

micro_scope



les films
CHRISTAL
UNE FILIALE DE ENTERTAINMENT ONE

MONSIEUR LAZHAR

a film by
Philippe Falardeau

starring
**Fellag, Sophie Nélisse, Émilien Néron
Danielle Proulx, Brigitte Poupart**

produced by
Luc Déry and Kim McCraw

Runtime: **94 minutes**
Canadian theatrical release: **October 28th, 2011**

a
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production

www.monsieurlazhar.com

synopsis

In Montreal, an elementary school teacher dies abruptly. Having learned of the incident in the newspaper, Bachir Lazhar (**Fellag**), a 55-year-old Algerian immigrant, goes to the school to offer his services as a substitute teacher. Quickly hired to replace the deceased, he finds himself in an establishment in crisis, while going through his own personal tragedy.

The cultural gap between Bachir and his class is made immediately apparent when he gives them a dictation exercise that is beyond their reach. Little by little, Bachir learns to better know this group of shaken but endearing kids, among whom are Alice and Simon, two charismatic pupils particularly affected by their teacher's death. While the class goes through the healing process, nobody in the school is aware of Bachir's painful past; nor do they suspect that he is at risk of being deported at any moment.

Adapted from a play by Evelyne de la Chenelière, *Monsieur Lazhar* depicts the encounter between two distant worlds and the power of self-expression. After *Congorama* and *It's Not Me, I Swear!*, Philippe Falardeau returns to the socially engaged filmmaking that marked his beginnings with *The Left-Hand Side of the Fridge*. Using great sensitivity and humor, the filmmaker follows a humble man who is ready to transcend his own loss in order to accompany children beyond the silence and taboo of death.

cast

Bachir Lazhar	FELLAG
Alice	Sophie NÉLISSE
Simon	Émilien NÉRON
Mrs Vaillancourt	Danielle PROULX
Claire	Brigitte POUPART
Janitor	Louis CHAMPAGNE
Gaston	Jules PHILIP
Mrs Dumas	Francine RUEL
Audrée	Sophie SANSCARTIER
Abdelmalek	Seddik BENSLIMANE
Marie-Frédérique	Marie-Eve BEAUREGARD
Boris	Louis-David LEBLANC
Victor	Vincent MILLARD
Commissionner	André ROBITAILLE
Me Gilbert Danis	Daniel GADOUAS
Marie-Frédérique's father	Stéphane DEMERS
Alice's mother	Evelyne de la CHENELIÈRE
Prosecutor	Marie CHARLEBOIS
Psychologist	Nico LAGARDE

crew

Writer / Director	Philippe FALARDEAU
Based on the stage play of	Evelyne DE LA CHENELIÈRE
Producers	Luc DÉRY, Kim McCRAW
Director of photography	Ronald PLANTE csc
Editor	Stéphane LAFLEUR
Production designer	Emmanuel FRÉCHETTE
Costume designer	Francesca CHAMBERLAND
Sound	Pierre BERTRAND, Mathieu BEAUDIN, Sylvain BELLEMARE, Bernard GARIÉPY STROBL
Original score	Martin LÉON
Line producer	Claude PAIEMENT
Post-production supervisor	Erik DANIEL
1 st assistant director	Carole DOUCET
Casting	Nathalie BOUTRIE, Emanuelle BEAUGRAND- CHAMPAGNE, Constance DEMONTOY
Production	micro_scope
International sales	Films Distribution

interview with Philippe Falardeau

After *It's not me, I swear !*, *Monsieur Lazhar* is your second film adaption of a literary work. What is it about this process that appeals to you?

I think I like adaptations because the work has already proved itself in its initial form, either on an emotional level for me or for the general public. One thing always worries me when I make a film: will I be able to live with this subject for a period of three or four years? Will it interest others as much as it interests me? It is equally important to understand the limits of one's medium and not try and reproduce what the original medium has done successfully. For *It's not me, I swear !*, it was clear that the humor found in Bruno Hébert's writing came from the discrepancy found in the naive narration of a 10-year-old child whose references are those of a 40 year old. For *Monsieur Lazhar*, Evelyne de la Chenelière's play stages only one character. What particularly interested me was its evocative strength. I also knew it would be risky to try and emulate Evelyne's poetic style, simply because I'm not a poet like she is and film as a medium doesn't lend itself to poetry in the same way.

So it was Bachir's strength that interested you and allowed you to imagine the rest?

I liked the subject of the play and its intention straightaway. While watching, I immediately imagined the film: I saw the classroom, the children... Daniel Brière's touching and spare direction most likely helped me to visualize a cinematographic work. The character Alice existed slightly, Simon barely at all, and yet there was a whole story to invent. I knew there was room for creation. I also liked the fact that Bachir's tragic story of being an immigrant wasn't the central plot. He is confronted with something that is very concrete within the society where he has settled, but this confrontation could have occurred anywhere. The story had to be able to stand on its own merit, beyond the fact that he has gone through a traumatic event leading to his exile. It has an influence on what is going to happen, it makes him a foreigner who is going to upset our view of the world, but I still do not believe it is the subject of the film. During the play, I thought: "Here is a rich character." He's not a character that has just been invented making us wonder what could be his traits and features. Not at all. Bachir has his own backstory, his own history, even before the movie starts.

