

"Not since Truffaut's 'The 400 Blows' or Resnais' 'Hiroshima, Mon Amour' has there been so deeply personal and so creatively exciting a film as Michel Drach's 'Les Violons Du Bal'."

- Judith Crist/NEW YORK MAGAZINE

"REMARKABLE!"

- Seth Goldschlager/NEWSWEEK

"A unique movie full of humanity, originality, wry wit, effortless nostalgia and a soupçon of cynicism."

- Bruce Williamson/PLAYBOY

"TOTALLY LIFE-AFFIRMING."

- Deena Brown/PARENTS MAGAZINE

"Brilliantly conceived and artistically executed - manages to be romantic, ironic, subtle and cynical - and ultimately memorable."

- Bernard Drew/GANNETT SYNDICATE

"A TOUR DE FORCE!"

- Joseph Gelmus/NEWSDAY

"You should and you must see 'Les Violons Du Bal'."

- Bob Salmaggi/WINS RADIO

"A MIRACLE OF A MOVIE!"

- Norma McLain Stoop
AFTER DARK

"One of the most moving, most beautifully made and acted films of the year."

- Frances Taylor
NEWHOUSE NEWSPAPERS

"The acting is excellent, immensely sensitive."

- Frances Hermdge/NY POST

"Terrific! You feel a joy, an exaltation that is the most intense kind of pleasure that art can afford. I couldn't wait to tell you about this beautiful film."

- Bruce Cook/THE NATIONAL OBSERVER

"OUTSTANDING!"

- William Wolf/CUE

"A RARE ACCOMPLISHMENT!"

- INDEPENDENT FILM JOURNAL

"A wonderful movie that is likely to sweep the awards at next year's Oscar ceremonies. A stunning screen achievement. Don't miss this brilliant, moving, engrossing screen experience. As soon as it started, I knew I was watching one of the year's 10 best!"

- Jeffrey Lyons/CBS RADIO

GRAND PRIX
D'INTERPRETATION FEMININE
FESTIVAL DE CANNES 1974

MARIE-JOSÉE NAT

les Violons du BAL

a film by MICHEL DRACH / with the participation of
JEAN-LOUIS TRINTIGNANT
A VIOLONS ASSOCIATES LTD. PRESENTATION. Distributed by LEVITT-PICKMAN FILM CORPORATION

B'WAY & 67th ST. 724-3700 **Regency** 12, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10



MARIE-JOSÉ NAT



BEST ACTRESS
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

1974



OFFICIAL SELECTION
CANNES CLASSICS
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

2014

Marie-José NAT

in

Michel DRACH'S "LES VIOLONS DU BAL"
(VIOLINS AT THE BALL)

with the special participation of Jean-Louis TRINTIGNANT

AMERICAN PREMIERE : **December 15th, 1974** REGENCY THEATER

running time : 104 minutes

PORT-ROYAL FILMS David Drach +33 6 18 35 58 78 portroyalfilms@gmail.com

In this WW II drama based on an autobiographical story by director Michel Drach, a Jewish boy and his family living in Nazi occupied France, attempt to escape the invaders. Later the boy grows up to become a filmmaker obsessed with chronicling his childhood.

written, directed and produced by **Michel DRACH**

photography **Yann LE MASSON** (Black & White)
 William LUBTCHANSKY (Color)

