



OFFICIAL SELECTION
FESTIVAL DE CANNES
OPENING FILM

STANDING TALL

François KRAUS and Denis PINEAU-VALENCIENNE

present

Catherine DENEUVE Rod PARADOT Benoît MAGIMEL Sara FORESTIER

STANDING TALL

A film by

Emmanuelle BERCOT



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OPENING FILM

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SYNOPSIS

Abandoned by his mother at the age of 6, Malony is constantly in and out of juvenile court. An adoptive family grows around this young delinquent: Florence, a children's magistrate nearing retirement, and Yann, a caseworker and himself the survivor of a very difficult childhood.

Together they follow the boy's journey and try unfailingly to save him. Then Malony is sent to a stricter educational center, where he meets Tess, a very special young girl who will show him that there are reasons for hope.

Interview with Emmanuelle Bercot

After seeing the film the first thought goes to those juvenile counselors and judges whose painstaking work, perseverance, patience, devotion and self-denial commands admiration. It's popular today to draw attention to the failings of institutions and the flaws and shortcomings of the judicial system, but you do just the opposite. Was that the intention that triggered your desire to make *Standing Tall*—to pay tribute to these workers in the shadows?

Yes and ... no! My idea at first was to make a film about the support system that revolves around a child, but when that idea came to me I knew little about such work. It was the years of research I did before shooting the film that enabled me to realize how committed these workers were, their abnegation, patience and capacity never to give up. Actually, the film's real point of departure is rooted in very specific circumstances. I have an uncle who is a youth counselor and, as a child, I visited him one summer in Brittany where he was in charge of a camp for young delinquents. One of them was even a child criminal. As a little girl from a well-heeled, proper and supportive background, I was fascinated by the behavior of these teenagers who hadn't been as lucky as I was, intrigued by their insolence, their rebellion against authority and social conventions. At the same time I was in awe of the work undertaken by my uncle and the other counselors to get them back on the right track, as we say, to educate them, to teach them to love themselves and love others, to show respect for others but first of all to have respect for themselves. The memory remained very present in my mind to the point that as a teenager I considered becoming a juvenile judge. It eventually inspired me to make a film about it. When François Kraus and Denis Pineau-Valencienne at Les Films du Kiosque, with whom I did *Mes Chères Etudes* for Canal +, told me in late 2009 that they wanted to work with me again, I spoke to them about this project that I'd been carrying around in the back of my mind for such a long time, and they were immediately on board.

How did you go about it? What angle did you start from?

The first thing I did was to go spend time with my uncle. I asked him to talk to me about his experience as a counselor. He introduced me to other

counselors and a juvenile judge in Valence. I had the opportunity to observe court hearings, I spent time in a juvenile detention center, and I read an awful lot of books on the subject as well as watched every reportage and documentary I could find about it, taking copious notes. This initial approach was deeply upsetting and terrifying. How can one not feel compassion and understanding for these children who have been damaged by terrible family dramas, by poverty and often by their parents' abdication of their responsibility, followed by failings of the school system, and by the devastating lack of love that leaves them to their own devices, with no values or any hope or future prospects, adrift, caught up in a spiral that only youth counselors and judges can help them to stop? And how can one not admire the energy, devotion and patience these counselors and judges deploy to pull these youngsters out of the ditch no matter what, despite the obstacles, the ingratitude, the cruelty and their lousy salaries, basically offering these children the attention they so sorely lacked?

The screenplay of *Standing Tall* began with this epigraph: “All children have a right to an education. It should be supervised by the family, and if the family is deficient, then it is society’s responsibility to step in.”

I read that sentence in a book by a judge. It highlights perfectly what the film is all about. I think it's brilliant. It seems like something that should be obvious, but, unfortunately, I'm not sure that it's a self-evident truth for everyone. Yet education is a basic right. And it sums up in a nutshell the work that is done in favor of these lost youths. The task is essential, vital. How can society be rescued if not through education, in the broadest sense of the term? Juvenile justice is based on the idea that nothing is entirely written in stone for a child and that through educational and support programs, the downhill slide can be stopped. How all this can be done without giving up—because results are a long time coming, if they come at all? That's what the film is about.

So you chose to follow a trio – a young delinquent, his counselor and his judge. Did the idea to cast the judge as a woman come from a desire to film Catherine Deneuve again after *On My Way*?

The idea for the film had come to me before *On My Way*, but I already had Catherine in mind to play the juvenile judge. Or ... Gérard Depardieu! No one else. It was as if I needed a quintessential figure from the movie world for the character. My uncle had grown particularly close to a young delinquent he had looked after for several years, together with a juvenile judge, a woman, who was on the verge of retiring. I was directly inspired by that story. The teenager

had become as attached to my uncle as to the judge. My uncle said to me that one day he had told the judge, "For him, you're his mother and I'm his father," and she replied, "No, *you're* his mother and *I'm* his father." From that point on I decided that the judge in my film would be a woman and that it had to be Catherine who played the role. It wasn't until after this initial documentary research that I got in touch with Marcia Romano about writing the screenplay with her.

Why her?

We had attended the same film school (La Fémis in Paris), but we weren't in the same year. At the time, I had already noticed her remarkable talent, and it was with her that I wrote my first short: *Les Vacances*. After that, we were out of touch for ten years until she wrote to me after having seen one of my made-for-television films, saying she wanted to work with me again. I had this project in mind and I thought she was the right person. She's someone with a lot of convictions and who defends them tooth and nail. She also has quite a radical approach toward filmmaking. Her contribution is what made the film what it is today. I was very attached to this idea of the trio – the counselor, the judge and the delinquent – but at first I imagined a more romantic, more fictional, more fragmented storyline. In my mind, the film also followed the boy in his crimes and misdemeanors. She convinced me to leave them out and to ground the narrative in a radical framework, sticking mainly to the educational process, keeping as much as possible within all the various support institutions a delinquent minor encounters along the way. So the action takes place mostly indoors, in offices. That's how the film found its direction and what makes it what it is today. This of course raised other issues of dramatization, other challenges, too, because, while trying not to bore viewers, it was important to convey the tension of these face-to-face encounters, these hearings in the course of which the scales could tip one way or another each time. That made it all the more exciting.

What was most difficult about the writing process?