How did you work with Evelyne de la Chenelière?

From the moment she accepted that I adapt the play, it was understood that I would be the screenwriter. I asked her to help me uphold the character's integrity and to follow me step by step. I wanted her to make sure to bring me back in line each time I headed in a direction that would betray the character's essence. She also was my first reader, along with my producers. Whenever I hit a wall, because she is an extraordinarily skillful writer, she was able to come up with real ideas. Not necessarily concrete ideas for the film, but she always knew when there was an important moment at stake and she'd send me her reflections, articles to read... and that unblocked me. That made me want to write with someone because sometimes you think you're at an impasse, but in the end there is a door – you just don't see it. Evelyne also helped me to reach emotionally deeper places for the film.

It was also important for you that what Bachir was going through would be plausible.

I did a lot of research to get to that point. A year after having started the adaptation of the play, in May 2008, I went to Algiers to see where Bachir came from to try and understand why he would have left his country. I also wanted to see what a civil servant's life would be like there... I imagined something very elaborate, that isn't in the film, but which helped me to understand him. Long before, I had also visited several countries such as Syria, Libya, Egypt and Tunisia. I have believed for a longtime that this area provides a fertile ground for film subjects. When the Arab Spring arrived, for me, the timing was simultaneous with the film I had just completed. Why did Bachir come to Montreal? Because he didn't have the choice: even several years after the civil war, Algeria is still facing many problems.

But could the Bachir character have been from another country?

I think so; but then perhaps the problem would be the language. I had thought about Lebanon. The character had not only to master the French language, but also love it greatly. Because in my mind, the healing process happens through the act of speaking, teaching, loving the French language and reading. Algeria worked well because there are many intellectuals there, great writers... Once in a Quebec school, Bachir is caught in a system that he doesn't know and he has to search within himself to draw from what he was taught in his childhood. So his only reference is a French method of teaching that is considered old-fashioned. It shouldn't be forgotten that Bachir is a North African immigrant who is profoundly secular. This was a very conscious decision on my part. He represents the "Other", who is above all a man searching for solutions, not in religion or in morals, not even in his cultural references in the "ethnic" sense of the term, but in relation to teaching, to our common relationship with the French language and literature and then in the fundamental act of communication. There is also irony in the fact that he has come to teach in a former colony that has a particular relationship with the French language, while he also comes from a former colony.

In the film, you emphasize the importance of speaking properly.

I wanted to show that speaking French correctly is not just an academic or intellectual concern. It also has value for creating an identity. To Bachir, speaking correctly and reading are important. That said, *Monsieur Lazhar* is not a film about the French language in Quebec, or about the quality of its instruction, even though it's true that there are still shortcomings in that area. On the contrary, I consider teaching to be an act of resistance. In my view, teachers are modern heroes. So the film is more of a paean to that fact than it is a critique of the educational system. Yes, the system is very feminized and highly bureaucratic, but that's nothing new...

Why did you choose Fellag for the role of Bachir?

I knew from the start, unless a miracle happened, that we wouldn't be able to find an actor in Quebec, because there isn't a large enough community of Maghreb actors. Given the context of the story, I was partial to France and its abundance of fine actors... I had a few people in mind, but in the end I found them too "Parisian" for the role. It was Evelyne who led me to Fellag, because he had already given a public reading of her play in France. I didn't know him before, but it made sense because he himself had been exiled during the Algerian civil war. While he was in Tunisia, the authorities warned him not to return, as there was a fatwa against him. He has experienced what Bachir went through, and for me that gave him additional depth. Even if his one-man shows don't at all resemble the character in the film, he has a sensitivity and intelligence that greatly interested me. I liked him right away when we met. He was very familiar with the play, and after having read the screenplay he immediately wanted the role. Fellag is enormously

generous and has a great authenticity. I'm very happy with what he did, which is at the other end of the spectrum from his usual work.

After *It's no me, I swear!*, was it your intention to work with child actors again?

The choice was really made because of the play. The problem that occurs when children play a central role in a movie, is that one always wonders if the film is for children or for the family - something that never happens when there are only adult characters. However in life, we never ask ourselves when a situation occurs if it is a child situation or an adult situation... It's just life. I think that I make films about life and that lends itself to there being children.

As a screenplay writer and director, you still have to adapt your working style to the children.