music **Jean-Manuel DE SCARANO**
 & Jacques MONTY

Marie-José NAT Michel's wife
 Michel's mother

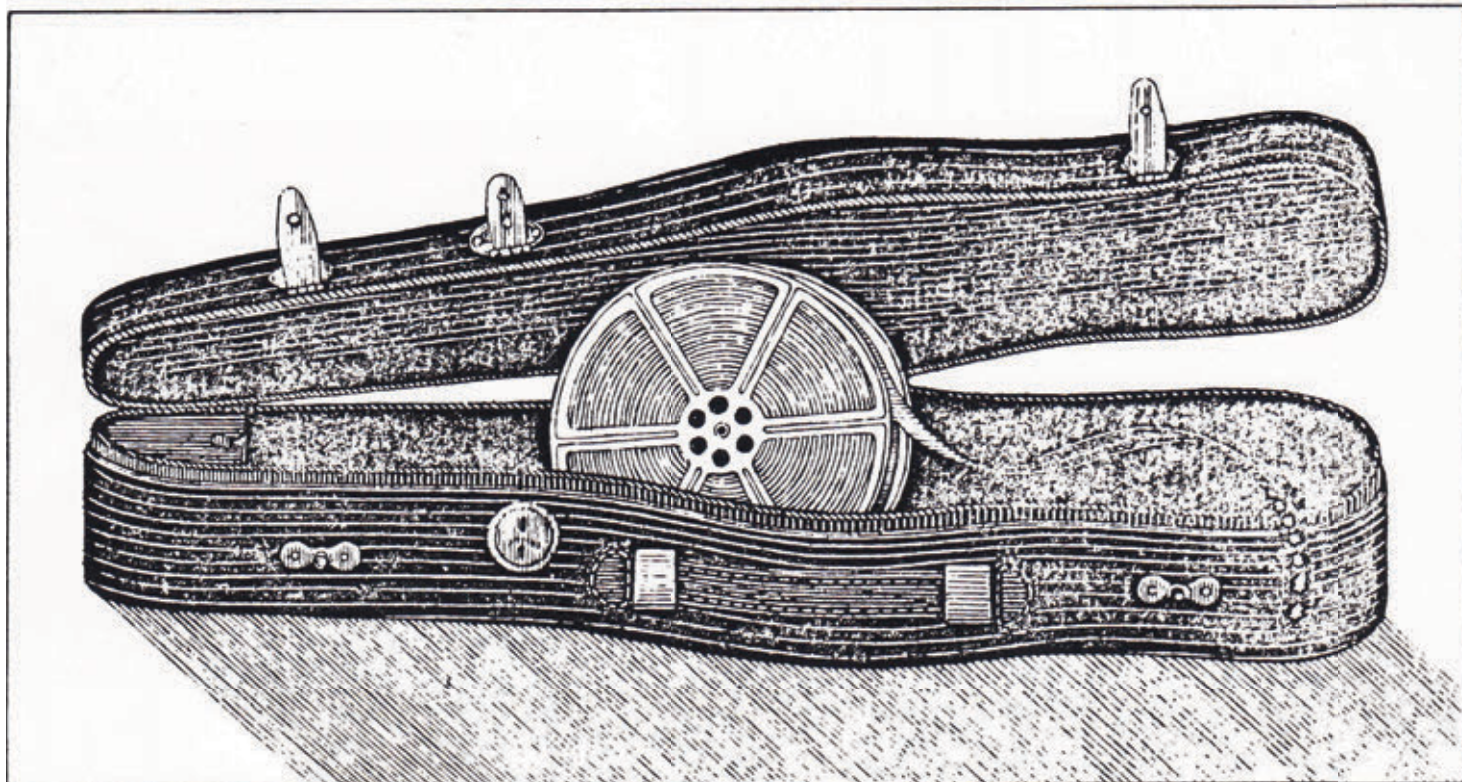
Jean-Louis TRINTIGNANT The film director
Michel DRACH Himself
David DRACH Michel as a child
Nathalie ROUSSEL Michel's sister
Gabrielle DOULCET Michel's grandmother
Christian RIST Michel's brother
 The demonstrator

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Movies/Judith Crist

PAST MASTERY

"...It is difficult to recall another 'personal' film done with the discipline and lack of self-indulgence of *Les Violons* ..."



A double celebration is in order: New York has a new first-run "art" house, the refurbished Regency Theater at Broadway and 67th Street, a boon to West Siders in particular and, with its inaugural offering, to film lovers in general. For the major celebration is of our introduction to a gifted French film-maker, by way of his sixth film, the first to be shown in this country.

