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**Friday November 25th, 2016**

**Attila Marcel (12)**

*dir: Sylvain Chomet*

*Starring: Guillaume Gouix, Anne Le Ny, Bernadette Lafont, Hélène Vincent*

*Sponsor: Dr Roderick Ørner. Michelle Allen  
Psychological Therapies and Consultancy Services*

**Synopsis:** Paris the present. Paul Marcel, a 33 year old pianist, has been mute since infancy, when he witnessed the death of his parents Anita and Attila, a memory that he has repressed. He lives with his elderly aunts, overbearing dance instructors for whom he works as accompanist. The aunts are training him for a piano competition.

A chance encounter leads Paul to the flat of his neighbour, ukelele-playing hippie Mme Proust. She gives him a herbal infusion, which allows him to unlock his memories when he hears a significant piece of music. Soon, Paul is paying Mme Proust regular visits, gradually piecing together the mystery of his parents' demise. During a visit to the seaside, he meets cellist Michelle who flirts with him.

Finding out that Mme Proust has been helping Paul to recover his memory, the aunts attack her, though they discover she is dying of cancer. An infusion-fuelled hallucinogenic-filled performance wins Paul the competition. He takes a final dose of herbs and remembers that his parents, professional wrestlers, were killed when the aunts' piano fell through the floor and into their apartment below. Paul confronts the aunts, who beg for forgiveness, but he deliberately breaks his fingers, ending his concert career. He discovers that Mme Proust has died. Paul visits her grave and finds her ukelele.

**Some time later.** Now a ukelele teacher, Paul visits Hawaii with Michelle and their baby daughter.

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Sylvain Chomet's first live-action feature opens on a snake-hipped figure strutting down a cobbled Parisian street to a disco score, his leather jacket studded with the words 'Attila Marcel', his visceral sexuality attenuated somewhat by the tiny hands waving in and out of shot and the cooing of the infant whose pram-bound point of view we're sharing. It's an appropriately barmy beginning to a bizarre film, a trippy admixture of Marcel Proust and *Mr Bean*, seemingly inspired by a line from Proust's *The Prisoner*, which claims that memory can offer us both sedatives and poisons.

*Attila Marcel* centres on 33 year-old Paul (Guillaume Gouix) and his quest to uncover the mystery of what happened to his parents - sweet, luminous Anita and the more sinister Attila. Their deaths have traumatised Paul, into silence, and he lives a cloistered, cosseted existence with a matched pair of elderly aunts (Hélène Vincent and the late Bernadette Lafont, having an uproarious time) in their *fin-de-siècle* apartment. Paul's leash is as tight at a pedigree pet's, but when he stumbles through the door of his less than subtly named neighbour Mme Proust (Anne Le Ny), he discovers a key to his past in the form of a hallucinogenic infusion that reveals repressed memories.

What follows by way of a plot is largely nonsensical, serving as little more than a launchpad for Chomet's fantastic flights into Paul's memories. Shot from the infant Paul's point of view,

carved from a makeshift craft aesthetic and saturated with colour,



these scenes offer seaside serenades, jamming jazz frogs and a gorgeously sizzling sexy tango-cum-wrestling match. Even the sober world around Paul is surreal, filled with such characters as a taxidermist doctor, a horny Chinese cellist and a blind piano tuner who adjusts a staircase railing so that all the bars make the same clang against his cane.

If all this seems rather cartoonish, that's hardly surprising. *Attila Marcel* stands in a line of descent that runs from Buster Keaton through Tati and Demy to Jean-Pierre Jeunet, Michel Gondry and most obviously - with its childishly innocent hero, kitsch costumes and retro soundtrack - Wes Anderson. But Chomet's primary reference is to his own work: the film's universe is populated with the pin-neat, steely-willed old ladies, mismatched twins and outsized animals that ambled through *Belleville Rendez-vous* (2003) and *The Old Lady and the Pigeons* (1997), while the tender mother-son relationship plays out as both a reversal and a repetition of the father-daughter dynamic central to his adaptation of Tati's *The Illusionist* (2010 - shown by LFS in 2012). The overriding impression is of an animation film that's been colour-washed with live action.