Of all the stages of filmmaking, I find that writing is always the hardest part. For this one it was more difficult than usual. I don't think I've ever worked so hard on a film! Or for as long. It took years! What is perhaps the hardest thing is that sometimes I have these purely intuitive ideas and I latch on to them no matter what. For instance, I wanted the young delinquent to have a child at the end. That couldn't happen in a purely documentary film. We had to introduce a fictional, romantic aspect.

Why was this idea so important to you?

I don't know! A sort of intuition, a deep conviction. Maybe because there's something rather nice in telling the story of a child that was unloved by his mother, who lacked upbringing and attention, and who suddenly finds himself in charge of loving and raising a child. I wanted to have this mirror effect. This more romantic part of the film was also a means of incorporating something counselors had told me:

95 % of the time, falling in love is the trigger that enables youths to pull through. These kids have no self-esteem. They have trouble loving and letting themselves be loved, so it's hard for them, but when it happens, it's lifesaving.

How did you work with Marcia Romano?

I first compiled for her everything I had accumulated. Then we worked together in the usual fashion: we got together often, on a regular basis, we talked, exchanged ideas, built up the storyline and sketched out the characters. When I left to shoot *On My Way*, Marcia interned for several weeks at the Juvenile Court in Paris where she was able to attend a large number of hearings – both for criminal matters and for child support measures – in the offices of various judges and in the courtroom. She also met with counselors and accompanied them on a number of visits to various youth facilities. We strove to make everything convincing and accurate, which is my main preoccupation when doing fiction. I then drafted and wrote the dialogue for the first version. Afterward, we went back and forth up until the final version. Justice Thierry Baranger, president of the Juvenile Court in Paris, opened the doors to his courtroom for us. He then agreed to act as a consultant on the script so that everything in the screenplay would be credible, coherent and realistic. I myself interned at the Juvenile Court in Paris with various judges for a month to perfect the blocking, closely observing how things took place physically, concretely, in a judge's office and in the courtroom. This naturally enabled me to enrich the screenplay, to round out certain characters or situations, but while following the narrative that had already been developed. If I had done the internship prior to setting down the story and the character, I would have wanted to put all the incredible scenes I witnessed there in the film.

How did you find Rod Paradot, who plays the young delinquent, Malony?

It was Elsa Pharaon, a well-known street casting director, who found him in Stains, in a vocational school where he was training for his certificate in carpentry. But it was after a long search. A lot of people had worked with

youths. Marcia and I had deliberately decided not to stigmatize the character of the delinquent and to go against the usual clichés. I didn't want the boy to be too stereotyped, not a junkie or a dealer or a kid from an immigrant family. Or a boy who ran with a gang. We also wanted the story to be set in a provincial town instead of some rough suburb. I had of course seen all the screen tests that Elsa had done, but in the end, I met with only a fairly small number of boys because few fit with what I was after. We also ran into another difficulty: the film follows a character from age 13 to 17 and I didn't want to have to change actors halfway through. So we had to find someone who could be as credible at 13 as at 17. Rod, although he was 18 during the shooting, had that quality. He has such a pure face that is still quite childlike. He also had the intonations of a "common man" accent that I felt was essential.

How did you work with him on the set?

Intensely! Malony is not an easy character. He was the hardest to write. You can't help but want to slap that kid sometimes! But I wanted the audience to end up liking him, understanding his weaknesses, his wounds, his distress. I tried to make them feel the same mixed feelings that the judge and counselor feel with respect to Malony, constantly wavering between faith and discouragement, empathy and rejection, rather than simply ride on the wave of a redemption story. It wasn't easy to find that balance between the exasperation he should arouse in people at the beginning and the need to make them like him after a while. He's not an easy character to play, either, especially for someone who's never acted before and whose temperament is a far cry from the character that's written. In fact, knowing that time on the set would be short, I had a coach, Daniel Marchaudon, work with him for two months before the shoot. Rod came on the set knowing his lines perfectly, which isn't easy for a young man who's not used to that sort of work. Every morning I talked to him, explaining what the scenes were to get across, how and why the character was in such and such a state. But the real work came while filming. The hardest thing was to bring Rod around to enact Malony's violence, because in real life he's very gentle, calm, polite, likeable and engaging. As a result, the character isn't exactly what I'd pictured at first, and yet at the same time the rage and contained hurt that Rod expresses so well in his violent outbursts were all the more powerful and upsetting. Sometimes, it's in constraints and the unexpected that you find something else that turns out to be better than what you'd imagined. I must say, I never let up. I pushed him and pushed him until he managed to come out with what I wanted. It was very hard for him sometimes. But he was always eager to do things right. And then, there's his screen presence. That just comes naturally.

At what point did you talk to Catherine Deneuve about *Standing Tall*?

While we were doing the promotion for *On My Way*. One evening, I just said, "Here." And I gave her a script I'd never mentioned before. I think she was surprised, but she seemed happy that I indicated a desire to work with her again so quickly. The two of us really get along well. In life, we have a pretty strong bond. The same is true when working together. I'm so fond of that woman! I think she's exceptional in this role. She has that dual side to her: an obvious natural authority and yet she's very attentive and protective. She has a very maternal side. I needed that blend in the judge, and Catherine portrays her perfectly. Yet it wasn't easy for her. There were a lot of lines, with a very specialized, very factual and precise vocabulary. On top of it, she was sitting almost all the time. Just the opposite of *On My Way* in which I filmed her completely freely, on location. The judge is practically the main character of the film for me. She is the pivotal character that everyone revolves around. Moreover, when Catherine came on the set—we'd already been shooting for three weeks—I got the feeling that the real filming had just begun! [Laughter]

How did the desire to cast Benoît Magimel in the role of counselor come about?

I've long been fond of him as an actor. Of course I first saw him in *La Vie est un long fleuve tranquille*, in which I thought he was fantastic, and I've never lost sight of him. He's truly one of my favorite French actors. He's quite simply a very great actor. He has something that few French actors have: a way of using his body, a very physical side. I have great affection for him as a man, and I appreciate his looks, his virility, and also the intensity and the emotion he exudes, his "wounded man" side. And so I filmed him lovingly. I have to say, one of the pleasures of a director is also to film faces and bodies, and he inspired me a lot. I thought of him very early on, but then I backtracked because I thought it would be better to take an unknown. So I interviewed a lot of people, and even other well-known actors. But he stuck in my mind, and since I had already chosen Rod, I simply asked him to do screen tests with him. Benoît accepted very graciously. As soon as I saw the tests, I stopped looking. He was the one! I was so glad to shoot with him. He's really a wonderful man and a marvelous actor. Deep down, he's very sentimental, and that's beautiful in a man.