Not since Truffaut's autobiographical recalls that began with *The 400 Blows* or Resnais's explorations of the interweaving of past and present that began with *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* has there been so deeply personal and so creatively exciting a film from France as Michel Drach's *Les Violons Du Bal*. And it is difficult to recall another "personal" film done with such discipline, such total lack of self-indulgence even where it might have been excused.

Les Violons Du Bal, Drach's own idiom for the past remembered, is in the form of a film within a film, where, in Drach, as film-maker, is attempting a movie about his childhood, about his experience as a Jewish child of affluence during the German occupation

His nine-year-old son, David, will portray him as that child; his wife, Marie-Josée Nat, a beauty and an actress in her own right, will portray his mother. But child stories are out, a commercial producer assures him; besides, a Jewish child who survived—"that won't sell. A dead Jew might—Buchenwald, Hiroshima, Vietnam, Biafra might—but live people don't sell." And if you haven't even a star . . . That last, at least, is reasonable and with the swivel of a chair Drach turns into Jean-Louis Trintignant and the search is on, the sites of childhood experience reexplored in the present to offer the memory of the past.

Drach sees the present in black-and-white, the past in the color of memory as he attempts the "rediscovery" of 1939, when a small boy notes the large apartment being dismantled, his elder brother and sister, his mother and grandmother trying on gas masks with hilarity, his brother reading the instructions their father, already "away," has left. The large crystal chandelier is down—but there is the reassurance that the glorious view of the Cirque D'Hiver across the way is still there.

The family joins the stream of refu-

gees leaving Paris and establishes a new home, then another, new names adopted, possessions sold one by one. There is the memory of a refugee the brother brought home and of her special way of thanking him; there is his sister's heartbreak from a fiancée whose parents refuse him marriage to "an Israelite," the boy's own discovery of what "a Jew" is from a mother's refusing to lose her laughter, a grandmother who can find her own God even in a church, and schoolmates who react in the French manner. An awareness grows with the sickness of seeing the Nazi roundups carried out by the French; his brother disappears one night to join their absent father; his sister runs away. With new identities his mother and grandmother take him to Paris to search for her and find her surviving with the occupiers, able only to warn them of growing dangers. Michel is sent off by himself to have some blissful months with a devoted farm family and find childhood's pleasures even under still another disguise. Then his grandmother and mother come for him; escape has been arranged—for a price that includes a last minute and

horrifying betrayal by the "friendly" farmer. . . .

But Drach never loses the thread of the present. The film-maker finds, for example, that in seeking to duplicate the Nazi hordes he has captured the full flavor in covering the police attacks against student demonstrators. And a student fugitive who asks him for help reminds him of the brother he knew (another superb casting device, with Christian Rist so full of adolescent passions in a dual role); he offers aid in the face of abuse for being so bourgeois, so smugly Establishment and unknowing of social injustice. And finally, showing his rushes to the producer and his Italian co-producer (who announces in Pontifical tones, "I am cinema"), he is assured that the makings of a film are there. Drach-Trintignant can but smile as he turns to the camera and notes, "But it is a film."

And indeed it is. A sophisticated and complex successor to Claude Berri's *The Two of Us*, it is the other side of the coin that Louis Malle has given us with *Lacombe, Lucien*—in effect, the face of the coin. For instead of exploring the brute mind and vulnerable instincts of the collaborator, Drach notes the marks made on the tender mind, the unforgettable love and the unforgivable cruelty that come clear only in mature recall. And Drach's amazingly subtle skill can be savored with the realization that we too become aware of them only in retrospect, only after his thrilling narrative and its breathtaking climax—almost an *homage* to the final moments of *Grand Illusion*—have released their grip upon us. And we recall the exquisite moments provided by Ms. Nat, the chic attentive mother of a boy's memory, a woman of heroic vitality who allows herself to weep only when her dependents are safely asleep; the dignity and courage of age portrayed by Gabrielle Doucet's grandmother; the true charm of youth that David Drach exudes without a moment's cloyingness or coyness; the adult mind in appreciative retrospect embodied by Trintignant.