Of course, but I think in general it is similar to the way one adapts their style for different actors. One thing that is really different is when it comes to an adult, I never worry if he knows his lines. Also, the set has to be managed in a more playful and relaxed manner. Yet as far as the acting is concerned, I maintain that these children are capable of grasping the emotions at stake for their characters, that they well understand that it's a job, and that I am not asking them to be who they are in real life. It was a bit more difficult in *It's not me, I swear !* because the main character had a distinctive gift for repartee. This time, I tried to be less "adult" in my writing, even if the Alice character is particularly mature for her age. Obviously there are lines that are a bit my perspective through the words of a child. Generally speaking, there is a great deal of work done in preproduction and Félix Ross, the acting coach who ran the children's workshops with me, must be thanked. She understands exactly in what direction I want to go, and without her I would never have made it.

How did you choose the school where the film is set?

It could be a school that's "close to home" but it's also clearly an urban school, even if its precise location isn't revealed. On the other hand, I think the class's ethnic mix says that this can only be Montreal. It's also a private school, which is important for making Bachir's hiring more realistic. In a private school, the principal has a lot of independence, because there's no school board to get in the way.

The class and the school are shown in a very realistic manner.

Contrary to Evelyne, who has the ability to invent something from nothing, I need to recycle. I started my career with *La Course destination Monde* (a Canadian television show where young filmmakers were invited to travel to different regions of the world and make short documentary films) and my reference point in cinema is observation. I have a strong interest in films such as those by Ken Loach or Mike Leigh, for example. Their characters are clearly drawn from reality, or at least they are anchored in something that is naturalistic, which is my preference. Before making *Monsieur Lazhar*, I spent several weeks in primary schools to see, for example, how a child fidgets in his seat... My art director, Emmanuel Fréchette, also conducted extraordinary research in a dozen or so schools in order to decorate ours. What is seen on the walls has been pieced together: all the artwork comes from children's work gathered in real schools. As with *The Left-hand side of the Fridge*, which in the beginning was supposed to be a documentary, I was very happy, with *Monsieur Lazhar*, to return to a universe where I needed to document things. It's fiction, but I work from a mixture of people I've known, I've seen or with whom I've spoken, and all of a sudden it all fleshes out. For me, film is a medium that is anchored in reality, unlike literature. I'm interested in life, especially in a film that claims to reflect a certain reality. This wasn't my main interest for *It's not me, I swear !*, but this time it was.

You are also making a return to a more socially conscious type of filmmaking.

After the *Course*, I made documentaries, then I made *The Left-Hand Side of the Fridge*, a social comedy... a film that dealt with unemployment, but that also became a political piece in its own right. Next, I think I veered clearly into pure fiction. *It's Not Me, I Swear!* is not a political film even though it has a social backdrop, and the same goes for *Congorama*. Now, I've returned making a kind of film that forced me to do a bit more research into the real world. At this point in my life, it was important for me to get back to a more socially aware kind of film. I often ask myself about the purpose and meaning of my films. I ask, "Is it important to make this particular film?" Obviously, few people in Quebec ask that kind of question, but I consider it a very important one.

In what ways does *Monsieur Lazhar* have a political dimension?

I think the film can be seen as a political piece in response to the public discourse on the idea of "reasonable accommodation" promoted by Canadian institutions. When we accommodate, we don't truly interact. *Monsieur Lazhar* is the opposite of reasonable accommodation. My idea of integration and immigration involves seeking out the Other. In that sense, I think the film is political. Beyond the themes of mourning and healing, the film talks about really getting to know the Other. Bachir tries to break down certain taboos in the school, such as not talking about death.

Is it also a film about mourning?

It's not a film about mourning, but rather a film about the complex organic entity that is a school. There is inevitably a healing process, but what particularly interested me was that the mourning process is taking place within the context of an encounter between an immigrant and us. And so the school is going to work through this tragedy thanks to a "free electron", a foreigner who is also going through his own mourning process. Therefore, I like to think the film is rather a response to pervading views on how to integrate immigrants. As far as I'm concerned, there isn't a "how." Let's live together with the immigrant, in everything we may experience: eat, drink, laugh, work, live... and overcome hardships together. That's what integration is; it isn't anything else. It's not a matter of establishing policies.

But there is also another dimension quite dear to me that surfaced in the film, although it wasn't in the play. It's the entire question of the codification of relationships between children and adults in schools. Over the years, we have established rules that forbid adults from touching children, no matter what the circumstances, even if it is just to "put sunscreen on their back", as the gym teacher character comments. We very well understand the reasons behind these rules and what's at stake with them. But the result is that teachers, parents and even the children walk on eggs whenever it comes to showing a certain form of affection or closeness. The question is extremely delicate and constitutes a pivotal moment in the film. I think the film speaks a great deal about this, imperceptibly at first, until the end where the subject matter becomes explicit.

During the entire film, Bachir is someone who remains strong and dignified...