At what point did the idea of having Sara Forestier play Malony's mother come to you?

Right from the start. I already had Sara in mind when I was writing. I don't

know why— some things you just can't explain! Maybe because I sensed she could fit the character, that she could even go very far. And then, when the screenplay was finished, I decided to take an unknown! So Antoinette Boulat and I came up with a long list of unknowns, but also finally some well-known actresses. It got to the point where, like with Benoît, I figured that I simply had to meet Sara, who I didn't know. I asked her, too, to do screen tests with Rod, at least to see if the mother-son duo could work. When I saw the tests, it was settled! All the more as we sensed that she really wanted the role. There was something very visceral in her desire that is very stimulating for a director. Sara has that ability to abandon herself totally to the character. She likes to be guided, she listens attentively to the director, but at the same time she gives a lot of herself. She enjoys exploring and trying to dig deeper. The takes were always different, we were always surprised, and that's a joy for the director. The character isn't easy at all, because this young, irresponsible mother prompts rejection. Yet it's clear that this woman has also suffered, that she wasn't raised properly, that she doesn't have the tools to raise her children and that she has all the weaknesses of her own childhood to bear, that she had a child at a very young age. I can't say I forgive her – well yes, I do! I hope the audience will see her through Malony's gaze: with boundless tenderness, because although their relationship is dysfunctional, she does love him!

What about Diane Rouxel, who plays Malony's girlfriend? How did you choose her and how would you define her character?

There was a long street casting process for this role as well. I was looking for someone very specific. A coarse, tough girl, very much the tomboy, not at all into seduction, with something strange about her. And she had to have short hair. I didn't find the character I'd imagined among the nonprofessionals who were auditioned, so I agreed to explore among young actresses who'd already been in films. That's where I met Diane, whom I didn't know, but who had acted in Larry Clark's *The Smell of Us*. Like Rod, she was rather remote from the character I had in mind, but she had such a cinegenic face, and she agreed right off the bat to cut her hair. She is extremely focused and devoted on the set. There had to be an aura of mystery that was unexplainable, to make it acceptable for this girl to fall in love with the young delinquent despite the way he treats her. Diane's somewhat mystic gaze makes it possible to convey that. And one might think that following the model of her mother, an exemplary youth counselor, she has forged the soul of a Saint Bernard, a lifesaver.

Even if there are fewer nonprofessionals than in *On My Way*, you also used them here for the minor roles.

Because I love doing that. I find it thrilling! Besides, it confronts the actors with something unexpected, risky, and exciting. Most of the counselors in the film are for example real counselors. And I derive great pleasure from working on the minor roles, in making them come to life in short takes. I'm fascinated by everyone I film.

As you were saying earlier, *Standing Tall* seems like the opposite of *On My Way*. Even in the dramatization. In *On My Way* it's all about movement and freedom, whereas here, in most scenes, things seem much more composed and meticulous.

It was a very different challenge and I liked that. It's even the sort of constraint that can be fun for a director. It's stimulating to know that I have seven big scenes that are six, seven or eight pages long each, all in the same office, and that therefore I'm going to have to innovate with each scene. But very quickly I decided not to try to be clever because there was already so much to grasp in the dialogue and in the issues at hand. So I didn't seek to be too inventive in the staging, or to be demonstrative. Afterward, it was in choosing the angles. When I interned in the judges' office, I was always in the same spot, at the same level as the judge, a little off to the side, facing people. Actually, I observed all those hearings from the same place and never found it tedious. But I still didn't want to carry that systematic approach so far as to use only one camera angle, like Depardon for instance did in *10th District Court – Judicial Hearings*. I didn't want a documentary style– I saved that for the screenplay–, so I tried for something fairly simple and tenuous. When the film begins, there's no trigger. The more it progresses, the more there is communication between people, the more triggers there are. I thought about things like that. The main thing was to render the tension that hangs in the atmosphere of these hearings and to sustain the suspense around the outcome of each of the scenes. I wanted moviegoers to be on their toes throughout the entire film.

Actually, here and there suddenly there's a fleeting image, attention to a detail, or an exchange of glances.

These scenes where an exchange of glances takes on great importance are very new to me. It's not something very common in my previous films, and here it became an important aspect of the dramatization, because

when there are a lot of lines, something else needs to happen besides what is said. And during the editing process, I really enjoyed bringing out the interplay of glances, particularly between Deneuve and Magimel, which said a lot.

You're back with Guillaume Schiffman on camera, how did you work with him? Did you have a clear idea of what you wanted?

I already knew I wanted to steer clear of a documentary style that could have prevailed, or more precisely, I really wanted a high visual standard to go hand in hand with the documentary aspect of the film. I didn't want the lighting to be too stylized but still, I wanted it to be assertive and very polished. In the judge's office – usually very poorly lit! – there's never the same quality of lighting. Guillaume and I always work the same way. I show him photographs that inspire me and we talk about them. I didn't want to insist on the dark side of this story, either. On the contrary, I imagined a luminous film. That's why I sometimes filmed Malony in the middle of the countryside, trying to breathe a certain poetry into this very grim story.

By the same token, you use music that is mostly classical in its inspiration.

I always use a mixture of types of music, and I like to use existing pieces. Well before shooting the film, it was plain to me that I wasn't going to play up the world of delinquency with the cliché of rap. Besides, as I told you, we wanted to strip this kid of all the attributes and clichés of delinquency: he's a teenager who doesn't listen to music. I preferred to play on the opposition between this bitter and difficult world and classical music, which also carries the lyrical inspiration I was looking for to create a contrast that could produce emotion. When it comes to music, my editor, Julien Leloup, has the best ideas!

Did you come up with the title *Standing Tall* right off the bat?

