

LES FILMS DE LA BOISSIERE PRESENT

A vibrant, orange-toned movie poster for the film 'Marching Band'. The background is a collage of geometric patterns, including stars and stripes. In the center, a large, dense collage of faces of diverse young people, presumably the band members, is featured. They are surrounded by various musical instruments, including brass instruments like tubas and euphoniums, and woodwinds like saxophones. At the top, a young man in a white t-shirt and blue gloves stands with his arms raised. At the bottom, a group of cheerleaders in red and white uniforms are shown. The title 'MARCHING BAND' is prominently displayed in the center in a large, bold, white font with a red outline and a blue shadow effect.

# MARCHING BAND

A FILM BY  
**CLAUDE MILLER**

# INTERVIEW WITH CLAUDE MILLER AND HELENA COTINIER

## WHAT WAS THE STARTING POINT OF THE FILM?

**CLAUDE MILLER:** I first thought about it when I watched Michel Gondry's *Black Party*, a documentary on a New York concert which included a marching band. I then realized how much I was fond of the marching band tradition. But then again I thought to myself that it wasn't really a good subject matter for a film. When the US presidential election campaign began, I thought of interviewing those young people in the marching bands and asking them how much they felt involved in that event. So we decided to start shooting three months prior to the election and to remain with the young people until D-Day.

## WHY DID YOU CO-DIRECT THE FILM WITH HELENA COTINIER AND PIERRE-NICOLAS DURAND?

**CM:** For the most part, it's a film about young people and I felt like working with young people who were hardly older than the students we met and who could share in their energy and their view of the world. I knew Helena because she was my assistant on *A Secret*. At the time, she had shown me a documentary she and Pierre-Nicolas had directed and which I enjoyed tremendously. So it seemed obvious to ask them to participate in *Marching Band*.

## WHAT ABOUT THE LOCATION SCOUTING PROCESS?

**HELENA COTINIER:** Pierre went scouting with Annie Miller, the film producer. The Virginia Film Office, a regional film commission, helped us and guided us in our research to great effect. We were very happy with University of Virginia (UVA), one of the best colleges in the country, and Virginia State University (VSU), a historically African-American college - and it was all the better because of Obama's candidacy and because we could address the Black issue.

## IT'S AS IF THE CAMERA WAS NOT THERE AND STUDENTS COMPLETELY FORGOT ABOUT IT...

**CM:** I think that one of our strengths was how young my two co-directors and my cameraman were. As a result they got accepted pretty fast.

**HC:** What was helpful at UVA is that we went along with the band members for a week of band camp to rehearse their routine extensively. So we got to be with them 24 hours a day, which helped us to be accepted in a cheerful spirit. We took the opportunity to shoot the drill exercise on the practice field

with our camera virtually embedded with the marching band. As a result, we built up a real sense of mutual trust - they realized we were respectful of what they were doing and they were respectful of what we were doing.

## WHAT ABOUT VIRGINIA STATE UNIVERSITY?

**HC:** It was slightly more difficult to establish contact than at UVA where the kids were socially closer to us. Once again, we spent a long time with the band members during the rehearsals which took place for the most part in a spacious room - the band room - which you can see in the film. We filmed them, we hung around with them in the college corridors and we talked and laughed a lot together.

## HOW DID YOU SPOT THE "CHARACTERS" PORTRAYED IN THE FILM?

**HC:** To begin with, we asked the directors of the marching bands to help us locate the most interesting characters. But in the end we noticed the people we were interested in during the band camp at UVA and the rehearsals at VSU - we would hang around with them and talk about music and politics so that we eventually got to know them and like them. But then again the students you see in the film are the ones who spontaneously came up to us.

## THE ADULTS ARE JUST AS FASCINATING, INCLUDING A MAN IN HIS THIRTIES WHO TALKS ABOUT THE FEELING OF HOPELESSNESS.

**CM:** I loved the way he spoke, like a bluesman. He's had an amazing life: he used to be a criminal and he did time before



he sent himself to college to try to pull through. Music was his lifesaver.

**HC:** The director of the VSU band, Doc Phillips, was another strong personality whose charisma made an impression on us. He is the voice of wisdom for some students who even refer to him as their "grandpa."

## WE GET THE FEELING THAT THE BAND AT VSU HAS A REDEEMING QUALITY.

**HC:** Some young people are aware that if it wasn't for the marching band, they would be in jail or drug addicts. What I found particularly moving was that during the rehearsals in the

band room you get the impression that their life is at stake. Even at UVA, the band plays an important part in the students' lives – as you can tell from the way they run to rehearsal with joy and excitement. I was fascinated by the whole thing, which isn't part of French culture at all. I'd never witnessed such excitement.

**CM:** At VSU, the marching band - just like sport - serves a social or academic purpose. When a student's fate is at stake, faculty members may decide to keep him or her if he or she is a great musician.



#### **MARCHING BANDS ARE A VERY CEREMONIAL AFFAIR.**

**HC:** There is indeed something military about the way band members walk. Incidentally, in both colleges what I heard most often, besides "fraternity" and "love of music", was "discipline." The students told us it was for them a way of learning about life and respect, with no double entendre.

**CM:** Some young people at VSU face terrible social and personal challenges – they're so caught up in chaos that they need order, which they even find comforting.