Qualities that often characterize immigrants. He is discreet when it comes to himself. Bachir feels that it isn't relevant to put his emotions or his pain on display. In a world where communicating emotions is highly encouraged, he chooses to keep his to himself. And in my opinion, that is a mistake. Especially with his colleague Claire, among others. At the same time, it's what gives his character dignity: he is much more interested in helping the class work through and free themselves from their grief; so he ignores his own. But unconsciously, I think he pushes Alice and Simon because he wants to push himself. Simon is the child who carries all of the school's guilt. In the end, when he yields to the emotion, the tension felt by the entire school is released.

The importance given to words gives the film a poetic dimension.

I think the poetry is above all the result of Evelyne's work. I think there's also some poetry in the musicality of Bachir's lines, and in the idea that the spoken word can be cinematic. Portraying speech, verbs, is not a simple matter! When I watched the play, I knew I had to avoid lyric poetry. But it was still important to me to close the film on a poetic note, the way the play ends, because I was so deeply moved by its closing fable. Except that for the film, I asked Evelyne to write a different version. To get her started I gave her my impressions and emotions, and she wrote a very nice scene.

Even if the film is dramatic, and the subject is serious, there are humorous elements throughout...

Rarely in life does tragedy or drama come alone. It's often a question of perspective... In *It's not me, I swear!*, the humor was built on distance, an off-beat, indeed at times absurd humor. In *Monsieur Lazhar*, the humor is more subtle, more down-to-earth. The Algerian character's naivety surprises us and makes us laugh. When a cultural gap is subtly played upon, there is always a rich potential for humor. The maintenance man and the gym teacher constantly have odd and direct lines that make you laugh. You must understand that, strictly speaking, there aren't any gags. It's simply that life is comical and I think we should realize it. For me, films with no humor at all are science-fiction. It just can't be!

You worked with several new people on *Monsieur Lazhar*. How did you work together?

First there's the director of photography, Ronald Plante. We complemented each other really well. He's instinctive and emotional, whereas I'm very cerebral. We work very differently, and it was a perfect fit. He has a great deal of experience and works very quickly. He made me a minimalist lighting system that cut down on the waiting when we changed angles, which was very useful for working with the children. He is also excellent with natural light and really understood what I was looking for. We worked well as a team and I appreciated his eye, his way of filming children...

Then there was Martin Léon, who wrote the music. We had wanted to work together for a very long time. Martin is someone who's always willing and able to start over until you have exactly what you want. He got deeply involved – he read the script before filming and spent some time on the set. It was a long process of reflection. When we started editing, we played classical music, Mozart and Scarlatti. I asked him, whatever else he did, to compose in a similar vein. He ended up writing a theme that starts out very abstract and comes together over the course of the film. At first very ethereal with its use of the xylophone, and then played on the piano at the end. I like the fact that it's very sober from beginning to end. But despite that seriousness, Martin composed a piece that's deeply touching, that literally carries us through to the end of the film.

As for the editing, I don't remember who suggested that I work with Stéphane Lafleur. For a long time I had wanted to work with another director. I think today's Quebec filmmakers are too isolated compared to our predecessors, who tell their stories about life at the NFB, with all their group projects, always helping each other out. Things aren't like that anymore. So I'm really happy that a director edited my film. And when Stéphane was editing, he was being an editor, not a director. I think he handled his role perfectly. And he also complemented me on the handling of emotion. I'm very emotionally reserved, and I was afraid the film was too melodramatic. Stéphane put in a lot of hours working on that. Without me at first, because I wanted him to put together something he could show me. It was a very satisfying collaboration.

Interviewed by Marie-Hélène Mello.

director's biography

After studying Canadian politics at University of Ottawa and International relations at University Laval in Quebec City, Philippe Falardeau was chosen as a contestant for the 1993 edition of the television series ***La Course destination monde*** (a contest where the participants tour the world making short films). While there, he directs 20 films and ends up winning the race as well as the IDRC Award (International Development Research Center of Canada). In 1995, he collaborates with director Jacques Godbout to co-write *Le Sort de l'Amérique*, a National Film Board of Canada documentary.



Two years later, he returns to the National Film Board to direct a medium length documentary on Chinese immigration in Canada called ***Pâté chinois***. The film is presented at the Montreal World Film Festival and wins Best Screenplay Award at the Yorkton Film Festival. In 2000, Philippe Falardeau directs his first theatrical feature film, ***La Moitié gauche du frigo*** (*The Left-Hand Side of the Fridge*). The film was a big success in Canada and screened in numerous festivals around the world including Rotterdam, London, Paris, Seattle, Vancouver and Montreal. *La Moitié gauche du frigo* wins the Citytv Award for Best Canadian First Feature at the Toronto Film Festival, and the Claude Jutra Award at the Genie Awards ceremony. In France, the film was released theatrically by Pierre Grise Distribution.