Central performances from Gouix and Le Ny put flesh on the characters' bones - the former is particularly impressive in dual roles as the sad-eyed, silent Paul and his virile menace of a father. It's at its most free-wheeling that Chomet's film takes flight, though. Where Anderson's work, like Tati's, is tightly controlled, *Attila Marcel* seems to overspill the borders of its frame. Featherlight and sickly sweet, it's the cinematic equivalent of a profiterole.

#### Credits

<b>Guillaume Gouix</b>	Paul/Attila Marcel
<b>Anne Le Ny</b>	Mme Proust
<b>Bernadette Lafont</b>	Aunt Annie
<b>Hélène Vincent</b>	Aunt Anna
<b>Luis Rego</b>	M Coelho
<b>Jean-Claude Dreyfus</b>	M Kruzinsky
<b>Fanny Tournon</b>	Anita
<b>Kea Kaing</b>	Michelle
<b>Cyril Couton</b>	Doctor
<b>Director/Screenplay</b>	Sylvain Chomet
<b>DoP</b>	Antoine Roch
<b>Editor</b>	Simon Jacquet
<b>Music</b>	Sylvain Chomet, Franck Monbaylet

France 2013. 106 mins

#### Another view

Sylvain Chomet's *Attila Marcel* may open with a quote from Marcel Proust about the nature of memory "which is like a dispensary or chemical laboratory in which chance steers our hand sometimes to a soothing drug and sometimes to a dangerous poison" and contain a reference to the *Remembrance Of Things Past* author in both the title (also a character name) and one of the key protagonists - but this playful consideration of recollection has the distinctive light and funny if slightly melancholic touch that we've come to associate with the director of *Belleville Rendez-vous* and *The Illusionist*.

And though the director is drawing with people as opposed to pencils, there is a strong sense of visual style - from the use of blocks of colour in costumes to a plethora of sight gags - that make this very much in keeping with his earlier work.

Guillaume Gouix has a wide-eyed innocent charm that makes him look like the long-lost sibling of Elijah Wood's Frodo. He plays Paul, Chomet's central character, a piano ace, rendered silent by childhood trauma that he can't fully remember but which left him an orphan.

Since then, his life in the Paris apartment he shares with his eccentric maiden aunts Anna and Annie (Hélène Vincent and Bernadette Lafont, in one of her last roles) has become a roundelay of the same old tune. His aunts - recalling Chomet's earlier triplets in their similar but not quite identical mannerisms and clothing - dote on him but like him to stick to the groove of playing music for their dance classes while encouraging him, year on year, in his attempts to win a piano playing contest despite his advancing years.

A chance encounter with a hippy neighbour Madame Proust (Anne Le Ny) sees him introduced to the organic chaos of her apartment - just below that of his aunts and yet light years away in terms of its environment, from her vast indoor garden to her bear-like dog and penchant for buns and tea laced with something a little bit special to unleash memories. In Chomet's hands, Paul's memories become a candy coloured cabinet of curiosities, a place where people can break into song or TV show frogs hang out. He captures the way that memories can mislead or turn into a torrent but despite the jokes, he never loses sight of Paul's sadness.

There is more than a touch of Tati and an emphasis on whimsy but unlike his fellow countrymen Michel Gondry and Jean-Pierre Jeunet, Chomet doesn't let it run away with the narrative, anchoring the film with strong characters, particularly the wonderfully counter-culture Mme Proust, who are more than mere caricature and bring surprising amounts of emotional gravitas.

**Amber Wilkinson:** *Eye for Film*

"experience the tales your parents never told you." You have been warned!

The Committee would like to thank all the members and guests who have supported us in making 2016 such an enjoyable and successful year for the Society. We hope you all enjoy the Christmas and New Year break and look forward to seeing you on our return in January for more adventures in film.

#### **Our next screening: Friday January 6th 2017 Tale of Tales (Italy/France 205. Cert 15)**

We return after the festive break with the first of another sequence of stunning films, as varied and powerful as any in the first part of the season.

Matteo Garrone (director) burst onto the scene with *Gomorrah*, a vividly naturalistic story of goings-on in the Neapolitan Mafia based on the book by Roberto Saviano. This, his first English language film, could not be more different.

Drawing on 17th century Italian fairy tales, the film consists of 3 stories with all the tropes of the genre - monsters, castles, princesses, giants - woven together into a deliciously gothic vision that dazzles, enchants and astonishes in equal measure.

The production values of the film - costumes and sets especially - and an international cast of the highest order alone make this film worth watching.

These are no films for children, however: the trailer promises you will