Not at all! It took us a long time to find. The project started out being called *Double Jeopardy*, but it was too ambiguous. It has a very specific meaning in the legal world and in people's minds. And then suddenly, François Kraus suggested using the last words in the script: "Malony walks through the courthouse halls, out through the lobby, and onto the courthouse steps. He pauses, standing tall, holding his child in his arms." "Standing tall" is exactly what the film's all about.

Your film career was launched in Cannes: you showed your first short there, *Les Vacances*, in 1997, which won the Jury prize. What does it mean to you to open this year's Festival with this film?

Without Cannes I think my career would have been more difficult. I'm very—I don't know what word to use—touched that a film like this one, which sheds light on these men and women in the shadows, can open the Festival, that it can be shown in such a far-ranging and prestigious venue. It's a huge honor, in fact.

Interview with Catherine Deneuve

Were you surprised when Emmanuelle Bercot asked you to work with her again even before *On My Way* was released?

- Surprised, yes, because I didn't know she had already completed the script, but glad, because *On My Way* was really a fantastic experience. Over and beyond her films, I'm very fond of the woman herself. I have a lot of respect and admiration for her. I like the way she is with people, the way she is with her son, I like her attitude about life and toward movies. I like how she works hard, I like her intensity and her simplicity. She's a director who doesn't let up when she's on the set, who works very hard before, during and afterward, and is someone you can really count on.

What did you find the most exciting? Working with her again? Playing the character of a rather compassionate juvenile judge?

- First, working with her again, and on a project that was completely different from the previous one. Also to work with her team again, Guillaume [Schiffman], her cameraman, Pierre André, her sound engineer. And second, to be in a role like that, the role of a judge, but a judge ... who in fact doesn't judge! A judge who listens, who tries to figure out what's best for the lost boy who stands before her. That's what impressed me most, actually, when I spent time at the courthouse: the perseverance, the indulgence, the boundless compassion of these judges and counselors, all the more as they are dealing with kids who can be pretty awful.

You have somewhat of a reputation for preferring to use your imagination rather than researching the characters you play. Was it your idea to observe what goes on in juvenile court?

- Emmanuelle and I both thought from the start that it would be a good idea to go watch what went on there to see how things work. Not to research it but to get a feel for the tone, the vocal color, how people express themselves, how they talk. When playing a judge, there's a risk of illustrating the function rather than personifying an individual. I found the screenplay very good, and I really liked the role, but when I thought it over, I realized it wasn't going to be easy. It's a little bit question-answer, question-answer over and over again. The dialogue

is very factual, even highly specialized. I needed to see how things went in real life, in an actual setting. For several weeks I attended various court sessions and hearings. I remember one session where there were two boys and a girl who didn't want to go back to their father. Their mother was present as well, of course. There were also the children's counselors, the family counselors, the attorneys and the judge. I can tell you that they were fully aware of everything that was involved, all the pain, the dramatic events. What surprised me most was to realize the importance these teenagers are given, all the time that is devoted to them. It makes you realize that we live in a very civilized country! It's not the least of the film's strengths to call attention to the painstaking work of these people we don't actually know much about, their perseverance, their patience. I was struck by the good intentions that drive them, and by their incredible ability to listen.

Would you say this firsthand experience influenced the way you played the character?

- Definitely. Having heard judges express themselves the way they do, having heard youth counselors talk like that and stand up for the teenagers, it's actually very surprising, and even impressive. I'm not saying it was on my mind for each take during the shoot, but it definitely permeated me. Emmanuelle, who had been struck by a rather aggressive juvenile judge, always tried to push me toward being more authoritarian, toward using greater firmness. I'd say to her, "I can't always behave like a cop!" At the same time, given the way she edited the scenes, making the best possible use of silent exchanges and glances, you feel that the judge really listens, she's very attentive, without being complacent.

How would you define your character?

- Emmanuelle told me a story that her uncle, a youth counselor, had told her. A female judge, talking about a young delinquent they were both handling, had said to him, "You're his mother and I'm his father!" That pretty well sums up the judge's character. Let's say, to stick with a familiar metaphor, that this judge is sometimes his father because she's the one who punishes him, even if, when she decides to put Malony in prison, it's both because he wouldn't understand if she didn't—since he didn't hold up his end of the bargain—and also to protect him from himself. She behaves like a father, but she's also a woman, she has the reactions of a woman and a mother. She knows how to listen and can sense when he's about to break down, when he's on the verge of tears, even when he is unable to express just how impossible things have become for him.

Isn't it less a character study than one might think and more a role that is rather close to you, with her blend of natural authority and kindness?

- Since the lines do contain a lot of facts, dates and legal references, as the judge throws all that stuff in the poor child's face without pulling her punches, I couldn't really identify with her. At the same time, it's true: deep down I was nevertheless in tune with everything she told him. Her behavior wasn't foreign to me, except that I'm not sure I could have said everything she says with such firmness. Emmanuelle really insisted, and she was right. What was hard for me was to play in sequence all those scenes that took place over a period of several years. In the screenplay, you see the child change over time. He becomes an adolescent and then a young man. You see these situations, these dramatic events, these problems, and my scenes with him were to highlight his progression. But when we had to shoot all these scenes in succession, keeping that same tone day in and day out, it was another thing altogether! That was something I didn't gauge properly before the shoot: to have to use that same tone for several weeks whereas at times I would have liked a breather. It did require a good deal of effort on my part.

What struck you most when you met Rod Paradot for the first time?

- When I saw his screen tests, I was immediately struck by his fragility, his lack of self-confidence and yet at the same time his apparent toughness, a sort of muffled rage. He's wonderful in the film. He's very moving, with a face that is still childlike, and that pale complexion. I know he had a rough time, and so did Emmanuelle. She never let up, but the outcome is incredible. The scenes in which his violent tendencies, his anger and his pain explode are very powerful.

You meet up again with Benoît Magimel opposite whom you played in *Thieves*.

- Benoit is so moving. He has a very special sensitivity and intensity that make his character, a wounded man whose itinerary and relationship to the judge we discover little by little, a wonderful character. He is so right on key, and what patience he has, too! People who have such patience and selflessness are truly admirable. I really like all our scenes, with all the subtext and exchanging glances, which Emmanuelle put to very good use.

On the other hand, it's the first time you've done a film with Sara Forestier...