With ***Congorama***, released in 2006, Philippe Falardeau offers us his second feature film, a Canada-Belgium-France coproduction. Distributed theatrically in Quebec and in Europe, the film also distinguishes itself at the numerous festivals where it is presented. After premiering at the Director's Fortnight in Cannes, as the closing night film, *Congorama* makes its way to festivals in Munich, Namur, Toronto, New York (New Directors/New Films), Pusan and Göteborg. In addition to earning 5 Jutra Awards, including Best Film, Best Direction and Best Screenplay, the film also wins Best Screenplay at the Genie Awards in 2007.

C'est pas moi, je le jure! (*It's Not Me, I Swear!*), his third feature film, was adapted from a Bruno Hébert novel. The world premiere of the film took place at the Toronto Film Festival in the Special Presentation category. At the Berlin Film Festival, the film screens in the Generation section and wins the prestigious Chrystal Bear and Deutsche Kinderhilfswerk Grand Prix Award. *C'est pas moi, je le jure!* also wins the Grand Prix Award of the Écrans Juniors section at the 2009 edition of the Cannes Film Festival. After over 60 invitations on the world festival circuit, the film is sold in about 40 countries. In Canada, the film wins as Best Canadian Film at the Atlantic Film Festival and at the Vancouver Film Critics Awards.

Monsieur Lazhar, an adaptation of the stage play *Bashir Lazhar* by Evelyne de la Chenelière, is his fourth feature film.

director's filmography

Monsieur Lazhar

2011 | feature film | 94 minutes | 35 mm | micro_scope

- ◆ World Premiere at Locarno International Film Festival, Piazza Grande
- ◆ Winner of UBS Audience Award and Variety Piazza Grande Award at Locarno Film Festival
- ◆ Official selection at Toronto International Film Festival, Special Presentation

C'est pas moi, je le jure! (*It's Not Me, I Swear!*)

2008 | feature film | 110 minutes | 35 mm | micro_scope

- ◆ World Premiere at Toronto International Film Festival, Special Presentation
- ◆ Winner of the Crystal Bear in the Children's jury category at the Berlin International film festival
- ◆ Winner of the Grand Prix for Best feature film (Generation Kplus) at the Berlin International film festival

Congorama

2006 | feature film | 105 minutes | 35 mm | micro_scope and Tarantula

- ◆ Premiered at the Director's Fortnight in Cannes, as the closing night film in May 2006
- ◆ Montreal Premiere as opening film of Festival du Nouveau Cinéma
- ◆ Presented at Munich, Toronto, Namur, Pusan and Göteborg film festivals
- ◆ Presented at the MoMA in New York for New Directors / New Films
- ◆ Winner of 5 Jutra Awards, including Best Film, Best Direction and Best Screenplay in 2007
- ◆ Winner of Best Screenplay Award at the 2007 Genie Awards
- ◆ Winner of Best Canadian Feature at Atlantic Film Festival
- ◆ Released theatrically in France by UGC-PH

La méthode Morin

2005 | documentary | 30 minutes | video | Productions 23

Boulevard Saint-Laurent

2003 | documentary series | 6 x 22 minutes | video | Fair Play

Ça c'est Laurence

2002 | short film | 5 minutes | video

Jean Laliberté

2001 | short film | 8 minutes | video

La Moitié gauche du frigo (*The Left-Hand Side of the Fridge*)

2000 | feature film | 89 minutes | 35 mm | Qu4tre par Quatre Films

- ◆ Citytv Award for Best first Canadian feature film at the 2000 Toronto Film Festival
- ◆ Claude Jutra Award for Best first feature film at the 2001 Genie Awards
- ◆ Presented at festivals in Rotterdam, London, Paris (Forum des images), Seattle and Vancouver
- ◆ Released theatrically in France by Pierre Grise Distribution

Pâté Chinois

1997 | documentary | 52 minutes | video | NFB (National Film Board of Canada)

- ◆ Award for Best Screenplay at the Yorkton Film Festival

La Course destination monde

1992 | short documentaries in a TV series | 20 x 5 minutes | video | Radio-Canada

- ◆ Winner of the race
- ◆ Winner of the IDRC (International Development Research Center) Award

Evelyne de la Chenelière

author of the stage play *Bashir Lazhar*

Evelyne de la Chenelière studied Modern literature at the Sorbonne and then went on to study theater at Michel-Granvale school in Paris. As an author and actress, she wrote several plays which were presented in Quebec as well as in Europe, and translated into several languages. As we think of *Strawberries in January*, *Au bout du fil*, *Henri et Margaux*, *Aphrodite en 04*, *L'Héritage de Darwin (Darwin's heritage)*, *Bashir Lazhar*, and *Le plan américain* (Best play at the Saarbrücken Scoops Festival in Germany in 2009), her creation is an accurate observation of the human nature.

In 2006, she received the Governor General's Literary Award for *Désordre Public*. The play *Les pieds des anges* was part of the 2009 season at Espace GO theater and was also nominated for the Governor General's Literary Awards. Her play *L'imposture* was presented at the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde the same year.



