

A MOMENT WITH THE TEAM BEHIND THE FILM "DE GAULLE"

Simon Abkarian and Antonin Baudry

Simon Abkarian: "I honestly don't know whether I'll be able to act again. When I finish a film or a play, I never know—when I'm handed a script, I genuinely have no idea which direction I'll take."

What does it feel like to be at Cannes?

Antonin Baudry: "Well, this is a great day for this film, and it's a great day for me. I am delighted to be here. I can't wait to show the film, and I'm full of emotion."

Simon Abkarian: "I'm in a state of euphoria, really, because it's been two years since I finished shooting, right? Nearly two years since I wrapped filming, and I've been waiting ever since. My life wasn't exactly on hold because of this film's release, but it's true that I needed people to see it, for it to meet its audience. And I'm very happy about that. Truly delighted to be in Cannes with this film. I feel very good."

Did you feel any pressure making a film about De Gaulle?

A.B.: "In order to work, I need to be able to feel. Everything depends on having access to my emotions. I have no external way of knowing whether, when I make an editing choice, a sound-mixing decision, direct an actor, or write, it is right or wrong. The only thing I have is my emotion. Pressure is part of my work, but my job is not to feel it, it is also to set it aside. Otherwise, I cannot work. "

S.A.: "It wasn't pressure related to the iconic, almost paternal figure of the General himself."

***DIALOGUE EXCERPT FROM THE FILM "DE GAULLE: RESISTANCE"*

"-We are France.

-You?

-Us."

S.A.: "If there was any pressure, it was about the screenplay. What I mean is: how are we going to approach it, how are we going to get there? In the end, everything falls into place because there is the director, the cinematographer, and the colleagues I work with. When we made this film, we shut ourselves away. We became deaf to the noise of the world, deaf to everything around us. Not to forget or deny it, but to tell it better, to express it more efficiently. I think that's important, like people who lock themselves away in a small room in order to draw. Our room was the frame, the light, the spoken word, the phrase that suddenly gains incredible sharpness. Sometimes a single word makes me understand something, and then we reshoot the scene and – bang - it all comes together."

***FILM EXCERPT - "DE GAULLE: RESISTANCE"*

"Fire!"

S.A.: "And if we remain confused all the time, things from outside start interfering. People say: 'Be careful, because at that point in his life de Gaulle didn't eat pasta, he didn't hold his fork like that.' We certainly created the character using archival material, but archives have their own limitations. Through imagination – the imagination of every individual – you have to invent, recreate the role."

How did you prepare for this role?

S.A.: "I was sent a great deal of archival material. The production team did incredible job. They genuinely sent me a huge amount of archives, and I watched a lot of them. Then at a certain point, I said to myself. Stop watching them. Now, I want to create him. Because he is a public figure. The archives only show moments when he appears in public. So, in my view, from what Antonin had written, we had to invent his non-public. His private life, I wouldn't say intimate, but simply the aspects we don't know. Because de Gaulle had the wisdom not to invite journalists into his living room and not to allow himself to be followed by hidden cameras. I think that was very elegant on his part. Beyond that, it all becomes a matter of invention."

****FILM EXCERPT - "DE GAULLE: RESISTANCE"**

"I stand alone against America, and only America matters."

S.A.: "His phrasing, the way he carried himself, his physicality. Something had to happen in my own body. I had to imprison myself once again within that body so that I could bring freedom out of it."

A.B.: "We decided that we would not try to imitate anything. So, first of all, creating this de Gaulle came largely through the writing. Then, Simon and I, sometimes with the sound mixer, would shut locked ourselves away together and work in private, particularly on the voice. We also worked on his gaze in an intimate setting and without relying on archival material."

****FILM EXCERPT - "DE GAULLE: RESISTANCE"**

"France is not a child, Mr. President."

A.B.: "As Simon says, what matters is imagination. Because what truly matters is what lies within. We created our own vision and developed it together. We knew these documents existed. We knew what was real. But what we are trying to create was not reality; it was our imagination, our own reflections. I think that left its mark throughout the shoot. Then, during the editing and sound mixing, I continued to follow the thread of that shared imagination. That was my guiding principle."

How do you integrate humor into such a serious subject?

A.B.: "To be honest, the more tragic or tense things are, the funnier they become."

****FILM EXCERPT - "DE GAULLE: RESISTANCE"**

- *"The French Government has stripped you of your nationality, and the court martial has sentenced you to death.*
- *Anything else?"*

A.B.: "That's simply how I experience life. It wasn't something I consciously added. It's just the way I see things. When I write, it comes naturally. If you speak to doctors, surgeons operating on patients, or people standing on the threshold between life and death in the next room, they're often making jokes. What I mean is that the proximity of death, the proximity of fate, is often what gives rise to comedy for many people – and certainly for me. So it found its way into the film because it could hardly have been otherwise."

What have your previous films brought to this production?

A.B.: "Whenever you embark on an artistic adventure, you begin again from scratch. Of course, you gain experience over time, but you can't simply tell yourself: 'I'll do it the way I did before' or 'I rely on my usual methods'. You throw yourself into it and get on with it. Every challenge is unique. Each one requires its own solutions, its own inventions, ideas you may never had before. So yes, experience plays a part, but the energy of the moment plays an even greater one."

S.A.: "For me, playing De Gaulle puts everything I've done before to the test. To say that I simply draw upon the tools I already possess – acting, imagination, the mental construction of this character. What I try to do is immerse myself in the text, in the writing. I honestly don't know whether I will act again once I finish a film or a play. When a new script is put in front of me, I genuinely have no idea how I am going to approach it. Then, reading after reading, discussion after discussion, conversation after conversation, face to face, we feed one another's ideas, we regain confidence through the tools of our craft and reaffirm the fact that we are capable of creating."

I never really know. I don't tell myself 'Right, I'll be able to do this'. And every time I find myself there, I end up chewing the scenery and becoming overblown. That's actually good for me – it keeps me grounded, because I was too sure of myself. You're never entirely sure of yourself, but at a certain point you tell yourself: 'This is what I'm going to do, and I'm going to see it through to the end.' There is always a doubt, because making a choice also means giving up other possibilities. But making a choice means owning it and saying: 'This is what I'm doing, and I'll follow that choice through to the very end.'"

Were there any scenes that were difficult to perform?

S.A.: "Honestly, no. There were scenes that were for more moving for me. Difficult? No. There were scenes where I told myself: 'You need to be careful here, don't overdo it.' Particularly the family scenes. You know, when we're shut away at Hampstead. I kept telling myself: don't play the father too much, don't overdo it. You have to find the right balance. Fortunately, my partners in those scenes helped me enormously. There are moments when you think people expect the grand speeches to be the hardest parts. But actually, because I had worked on those speeches so thoroughly beforehand, I had learnt the text inside out. The words became second nature: I could have been washing up and the lines would still have come out naturally; the text had to flow in every circumstance. The truly demanding moments were often much smaller things: sitting down, lifting my gaze, picking up a fountain pen, writing a letter. For example, the letter was a real piece of work for me."

A.B.: "We filmed that on the final day of shooting."

S.A.: "Because I had to follow the rhythm of the story, and make the handwriting legible, while at the same time giving a sense of rhythm. My hand was being filmed, so I had to adapt to that constraint and allow the hand itself to tell part of the story. I could see his vision. He explained to me that the writing will take place in a desert landscape. Then I understood. The handwriting had to have a rhythm. Yet at the same time, it had to feel like de Gaulle's handwriting – while remaining readable, unlike the real de Gaulle's handwriting, which was notoriously difficult to decipher. So I had to invent a style of writing that was close to his. Things like that."