- What she does with this character, not an easy one, is impressive. Sara is a great actress, an actress who takes risks. In the screen tests she tried some things that were even darker. She did some very bold things, and she had Emmanuelle's trust...

In *On My Way* you were always on the move, and so was the camera that followed you. Here you're always sitting.

- ... Yes, I'm a talking head! [Laughter.]...

... and you can sense that the staging is deliberately more static, more confining...

- Yes, but Emmanuelle used several cameras and did a number of takes, so that in the editing, she was able to show what goes on in this office and put a lot of vitality into it.

What in your opinion is her main asset?

- Her talent—even if that's a word that encompasses everything. But yes, her form of talent. Her screenplays are very polished. When you read them you don't think, "Yes, that's good, but here, things need to be reworked and improved." And she keeps working on it even after everyone has agreed to do the film. She decides everything, she's on all fronts. If she has to go off to scout locations and she's not given the means to do so, she says, "Never mind, I'm going anyway." She does what she has to do in order to achieve what she wants, and I think that must give her great satisfaction. She really worked the way she wanted to on this film. And we didn't have to ask ourselves pointless questions. If we did something, it was because that was what we should do. She never stops working. Before, during, afterwards. It must be exhausting! I admire her energy, her intensity and her thoroughness, as well. I think her work on this film was simply amazing. There's always a viewpoint, it's always right, always on target, always genuine. It's very powerful. At the same time, the film is full of light, it's very positive.

Interview with Rod Paradot

What was the first contact you had with the film?

- I was training to become a carpenter/joiner at a vocational high school in Stains. I was smoking a cigarette outside during a break when Elsa Pharaon came over to talk to me. She was looking for a young guy like me for a film and asked if I was interested in doing a screen test. We went into a classroom, did the audition and it seems to have worked!

Do you remember your first meeting with Emmanuelle?

- It was when I did a screen test for her. She was there watching while they were filming me. I was a bit stressed out. I had done a little research on the internet beforehand and knew who she was and what she'd done. I knew she was somebody in the film world, a director and an actress. So I wanted to give it everything I had in order to pass the audition. I was hoping she'd like it.

Had she given you a scene to learn?

- Just a short text. A part in the script where I ask Ludo to give me a cig. A really violent scene – that I really liked when I saw the film. After that I did a bunch more screen tests but Emmanuelle wasn't saying if I had the part or not! Before meeting Benoît and Sara, I did several more auditions with different actors and actresses. I thought it was a good sign that I was with so many people, but they still weren't telling me! I did screen tests with dozens of girls going for the part of my girlfriend in the film. And that's when Emmanuelle told me that she'd chosen me. I was super glad.

In what way would you say Malony is like you – or is he?

- I feel like I can see a bit of myself in Malony. In his nature. Even if I'm a lot less violent than he is. I like the character a lot. He's got a lot of love inside, especially for his mother. At the same time he suffers from a huge lack of love, which is why he's so full of rage. That's what I like about him. I live in the projects, so I know what it's like. Kids are often left all alone in the street by the time they're 8 years old, with no parents, no one, left to their own devices, and that's when they start getting into trouble. I was really moved by that, too, because I'd really like that to stop.

Where did you grow up? Do you have any brothers and sisters?

- I've always lived in Stains. I'm an only child, my father's a plumber and my mother's a civil servant.

Do you go to the movies a lot?

- Not that often, but I love them. I'm crazy about horror films. *The Exorcist* was the first one I saw when I was little, and I never forgot it! When I found out I was going to be shooting with all those folks, I watched the films they were in. I saw *On My Way* and *Polisse* several times.

When you were younger, did you ever dream of becoming an actor one day?

- To be honest, not at all! I didn't think I was capable of it. At the same time I always loved the theater and any sort of improvisation exercise. In elementary school we did a bit of acting to work on our emotions, so we wouldn't be so hyper in class. They had us work on shouting, being sad or happy. After that, whenever I went to summer camp I always took part in the shows they put on. I also played in a scene at school, an excerpt from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by Shakespeare. I loved it.

Emmanuelle Bercot had you work with a coach before the shoot.

- Daniel Marchaudon helped me a lot. We worked together for over two months. He made me think about the story, and we tried to really understand everything that happened in it. He talked about my character, Malony, why he acted this way or that, and why he thought this or that. We were working, but it felt like playing. Maybe because we walked around a lot while working. It was more natural, more fun than if we'd been sitting around a table. It was easier to understand the story and absorb the text. Learning lessons in school had always been so hard for me, but this just came naturally! Maybe because I was really moved by the story—and even cried reading the script. Maybe also because I know other stories like this one.

Do you remember your first meeting with “your” judge, Catherine Deneuve?

- It was during the lighting tests, just before the shoot started. I was nervous and a bit tense. I hadn't seen many films with her but I knew who she was. My family had talked about her a lot, about her fame and her career. I did some research, and I watched *On My Way*. So it was an honor and a joy to act with her. I was kind of awed at first, and a bit reserved, but she was really sweet and helped me to relax.

How do you explain the relationship between Malony and his judge?

- I wondered a lot about that. I think he sees her almost like a member of his family. She's kind of like the father he never had. And her viewpoint and opinions are enormously important to him. She's tried to understand him, not to penalize him straight away, and that has brought them together. Even when she finally sends him to prison, he thanks her, because he realizes he's gone too far and she has no choice. I think she's really the one Malony is most attached to.

More than his youth counselor, played by Benoît Magimel?

- It's not the same. Yann is more like an uncle, or a cousin, or a big brother. But there's a lot of love between them. It's funny, several times people said there was a family resemblance between Benoît and me. At any rate we hit it off right away. We talked a lot, confided in each other, he told me about when he was first in the business when he was even younger than me, he helped me out, gave me advice, put me at ease. We were on the same wavelength from the beginning. Like with Sara. We had a strong emotional bond right from the start, kind of like in the film but a bit less turbulent! [laughing.] She was like a big sister to me.

What scenes were you most scared about before the shoot?

- The love scenes! [laughing.] I had no idea how they would go and it scared me. Then in the end they weren't that hard! Diane [Rouxel] was also like a sister to me. We got along really well, helped each other a lot and rehearsed our scenes together at night. One day I asked her if I could kiss her then, to feel more comfortable about it during the shoot! [laughing.]

