd seen Karin in a movie called La Folie des grandeurs and she was really good. This was back when I lived in Rome and I knew a lot of people so I contacted her agent who gave me her address. The storyline intrigued her and she'd willingly act in the movie but refused any hardcore. She also liked to act with children. I originally wanted Dalila Di Lazzaro but she was too young. She was with Fabio Testi back then.

In 1983, you made 3 Filles dans le vent which was very critical about your own porn movies. Was that a reflection of your own opinion?

Yes. After four years, I stopped doing them. On my last movies, people kept telling me to do this or that but it was such a con. I was really fed up with it. Hardcore sex needs to be justified by the story but I preferred bawdy movies.

Your characters are often unfaithful such as in An Erotic Journal of a Lady from Thailand. Is there a religious aspect to be found?

They're behaving just like everyone! (laughs) It's funny because I made those movies but I was always a catholic. If God exists and I run into him, he's going to punch me real good! It isn't sick, though. My movies aren't sick. Prends-moi de force is about some guys who're looking to get a rapist. The message is simple, they gang up to kill the bastard. In L'Acte d'amour, the woman gets married and then accepts every sexual demand from her husband because she was a virgin when they met and knew nothing about sex. I probably did go a little overboard because it ends in an orgy with Alban.

(1) In 1972, an adolescent girl was killed and local notary was designated as the ideal suspect. The whole affair was heavily mediatised. The crime has been prescribed since 2005.

(2) Francis Mischkind is the boss of Blue One (originally Alpha France) which specializes in the production and distribution of pornographic movies.

(4) Georges Combret was a director/producer/distributor who passed on in 1998.