The photography—by Yann Le Masson in black-and-white, William Lubtchansky in color—is blended to intriguing subliminal effect, offering a mood to accept the ellipses, the unanswered questions, the gaps in what is remembered by a man and what is blotted out by a child. Drach's strongest point is his perspective, his lack of polemic that in itself makes every part of the past he recalls an item of indictment.

Perhaps, with the way opened by *The Sorrow and the Pity*, the French are ready to face the roles some of them played in supporting the Nazis; suffice it that this film not only was the official French entry at the Cannes Festival but also is a commercial success in France. It is a film they can regard with pride—and, hopefully, with understanding.

Personal Memories of French Fascism

By JOY GOULD BOYUM

In 1965, 23 years after 7,000 French Jews including infants were locked into a stadium without water or toilet facilities for eight days by French policemen, the French people erected a commemorative plaque which put all the blame for this horrifying occurrence on German occupation troops. Six years later, Marcel Ophüls' astounding 4½ hour long documentary, "The Sorrow and the Pity" shattered the long-held myth of pervasive French innocence implicit in such gestures as the erection of this plaque and revealed the actual degree of French responsibility.

This year, after Louis Malle's brilliant exploration of the motives of a young French peasant for joining the French Gestapo during the occupation, "Lacombe, Lucien," two other Frenchmen have created films which continue to explore that

On Film

"Les Violons du Bal"

era in French history; Michel Drach who in "Les Violons du Bal" tells the story of a French-Jewish family's escape into Switzerland and Michel Mitran who in "Black Thursday" ("Les Guichets du Louvre") recreates a single day, July 16, 1942, when 2,000 French policemen rounded up and bused out of Paris 30,000 Jews, 30 of whom survived.

Both of these films, like "The Sorrow and the Pity" and "Lacombe, Lucien" before them, make for extraordinarily intense experiences and in both, it would be untrue to deny that this intensity is in large part a function of the emotional charge inherent in their very materials: their images of men and women with the yellow Star of David sewn on to their coats; of French police doing the work many of us believed performed only by German occupation troops. But each of these films is also—though to varying degrees—an immensely sensitive handling of these materials, and in the case of "Les Violons du Bal" especially, an impressive cinematic achievement.

"Les Violons du Bal" is a film within a film about a filmmaker named and played by Michel Drach who is making an autobiographical film about his childhood in occupied France. It presents the viewer with

an intricate but never confusing interplay of past and present, of actuality and art.

The past, for example, asserting itself at first as elusive fragments of memory until the filmmaker finds financial backing to make his film and so capture that past more fully, is always seen in color. Photographed in 35mm by cinematographer William Lubtchansky, it is imbued with loveliness and lyricism. The present, in contrast, is matter-of-fact and unbeautiful, declaring its straightforward quality through the cinematography of documentary filmmaker Yann Le Masson who, using 16mm black and white film, gives to these segments the look of *cinema verité*. For the present is, among other things, seen from the perspective of a 42-year-old man; while the past is perceived by a 9-year-old boy, a child for whom there are moments of fear and sadness but who is protected from actual terror both by his limited understanding and by the loving warmth of his mother and grandmother. Because we are adult and because we bring with us to the boy's experiences the hindsight of history, we understand the danger in his situation, in his family's wandering, in their hidden Jewishness; because he is so young, his experience is to him adventure, his being a Jew a romantic secret to be shared by a laughing playmate.

If past and present are distinct in their tone and quality, they are also inextricably entwined, constantly influencing and shading one another. And once again, this perception is contained in the film's style. Shifting from the here and now to another time and place, Drach does not so much intercut images as make them dissolve from one to the other, frequently holding a shot on screen while draining its color to black and white or slowly infusing its black and white with luxuriant color. And his casting is used to similar point. For while in deference to the wishes of his backer that he use a star in a film without other commercial prospects ("No sex; no violence; nobody dies") Drach ultimately moves behind the camera and has Jean-Louis Trintignant stand in for him, it is Drach's real life wife who plays his mother ("What would Dr. Freud say about this?" she jokes in the present-tense part of the film) and his son who plays Drach as a boy. And sometimes even the casting serves to suggest continuities beyond the purely personal as when a contemporary youth fleeing to Switzerland from the

French police after a student demonstration becomes in Drach's inner film his own older brother who at 16 also fled France.