So which scenes were the hardest to shoot?

- The one where I gave the most was the scene with Sara when I sent the desk flying, it hits the pregnant woman's belly and Sara spits on me. I hate anyone spitting in my face! I really had to swallow my pride. It was a hard scene that really upset me. After shooting it I spent half an hour alone trying to unwind. There's another scene where I gave it my all. In the nightclub when Malony voices everything he's got inside, his rage and his love. It all comes out. I'd never done any of that trance dancing or headbanging. It was hard and it took a lot out of me. And we did retakes of the scene several times, too.

Emmanuelle said she was hard on you at times and didn't let up until she got what she wanted out of you.

- It's true, but she briefed me and helped me a lot on the shoot to understand

Malony, and also to get across what she wanted from me. It was hard at times but better than having a director who told me to just play what was written! She knows what she wants and when she wants red, it had better not be white! [laughing] But I think that's also why her films are so awesome. I felt bad after some scenes because I take things so much to heart, and it took time to realize it was about Malony, not me! At any rate it was a fantastic experience.

What was the most surprising thing about the experience?

- Working as a team. The movies is a world of its own, where everyone's working toward the same goal, and they're all there really listening. You can talk and open your heart to them. They were all there for me, even when I was having a hard time.

What surprised you the most when you saw the finished film?

- When you're acting on the set you can't imagine how it's going to look, and then when you get that thrown in front of you, it's amazing! You see all the work done by everyone on the set and in the editing room. It's even finer because you see that things work with Benoit, Catherine and Sara. It shows that we were close knit and worked well together. And then I figured out how filming works. Before, I used to watch a film without thinking about how it was made, but now I think, "Look, that's a different shot there, and another one there, and the camera's doing this." Now I'm aware of all the work behind it and how important all the different professionals are in a film.

Can you relate to what the film says, that if parents can't take care of their children's upbringing, then it's up to society to take over, which is where the work of the judge and youth counselor comes in?

- Yes, because first of all I live in Stains where there's a lot of delinquency, assaults, and lost youths like Malony, and I think this film will make people think about their upbringing. A child doesn't act like that for no reason, there's always something that triggers it. It made me think about myself, too.

***Standing Tall* is going to open the Cannes Film Festival. Are you...**

- ... proud, really proud of the film! Really excited and really stressed out, too! But mostly happy, really happy.

And after Cannes?

- We'll see. Emmanuelle warned me that everything could stop just like that from

one day to the next. I know, but I'd like to keep going. I really loved acting, really loved playing the part of Malony. I loved it, it was really interesting, and it even made me cry! So I'd love to keep going.

If there was just one thing to remember from this adventure, what would it be?

- When we all went on the set and I realized that we were all there and were going to act together. That was fantastic.

Interview with Benoît Magimel

Can you relate to the patience, abnegation and perseverance shown by Yann, the youth counselor you play?

- I certainly admire those qualities in him! While reading the script I thought, "There's nothing to be done, it's hopeless! Totally hopeless!" And yet the film shows that there is hope, that you can't throw in the towel, and that even if things don't always work out it's worth trying just for the times when they do. To be a good counselor, you have to be levelheaded. You need to be familiar with the turf, to know these kids would try to make you believe anything just to glean any semblance of love, and they're not above playing with people's feelings. In the film, sometimes Malony makes you think he's let his guard down, and at the same time he's ruthless and knows exactly how to hit you where it hurts. For instance when he shouts at you, "You can't even have a kid!" And yet, when you take an interest in these kids, they give you tons of affection, because they have a huge need for it. Basically, that's what it boils down to. Emmanuelle introduced me to a counselor. You can't help admiring these people. The film shows that it's worth hanging in there. Even for one kid out of ten or twenty! It's hard talking about it just as an actor playing a part because talking about the film makes you want to discuss the subject—and that's part of its strength.

What do you find most touching about Yann as a character?

- The fact that he's within an inch of giving up at times, and doesn't think he can succeed. "I'm tired," he blurts out at one point. It's understandable. At the same time he can't be fooled. He's a former delinquent himself and has experienced firsthand what the kid has been through. He knows what it's like, has no special feelings of empathy for Malony at first, and he doesn't indulge in miserabilism or pity. That's how I played the part at the beginning of the film, as if I weren't affected by all the wretchedness. He's observing things and can put on the pressure when he has to. Then at a certain point something happens between him and the kid that's a game changer. Suddenly he's turned upside down. So he does some soul-searching. The character grows and gets even more interesting to play. He's a brave guy and a wounded man at the same time.

The scenes in which you feel he's almost helpless are really moving. They mirror his own past, lending him added intensity and humanity.

- That's where Emmanuelle's strength as a screenwriter and filmmaker really comes through. Her truth. I don't think counselors can do this type of work without having their own flaws, their shortcomings, wounds or a past that give meaning to that desire to care for, heal and help others. Sometimes I can't help thinking about their loneliness as well. Who's there to watch over these caseworkers when they start doubting and reaching their tipping point? Who's there to support the juvenile judge who's finding it harder and harder to have faith in her mission? What happens when they have to deal with prosecutors and a judicial system that are so wide of the mark? Luckily these people are driven. The film's strength lies in simultaneously evoking all that, in spotlighting them, their struggles and their dedication.

Was it Yann, your character, that made you want to do the film?

- It was mainly Emmanuelle! Her desire was more important than anything else, including the script. Besides, I really wanted to work with her. Because she's a woman—I love working with women directors. Because she's an actress—and there's something very appealing about being directed by another actor. And because ... because it's her! I know she had second thoughts, which is why she asked me to do some screen tests with Rod, which I readily agreed to. I'm grateful that she had faith in me. The screen tests were incredibly valuable. I could tell right away that Rod had something special. I pushed him to his limits, even making him break down at one point. I could see he had weak spots and that he'd be capable of using them in his acting. It wasn't always easy for him, but when you see how he made out in the confrontation scene with his first caseworker, it leaves you stunned!

He really floored even me, despite my experience. It would be wrong to think that since he's a kid from the projects, Rod just played his own character. He really worked on his part with Emmanuelle, and she guided him. She didn't go easy on him, but she handled him the same way as she did the rest of us, and she brought out the best.

What was the hardest for you?