Izabel Zimmer

Evelyne de la Chenelière was singled out by the regretted Jean-Pierre Ronfard and worked many times under his direction for the Nouveau Théâtre Expérimental where she is still creating regularly in tandem with her partner Daniel Brière. Their recent creation, *Ronfard, nu devant son miroir*, was presented in March 2011 at l'Espace Libre.

Evelyne de la Chenelière also acted in the feature films *Le Colis* by Gaëlle D'Ynglemare, *Café de Flore* by Jean-Marc Vallée and the latest feature film from Philippe Falardeau, *Monsieur Lazhar*, a film adaptation of her own play.

In March 2011, Evelyne de la Chenelière published her first novel *La concordance des temps* at Lèmeac Editions.

actors' biographies

Fellag

Bachir Lazhar



Fellag is an artist from Algeria's Kabylie region. From 1968 to 1972, he studied theatre at the Institut national d'art dramatique et chorégraphique, the country's national theatre and dance school, in Algiers. He started to appear on Algerian stages before the age of 20. In the late 1970s, he spent several years in exile, including in France and Canada, but returned to Algeria to work as an actor and director at the Théâtre National

Algérien, and was named director of the theatre in the city of Béjaïa in 1993. A year later, Fellag toured Algeria and Tunisia with the play *Un bateau pour l'Australie*. In 1995, a bomb exploded during a performance of *Delirium* in Tunis; Fellag then decided to move to Paris permanently. He produced his first show in French in 1997, *Djurdjurassique Bled*. The play was a huge hit in France and earned Fellag a major theatre critics' award (Grand Prix, Syndicat de la critique) for best new talent. In 2003, he drew inspiration from Brecht's *Threepenny Opera* for his play *Opéra D'Casbah*, directed by Jérôme Savary. The next year, Fellag produced and starred in a one-man show, *Le dernier chameau*, in collaboration with Patrick Sommier.

Since then, European audiences have known him mainly for his one-man shows. *Tous les algériens sont des mécaniciens* (2010) was a critical and popular success, running for 320 performances. As well as being an actor and director, Fellag is also the author of three short-story collections and two novels published by JC Lattès: *Rue des petites daurades* (2001) and *L'Allumeur de rêves berbères* (2007).

Throughout his acting career, Fellag has also appeared in films, including *Liberté, la nuit* by Philippe Garrel (1993), *Le Gone du Chaâba* by Christophe Ruggia (1998), *Inch'Allah Dimanche* by Yamina Benguigui (2001) and *Fleur de sang* by Myriam Mézières (2002). In 2007, he acted in *Momo Mambo* by Laïla Marrakchi, *L'ennemi intime* by Florent Emilio Siri and *Michou d'Auber* by Thomas Gilou, in 2008 he was in *Les Barons* by Nabil Ben Yadir and *Zarafa* by Rémi Bezançon and Jean-Christophe Lié and, in 2009, in *Ici* by Angelo Cianci. In 2011, he voiced the character of Sheik Mohammed Sfar for the animated film *Le Chat du rabbin* by Joann Sfar, and plays the lead in the new film by Canadian director Philippe Falardeau, *Monsieur Lazhar*, which had its world premiere at the Locarno Festival in August 2011.

Sophie Néliste

Alice

Sophie Néliste, 11, is not only a self-taught actress but an excellent competitive gymnast thanks to her participation in a sports/study program.

She has made ten commercials to date and played major roles in series such as *Toute la Vérité* (2009), *Mirador* (2009) and *Les Parents* (2010-2011). She plays the role of a handicapped girl in the upcoming series *Vertige* (2011).

On the big screen, Sophie will soon appear as Marie in *Ésimésac*, the sequel to Luc Picard's *Babine*. She is also one of the leads in Philippe Falardeau's latest film, *Monsieur Lazhar*.



Émilien Néron

Simon



Émilien Néron, 12, has attended Montreal's Félix Leclerc School for the last five years, where he is learning singing, theatre, piano and percussion.

At the age of 8, he began his professional career with appearances in several television commercials. Émilien landed his first parts in television series with *Les Rescapés de la justice* (2008) and *Un tueur si proche* (2010).

In early 2009 he drew notice for his performance as the Child in the stage production *Paradis Perdu*. He again drew praise for the role of Gavroche in the musical *Les Misérables* (2010), directed by Frédéric Dubois and presented at Montreal's Place des Arts.

Émilien made his film debut in *Pour toujours, les Canadiens* (2009). He will soon appear in Philippe Falardeau's new film, *Monsieur Lazhar*.

Brigitte Poupart

Claire

Since graduating from Montreal's Conservatoire de Théâtre in 1990, Brigitte Poupart has performed in more than 30 plays, on both major stages and in experimental theatres. She has been in several international productions, touring Australia, the United States and Europe. She was a founding member of the musical group Les Secrétaires Percutantes and of the Momentum theatre company. She has also taken on a variety of roles with her company, Transthéâtre,



which has staged productions including *Le Défilé des canards dorés* (1998), *W.C.* (1999), *Babel* (2002), *L'Édifice* (2003), *Cérémonials* (2004), *L'Autoroute* (2006), *Un jour où l'autre* (2008), *Les Cabarets insupportables* (2007 to 2010) and *What's Next?* (2011).