Each of these actors is in his several roles quite marvelous: Marie-Josée Nat, deserving winner of the "Best Actress" award this year at Cannes, moves us with her quiet simplicity of technique as the courageous, elegant, and protective mother; David Drach is totally unself-conscious and completely winning as young Michel; and Gabrielle Doucet, as the grandmother, is wise and affectionate yet at the same time vain and foolish, marking each of her several escapes by the clothes she wore, always in her fabulous hats. Brilliantly conceived, this picture of the grandmother, like that of the mother and the boy himself, is perhaps unreal, touched and colored by deep affection. But if this is true, it is also Drach's point. For what he remembers more than the pain of that past (though that is there too) is the humanity and love which he persuades us was what made survival of that pain possible.

Les Violons Du Bal
(Violins at the Ball)
(FRENCH-COLOR/B&W)

Paris, Feb. 19.

Planfilm release of Port-Royal Films production. Stars Jean-Louis Trintignant, Marie-Jose Nat; features Gabrielle Doucet, Michel Drach, David Drach. Written and directed by Michel Drach. Camera (Eastmancolor), Yanne Le Masson, William Lubchansky; editor, Genevieve Winding. Reviewed at Salle Ponthieu, Paris, Feb. 12 '74. Running Time: 100 MINS.

Mother/wife Maris-Jose Nat
Director Jean-Louis Trintignant
Grandmother Gabrielle Doucet
Michel Drach Himself
Child David Drach
Sister Nathalie Roussel
Passeur Paul Le Person

An extremely personal film that avoids self-consciousness or self-indulgence. A look at a young Jewish boy's adventures during the Occupation, it is done as a film-within-a-film or a reflection on the times that should find good reactions on its home grounds and emerge a fine entry abroad.

Michel Drach has long wanted to

make this film and it shows in its rightness of tone, perfect meshing of past and present and its grace and tenderness despite a time of trial. Drach himself is first seen as a filmmaker trying to interest a commercially-minded producer in his script.

But it avoids satire and he gives in on getting a name as star Jean-Louis Trintignant replaces him. Things remind him of the past as it slowly invades the film. Present is in black and white and past in color and it works well. Using his own son as himself as a child, Drach gets a performance sans coyness as that period comes back.

No subjectivism here but a fine balance of showing it through the child and yet keeping a distance. A mature, all-encompassing viewpoint is the main trump of this tender but penetrating pic.

Trintignant as Drach also one day picks up a student chased by the police during the 1968 revolutionary days to counterpoint the past times. Drach's wife, actress Marie-Jose Nat, plays his wife as well as his own mother in the Occupation segs. The little boy's problems at school, his view of his brother and sister and their romantic problems and his own adventures, as the family tries to flee the country, are played with insight.

At the end an Italo coproducer has seen the film and says it has something. But Trintignant, as Drach, says to the audience, "but it is a film." And it is.

Nat is exemplary in her dual role and Trintignant his usual sure-footed self as he replaces the director. Drach has made his best film to date and after a promising but uneven career should have it easier to make pix and becomes a well merited part of directorial ranks here. —Mosk.

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- ★ The film that seems to have taken the critics by storm is Michel Drach's "Les violons du bal", an emotional and moving account of the director's childhood memories and realization of the implications of Jewishness (shot in colour) and, in counterpoint, the story of Drach's difficulties in getting producers and backers to agree to a film on such an unfashionable and uncommercial theme (these present-day scenes shot in black and white). The success of "Elise ou la vraie vie", four years ago, eventually made it possible for Drach to make this film, but it is fifteen years since he had the original idea. His own son David plays himself as a boy, his wife Marie-José Nat plays the boy's mother, and Drach's friend 'guest star' Jean-Louis Trintignant plays the part of the director. The film has been acclaimed as a success, beautiful, clear and coherent, one of this year's very best films. 'It would take several pages and a lot of talent to convey a quarter of the emotion Drach awakes in us . . . A film that absolutely must be seen.' 'A completely successful piece. Its well deserved success proves that sometimes quality and sincerity do find their reward.'