- Mainly the specialized vocabulary, and the legal terms in certain lines. But when you work with someone who trusts you, who's really by your side, there's no difficulty that can't be overcome. I'm impressed by the way Emmanuelle managed to bring out the best of what we could give. She's extremely intuitive and reaches inside people to find what could serve their characters. Yann's last

name is Le Vigan. Was it a coincidence? Emmanuelle didn't answer my question. But I don't believe in coincidence. I've often said that I was a fan of Robert Le Vigan. Emmanuelle probably noticed that at some point. But that's not all. When I saw the film, as I watched myself the way she filmed me, there's a scene where I felt like I was watching Le Vigan in *La Bandera*! There was something restless there that she picked up on and drew out of me. I can see things Emmanuelle got from Catherine in the character of the judge, too.

Speaking of whom, here you are back with Catherine Deneuve nearly twenty years after *Téchiné's Thieves*.

- I had a really short scene with her where I played the tough guy and gave her the brush-off. It was easy—I was half hidden behind a door! I could sense how kind she was right away. I'm really glad to have had the chance to work with her again and to get to know her through this film. She's a fantastic human being and a great acting partner. She really makes it easy for you, giving you a helping hand when you're feeling a bit lost. I love all the scenes we're in together, all the exchanges of knowing glances. Emmanuelle told us that for Malony it was a bit like the judge was his father and the counselor his mother. That really fits her. Catherine rules!

How would you define Emmanuelle?

- Emmanuelle is strong-willed. She has very definite convictions and doesn't let anything go. She's demanding. She has no qualms about questioning your sincerity if she feels you're a bit off the mark, and at the same time you feel like there's a lot of latitude, a lot of room for acting. And sometimes you can just let yourself be guided by her. For instance the scene in the Chinese restaurant with Rod, which she put together based on who we were and what would work in that moment. Not everything was written. Nothing is set in stone with Emmanuelle, and that's what's so wonderful. She knows how to reach the best in us. She seeks resonance in each of us and uses it, but not at all in a cruel way, like some directors, who give you the feeling they're taking something away from you. No, we're in such a relationship of trust that she does it with our tacit agreement, even our complicity. It's simple: when you work with Emmanuelle you feel supported. And she's an actress, someone who knows what that means and understands the pleasure you feel as an actor in getting in touch with your own truths and your own past, and drawing from that to make the scene resonate even more powerfully. On top of it, I really like the way she films. For instance the way she sets up Sara's [Forestier] character through the staging: you don't see her, you just hear her voice. She brings her in practically on tiptoes by starting out focusing on the little boy—a magnificent image! In fact, Sara is incredible in the film. Practically

possessed! She really delved into her role, without any coyness, with as much control as surrender, and with something sensual, too. Sara's so high-powered! I have to say that Emmanuelle is someone who's always there to bring out the best in you. Always. She may seem inscrutable, a bit rough around the edges, and then suddenly she breaks out into that gorgeous, almost childlike smile and it's a ray of sunshine! I find her very mysterious, too, almost elusive. I'd like to work with her again, to get to know her even better. She really is an incredible woman! [Laughing] She's my lucky star. It feels great to work like that, and it's rare. Actually, I think people can accomplish anything with kindness.

In fact, that's the moral of the film.

- Yes, that with love and attention, you can do anything.

Interview with Sara Forestier

How did you react when Emmanuelle Bercot asked you to do a screen test with Rod, to play his mother?

- I love doing them! I don't really like it when people just pick me like that because I feel like they're choosing me for very specific reasons, so I'm afraid I won't be as free or be able to surprise people. For me, screen tests are a way of getting into the role that I really enjoy. I feel like I can offer something unexpected and different from what the director has already imagined.

Yet Emmanuelle says she thought of you when writing the character.

- ... yes, with a photo of me in front of her! I'm not sure what that means when you look at the character of Séverine! [laughing]

What struck you when reading the script?

- That the role was a tough one! There are scripts where the role seems very clear. *Suzanne*, for example. I figured out the character so well and so fast that I really didn't feel like talking about it, even to Katell [Quillévééré, the director]. There was something I didn't want to spoil the charm of before playing the part. Here, it was the opposite, and I found the role unfathomable. And I couldn't get into the part right away. It took me two or three days of shooting before finding it. It's the most difficult role I've ever had to play.

Why's that?

- Because she's such a raw character and also someone who at times tries to hoodwink other people. So there are different levels of acting. That was the complexity of trying to render the character's uncompromising aspect, her sincerity, while also playing up her off-the-wall side, her own reality, while remaining true to myself. I could tell that Emmanuelle had a very loving way of looking at Séverine, and at the same time she made her laugh. So there was that part of it as well, which was not insignificant and gave me lots of room to play around. I always get into a role through its physicality, the costumes, the makeup, the props. They are all crucial factors. When making those choices for *Standing Tall*, I wanted to hang

onto something that was right on target and not overly cautious regarding what Emmanuelle wanted.

Meaning?

- I wanted to try not just to represent the social side. Actually, I hate social naturalism, which blocks my imagination. I was trying more to bring in something on the order of perdition: you can tell she's wacky and offbeat emotionally and psychologically. The trap in this role for me would have been to make what happens with Malony a purely social justification. I tried to bring in something a little more sexy, more trivial, crazy and wild. Emmanuelle has imagination and daring, she'd written a bold character, so there was no reason to be afraid of being bold myself.

You assume the character wholeheartedly, not trying to distance yourself.

- With that kind of character there's no other choice. You have to fully embrace it. You can't pick it up gingerly and play around with it like a puppet. Film is an art of emotion and personification. Ideas are what work least well on screen because they don't allow the flesh to express itself. In a well-written role you can see the ideas and the physicality. Then it's up to the actor to strike a balance by transforming and embodying the ideas.

What do you find most touching in this character?

- Emmanuelle's view of her. Emmanuelle is no snob, she's not a victim of the dictates of good taste, she's free, she's got nerve and she's bighearted. My character is really personifying France in crisis! And France in crisis means the people at the bottom. Emmanuelle has a wonderful take on this "working-class" side of the film, she's not just analyzing things, and there's a lot of humanity in what she sees. She inspires you to be daring because she herself is a "ballsy" woman! She inspires you. I think she had to put a character like mine in the film, otherwise it wouldn't have been Emmanuelle's film! It's kind of the character that's most like her, or that's most like part of who she is, of what you can imagine when you spend time with her. I'd even say I lifted two or three things and put them into my character! [Laughing] I figured out what she likes, what makes her laugh, and I came up with some things – which she kept in the film, which a more cautious director wouldn't have done, but I probably wouldn't have dared do it with another director either. I trusted her more than I've ever trusted anyone.