#### **THE STUDENTS KEEP TALKING ABOUT THE "RACE ISSUE".**

**CM:** It seemed obvious because Blacks play a very important part in the film and because of Obama's candidacy. So it kept intensifying throughout the shoot and the film's ending is like some kind of blues about the election. It was as if a taboo had been broken and as if Blacks could at last have their say.

**HC:** As Election Day drew near, the issue couldn't possibly be ignored. When we talked about it with the Black students, you could tell they were really proud. It was very moving.

#### **THE YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE FILM ARE ENTHRALLED BY POLITICS AND BY THEIR COUNTRY'S FUTURE.**

**CM:** At UVA, the weight of the Bush Administration was getting more and more unbearable. A vast majority of the students told us that the country couldn't be run by an ultraconservative government taking such extreme measures any longer.

**HC:** They also resented Bush for hurting America's image in the world. They made a point of it – they would come up to us and say repeatedly that America could not be reduced to Bush! I'm not sure how politically involved they actually were, but the thing is they were very excited by the election. The adults would tell us that they'd never seen young people so interested in politics before.

**CM:** Their political awareness is largely defined by their sense of civic duty. What they want to find out is who will rule the city.

**HC:** What also struck me was that even when they disagree and argue, they are never offensive or aggressive with one another. They are always highly respectful of everyone's ideas. Whoever won the election, they would accept him.

#### **AND YET YOU CAN FEEL THAT IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN DISASTROUS IF OBAMA HADN'T BEEN ELECTED.**

**CM:** Several adults, including the directors of the marching bands, told us that they feared there might indeed have been major rioting in case Obama had lost. But I guess it has more to do with the collective psyche: a large number of Americans have been hit by the crisis and my belief is that if Obama hadn't won, it might have put America's stability at risk.

**HC:** Had he been defeated, it might have been construed as racism. When we interviewed the students, whatever the colour of their skin, they said that if he didn't win, it would be because he was Black.

#### **EVEN THOUGH WE KNOW THE OUTCOME OF THE ELECTION, THE FILM HOLDS US IN SUSPENSE...**

**CM:** The exciting part was that when we were shooting, we didn't know how it would all end. Nobody knew for sure if Obama was going to win the election. I would often say it could be a film with a happy ending or with an unhappy one. This is probably my first film with a happy ending, but it was unintentional!

#### **YOU HAVE CUT IN SOME FOOTAGE OF THE KENNEDY AND MARTIN LUTHER KING ASSASSINATIONS.**

**CM:** We kept bringing up the threat of assassination against Obama. This is the threat against US politicians when they seem to be liberal and when they badly want to carry out reforms. I thought we couldn't possibly ignore this issue with the people we met. So we cut in the archive clip to emphasize the parallel between the fate of the Kennedys and Luther King on the one hand and the potential threat against Obama on the other.

**HC:** Even when we didn't put the question directly to the students, they would bring it up spontaneously. For instance, Ashley was concerned that Obama might get shot.





## CREW

**PRODUCERS** CLAUDE AND ANNIE MILLER (LES FILMS DE LA BOISSIÈRE), JEAN-LOUIS LIVI (F COMME FILM), FRANÇOIS BERTRAND (CAMERA LUCIDA PRODUCTIONS), NATHAN MILLER (CAN & CO PRODUCTION), JK AND ROB TREGENZA (CINEMA PARALLEL) **DIRECTORS** CLAUDE MILLER, HÉLÈNE COTINIER, PIERRE-NICOLAS DURAND **DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY** LUIS ARTEAGA PACHECO **SOUND** FRANÇOIS FAYARD **EDITOR** MORGANE SPACAGNA, KARINE TORJMAN

FRANCE / ENGLISH / 2009 / 1H35 / HD / COLOR / 1:85 / STEREO 5.1

## BIOGRAPHY

Claude Miller was born on February 20th, 1942 in Paris. He studied cinema at Hidhec where he majored in 1965. After assisting Marcel Carné, Michel Deville, Jean-Luc Godard and François Truffaut, he directed his first long-feature film in 1975, *The best way to walk*, which has been rewarded by a César. In 1987, he created, with his wife Annie Miller, their production company Les Films de la Boissière. The quality of his direction is characterized by his work with the actors. After multiple awards, *Marching Band* is his 15th long-feature film.

## FILMOGRAPHY

2007 **A SECRET**

2003 **LITTLE LILI** César Best Supporting Actress - Most Promising Actress 2004

2001 **BETTY FISHER AND OTHER STORIES**

1999 **OF WOMAN AND MAGIC** FIPRESCI Prize / Berlin 2000

1998 **CLASS TRIP** Jury Prize / Cannes 1998

1988 **THE LITTLE THIEF**

1985 **IMPUDENT GIRL** César Best Supporting Actress - Best Promising Actress 1986

1982 **DEADLY RUN**

1981 **UNDER SUSPICION** César Best Actor - Best Editing - Best Supporting Actor - Best Writing 1981

1975 **THE BEST WAY TO WALK** César Best Cinematography 1976

## SYNOPSIS

2008: election of the 44th president of the United States. Within this context university college and campus bands called "marching bands" were more than ever involved within political rallies. Especially popular in the United States, they reflect values of all sectors of american society, white as well as african-american cultural expression. They offer their devoted public exhilarating parades, high in musical and visual color. This film, boosted by the extraordinary energy of these marching bands, sketched a portrait of today's american youth and assessed the position of these students in the run up to a political decision that could change their life and the face of the world.



## CONTACT

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