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DAILY NEWS, MONDAY, DECEMBER 16, 1974

'Les Violons du Bal' Is Amusing Parody

★ ★ ★ ½★

"Les Violons du Bal," at the Regency, is actually a film within a film. It is partly about Michel Drach's personal frustrations as a filmmaker, partly a very amusing parody of all that filmmakers must endure in their dealings with fat cat producers who make statements like "No stars, no film."

Finally, it is the film that Drach has dreamed of making for many years—a tender, haunting film about his childhood as a Jew in Nazi-occupied France.

DRACH SHIFTS back and forth between the present and past, which, he says, "plagues" his mind. To show the present, he uses black and white and a probing, hand-held camera, the better to emphasize the realities of the adult world.

In re-enacting his childhood, he relies on color and soft, romanticized photography, for like all of us (even Fellini in "Amarcord") he sees his childhood through slightly rose-tinted glasses.

DRACH SEES himself as a precocious, adorable child dressed in a sailor suit. The older Drach doesn't remember ever having a

"Les Violons du Bal," a Levitt-Pickman Film Corporation release in black and white, and color. A Violons Associates Presentation, directed by Michel Drach from a screenplay by Drach. Presented at the Regency Theater. Running time: 1 hour, 50 minutes.

THE CAST

Michel's wife	Marie-Josée Nat
Michel's mother	
Michel, the man	Jean-Louis Trintignant
The Grandmother	Gabrielle Doucet
Himself	Michel Drach
Michel, the boy	David Drach
Michel's brother	Christian Rist

sailor suit but somehow it fits his image of himself as a small boy. (Drach as a boy, incidentally, is played by his own son, David Drach, an irresistible, dark-eyed cherub.)

His first memories are of the year 1939, when his family—his mother, grandmother, older brother and sisters is just beginning to feel threatened by the war. They are moving, packing chandeliers and family portraits, and deserting Paris, like other war refugees, for the country.

DRACH IS too young to understand what is really going on. His schoolmates taunt him for being a Jew. It is the first time he has heard the word. Gradually he comes to understand that it has something to do with "the troubles" he and his family face.

His brother leaves, to escape,



Marie-Josée Nat and David Drach

hopefully, to Spain. His sister becomes pregnant by a Gentile and when marriage proves impossible, she returns to Paris where she works as a model under the watchful eyes of the Nazis.

Drach and what is left of his family are forced to move to a smaller apartment. His mother sends him to Catholic school under a false name. There, he notices the French police rounding up Jews and loading them on buses. Again, he must move.

IN DESPERATION, his mother sends him to the country to live with a family, again under an assumed name. It is an idyllic time as Drach remembers it. He and a pretty little blonde girl his own age, play in the fields and hug and kiss each other.

His mother comes to visit, explaining that they are going to escape to Switzerland. With their few remaining possessions, they devise an escape plan with the help of local French farmers who take cruel advantage of their plight and eventually steal all their money.

EVEN THOUGH seen through the innocent eyes of a child, there is a cynical awareness in this film as in "Lacombe, Lucien" of the way the French really behaved during the war, of their willingness to collaborate with the Germans and their distaste for the Jews.

Jean-Louis Trintignant puts in a token appearance as the older Drach, but his very presence adds lustre to the film. Gabrielle Doucet is wonderfully dotty as the grandmother. But it is Marie-Josée Nat's (she is married to Drach in real life) performance as the mother that illuminates the whole film. With her lovely, expressive face, she makes the mother's suffering seem painfully real.

Drach, at one point, talks about the films of Fellini and others, saying that "they convey emotion." So does his unique film.

K. C.