Were you ever afraid of going too far?

- No, because going too far is not a criterion for me. What's important to me is

being sincere all the time even when the character isn't. What would have scared me was not so much going too far as going to the wrong place. It's not the same. And I trusted Emmanuelle's eye in that. There's a trueness in Séverine that comes from Emmanuelle and from me. That's what matters to me. The memories from the shoot are also crucial. Not just the human side, but the acting. Did I or didn't I derive enjoyment from playing that character? We're not there just to make money or to produce a moneymaker. On the last day I said to Emmanuelle: "I'll never forget making this film."

Which scene best defines Séverine?

- Probably the one in the visiting room when she tells her son she's not giving him her telephone number. It's one of the few scenes that focuses on her. And it allows you to grasp her way of thinking. And her fecklessness. She talks to Malony like she would to a friend! And she finally says to him, "Okay, I'll give you the number but don't call me." It's so unlike a mother! And when he leaves she says disconsolately, "He didn't even say goodbye!" That scene has everything. Her relationship with Malony is totally symbiotic and the boy is practically her greatest achievement in life, even though she has failed in her relationship with him. He's the most precious thing on earth to her. Her love is dysfunctional, but she does love him!

There's also the powerful scene where she ends up spitting in his face.

- And I ad-libbed that! Emmanuelle had written a terrific idea, that I should stretch his mouth out of shape. It was so powerful visually that I couldn't simply slap him. I thought it was more brutal to spit in his face. I thought it would be less painful for Rod too! Actually it was the thing he found most unbearable. Because, acting for the first time, there were no barriers between him and his character. I loved working with Rod. We got along right away, and there was obvious chemistry between us. Anyway, I always prefer acting with someone instinctive as opposed to someone who reasons. It's more inspirational. There are several scenes where Rod bowled me over! Times when I saw him delivering something really raw, with tears in his eyes, giving it everything he had...

This was the first time you worked with Catherine Deneuve.

- I loved acting with her. It was a great experience. I have a lot of admiration when I look at the career she's had! I'm not saying that to be pretentious or to play the model student, but I'm genuinely in awe. I don't think there's an actress anywhere in the world with such an enviable career. And for her to still be so free and have such fun. She's such a modern woman! She understands everything. When you

see her in scenes in the film, playing her role, you can feel her natural authority and an unwavering sensitivity. For me Catherine is close to the character. She's imposing, through her past and what she represents, and at the same time she's a woman who doesn't seem at all distant. That's what's so mysterious about her. On the set, she's not a calculating actress who's analyzing or overthinking things, or saying, "I'm going to do this or that with my character." She's in the present moment, in the realm of emotions. Working with an actress like her is very exciting.

It was also the first time you worked with Benoît Magimel.

- He's another one I've liked for a long time. In Jalil Lespert's films he's got that incredible vulnerability while being really virile. He also has a very "common man" quality that I find very touching. In this film he plays a really fine, very moving character. It's an extraordinary opportunity to have people who exercise their profession with such dedication and patience. And it's a good thing for a film to pay tribute to them like this. The film—bighearted, sweeping and working-class—is like Emmanuelle. There's a lot of love in the way she looks at these professions and characters. And hope, too. In fact what touched me the most in the film was seeing that in the end love is the only thing that can save you. Love in all forms. Films often show destructive love, but here it shows without any naivety or sentimentality that love can save people! The beauty of film is in giving us a different way of seeing things than in everyday life. You're suddenly in close proximity, in an intimate relationship with situations or people you felt were far away, and suddenly you understand them and see them differently. That's the power of *Standing Tall*.

Cast

The Judge	Catherine DENEUVE
Malony	Rod PARADOT
Yann	Benoît MAGIMEL
The Mother	Sara FORESTIER
Tess	Diane ROUXEL
Claudine	Elizabeth MAZEV
The JDC Director	Anne SUAREZ
Mr. Robin	Christophe MEYNET
The Public Prosecutor	Martin LOIZILLON
The Clerk	Lucie PARCHEMAL
Gladys Vatie	Catherine SALÉE
Malony 6 years old	Enzo TROUILLET
Ludo	Ludovic BERTHILLOT
The Grandfather	Michel MASIERO
The School principal	Marie PIEMONTESE

Crew

Director	Emmanuelle BERCOT
Script	Emmanuelle BERCOT and Marcia ROMANO
Director of Photography	Guillaume SCHIFFMAN AFC
Editing	Julien LELOUP
Sound	Pierre ANDRÉ
Sound Editing	Séverin FAVRIAU
Sound Mixing	Stéphane THIÉBAUT
Production Design	Éric BARBOZA
Costume Design	Pascaline CHAVANNE
1st Assistant Director	Léonard VINDRY
Script Supervisor	Isabel RIBIS
Casting	Antoinette BOULAT ARDA - Elsa PHARAON ARDA Karen HOTTOIS ARDA - Raphaëlle BECK
Production Manager	Hervé DUHAMEL
Unit Manager	Karine PETITE
Produced by	LES FILMS DU KIOSQUE
Producers	François KRAUS and Denis PINEAU-VALENCIENNE
In coproduction with	FRANCE 2 CINÉMA WILD BUNCH RHÔNE-ALPES CINÉMA PICTANOVO
French Distributor	WILD BUNCH
French Video	WILD SIDE
International Sales	ELLE DRIVER
With the participation of	CANAL + FRANCE TÉLÉVISIONS CINÉ +
In association with	SOFICINÉMA 10 MANON 5 PALATINE ÉTOILE 11 SOFITVCINÉ 2
With the support of	CNC la RÉGION RHÔNE-ALPES la RÉGION NORD-PAS DE CALAIS PALATINE ÉTOILE 11 DÉVELOPPEMENT MANON PRODUCTION 4 la PROCIREP and l'ANGOA

elle.
DRIVER