Brigitte Poupart was production designer and co-artistic director, with feminist writer Hélène Pednault, for the 2005 Political Theatre Week (Semaine de théâtre politique) at Espace Go, and joined the comedy troupe Les Zapartistes that same year. Recently, she produced stage shows for a number of musicians including Beast, Marie-Jo Thério, Yann Perreau, Mister Vallaire and Alex Nevsky. In February 2011, she produced the musical shows *Hommage à la Bolduc* (featuring a large cast of artists) and *The Man I love* (Florence K. and Nathalie Choquette) for the 12th edition of the Montreal High Lights Festival.

In 2011, she was an actor and dancer in two productions by choreographer Dave St-Pierre, *La pornographie des âmes*, presented at the Monument National, and the European tour of *Un peu de tendresse Bordel de merde*. The same year, she and St-Pierre presented their first collaborative work, *What's Next? Qu'est-ce qu'on fait maintenant ?* at the Festival Transamériques in Montreal.

Her television credits include a five-season stint on the Radio-Canada comedy *Catherine* (1998 to 2004), which earned her a Gémeaux nomination in 2004. In 2010 and 2011, she appeared in the series *Musée Éden* and the teen series *Le club des doigts croisés*, both shown on Radio-Canada.

On the big screen, Brigitte was in the cast of Philippe Falardeau's *Congorama* (2005) and worked with the same director on his new film, playing the role of Claire in *Monsieur Lazhar*.

Danielle Proulx*Mrs. Vaillancourt*

After studying theatre at Collège Lionel-Groulx, Danielle Proulx acted in more than 30 productions on major stages, in experimental theatres and with youth companies. In 1981, she was in the cast of a landmark Jean-Pierre Ronfard production, the epic play *Vie et mort du Roi Boîteux*. She also performed in *Les Troyennes* (1985-1986), *Les trois sœurs* (2001), *Les belles-sœurs* (2003) and *Vincent River* (2006). Recently, she was in the cast of the plays *Faits pour*

s'aimer (2008 to 2010) and *L'espérance de vie des éoliennes* (2009). Danielle has also worked as a director, with *Amour sur mesure* in the summer of 2004 for Théâtre Beaumont St-Michel. In 2010, she appeared in a French-language production of *Threepenny Opera* at Théâtre du Nouveau Monde, and in *À la recherche d'Elvis* (2011) and *Transmission* (2011).

She began her television career in 1985 with the series *L'agent fait le bonheur*, which she followed up with leading roles in television series, earning numerous awards and nominations in the process. In 1998 she won the Géméaux for best actress for her performance as Anette in *Sous le signe du lion* (1997 to 1999). She also appeared in the series *Jamais deux sans toi* (1997 to 1999), *Les héritiers Duval* (1994 to 1996), *Mon meilleur ennemi* (2000 to 2002), *Histoire de famille* (2004), *Casino* (2005 to 2007), *Annie et ses hommes* (2007) and *Lance et compte* (2006 to 2008). Danielle made an impression on young viewers with her character of Cornemuse in the series of the same name, a role that won her the best actress Géméaux in 2000 and a Métrostar award in 2004. Recently, she appeared in *Aveux* (2009), which landed her a Géméaux nomination for best actress in a television series.

Her film credits include Robert Favreau's *Portion d'éternité*, for which she won an acting award at the 1989 Montreal World Film Festival. In 1990, she acted alongside Rémy Girard in *Amoureux fou* and appeared in *L'enfant d'eau* (1994) and *Histoire de famille* (2004). In 2004, she played Laurianne Beaulieu in the film *C.R.A.Z.Y.* by Jean-Marc Vallée, a performance that won her several awards, including the Jutra and the Genie for best supporting actress in 2006. Recently, Danielle appeared in the feature films *Truffes* (2007), *Le Déserteur* (2009) and *Reste avec moi* (2010). She plays the school principal in the latest film by director Philippe Falardeau, *Monsieur Lazhar*.

the production company

micro_scope is an independent production company. Founded by producer **Luc Déry** in 2002, the company's main objective is the development and production of innovating, inventive and accessible feature films.

In its first year of existence, micro_scope participated in two co-production projects : **A Problem With Fear** from Gary Burns, director of *Waydowntown*, and Bertrand Bonello's *Tiresia*, a collaboration with French company *Haut et court*. *A Problem With Fear* opened the Perspective Canada section at the 2003 Toronto Film Festival and was selected for the Berlin Film Festival, while *Tiresia* was part of the official competition in Cannes 2003.

In January 2004, producer **Kim McCraw** joined micro_scope for its first solo production, *Familia*. This first feature film by director Louise Archambault was released in September 2005. The film participated at the Locarno Film Festival's International Competition and opened the Canada First section at the Toronto Film Festival where it won the Citytv Award for Best Canadian First Feature. *Familia* also screened in many other international festivals like Göteborg, Sao Paulo and Hong Kong and was released theatrically in France and in the United States. At the 2006 Canadian Genie Awards, *Familia* was nominated in 7 categories including Best Film and Best Director and won the Claude Jutra Award for the Best First Feature Film.

Congorama was released theatrically in Canada in October 2006. Philippe Falardeau's second feature stars Olivier Gourmet (winner of the 2002 Cannes Festival Best Actor prize for its role in *The Son*, by the Dardenne brothers) and Paul Ahmarani (*The Left-Hand Side of the Fridge*). The film is a co-production with Belgium and France. *Congorama* premiered at Cannes in May 2006 as the closing film for the Director's Fortnight. The film was a Special Presentation at the Toronto International Film Festival and was chosen as the opening feature for the Montreal Festival du Nouveau Cinema. *Congorama* also screened in many international festivals like San Francisco, New Directors / New Films at MoMA, Pusan, Göteborg and Halifax where it won the Best Canadian Film Award. At the 2007 Quebec Jutra Awards, the film won five prizes including Best Film, Best Director and Best Screenplay.

In November 2007, micro_scope released ***Continental, un film sans fusil*** (*Continental, A Film Without Guns*), the first feature film of Stéphane Lafleur. The world premiere, in August 2007, was at the Venice International Film Festival, in the Venice Days section. The film was also selected in many other festivals around the world, such as Thessaloniki, Göteborg, Rotterdam and the AFI Film Festival in Los Angeles. *Continental* also made its mark at the Toronto International Film Festival where it won the Citytv Award for Best First Canadian Feature. It was also awarded the Bayard d'Or for the Best Film at the Namur International Francophone Film Festival and the Borsos Award for Best New Canadian Feature Film at the Whistler Film Festival. In March 2008, the film won four Jutra Awards for Best Film, Best Director, Best Screenplay and Best Supporting Actor (Réal Bossé).

In September 2008, Philippe Falardeau's third feature, ***C'est pas moi, je le jure!*** (*It's Not Me, I Swear!*), based on a novel by Bruno Hébert, was released in Canada. Following its premiere at the Toronto Film Festival (Special Presentations), it was shown at the Berlinale in the Generation section where it won the Crystal Bear and the Deutsche Kinderhilfswerk Grand Prix for Best Feature Film. The film also won many awards such as Best Canadian Film and Best Actor at the Atlantic Film Festival in Halifax and Best Canadian Film and Best Supporting Actress (Suzanne Clément) from the Vancouver Film Critics Circle.

In 2010, micro_scope released ***Incendies*** by director Denis Villeneuve. Adapted from Wajdi Mouawad's stage play, the film stars Lubna Azabal (*Paradise Now*), Mélissa Désormeaux-Poulin, Maxim Gaudette and Rémy Girard (*The Declin of the American Empire*, *The Barbarian Invasions*). After premiering at the Venice Film Festival where it won the Venice Days Best Film award, *Incendies* was invited in many festivals around the world including Telluride, Sundance, Rotterdam (Audience Award), Warsaw (Grand Prix Award), Abu Dhabi (Best Actress for Lubna Azabal), Valladolid (Best Script, Audience Award and Young Jury Award), Pusan, Taipei and Thessaloniki. The film is also a four time winner of Best Canadian Film Awards in the Toronto, Vancouver, Halifax and Calgary Film Festivals. Distributed by Sony Pictures Classics in the United States, the film was sold in more than 50 countries. *Incendies* was nominated for Best Foreign Language Film at the 83rd Academy Awards.

The world premiere of ***En terrains connus***, Stephane Lafleur's latest feature film, took place at the Berlin Film Festival in 2011, in the *Forum* section where it won the Ecumenical Jury Prize. In Montreal, the film opened the Rendez-vous du cinema québécois. The film was also invited to many festivals including Jeonju, Shanghai, Durban, Melbourne, Motovun (Croatia), Monterrey (Mexico), Namur. Lately, *En terrains connus* was the winner of Best Narrative Feature at the Los Angeles Film Festival and of the Jury Grand Prix in the New Competition Talent section of the Taipei Film Festival.

Monsieur Lazhar, Philippe Falardeau's fourth feature film, premiered at the Locarno Film Festival on the Piazza Grande in August 2011, where it won the UBS Audience Award and the Variety Piazza Grande Award. The film, distributed worldwide by Paris-based Films Distribution, will have its North American premiere this month at the Toronto International Film Festival.

Finally, micro_scope is preparing the production of ***Whitewash*** by director Emanuel Hoss-Desmarais and screenwriter Marc Tulin, as well as the Canada-France coproduction ***Inch'Allah*** by director Anaïs Barbeau-Lavalette (*Le ring*).