A man and a young boy are sitting on a large pile of hay in a dimly lit barn. The man, on the left, is wearing a cap and a vest, and is looking down at his hands. The boy, on the right, is sitting on a small wooden stool and pointing upwards with his right hand. A swallow is flying in the air above them. The title 'WHEN THE SWALLOWS FLY AWAY' is written in large, white, serif capital letters across the top of the image.

WHEN THE SWALLOWS FLY AWAY

A film by
Sébastien Pins



“

Sometimes, everything breaks on the inside, like a glass shattering on the ground into a thousand pieces...

”

Original title

Quand les hirondelles s'en vont

Duration

18'53

Format

2.35 Scope

DCP 4K

Sound

5.1

Year

2021

Country

Belgium

Press & distribution contact

alchimieproductions@proximus.be

hirondelleslefilm.com



In a small rural village, a young boy befriends Fernand and Andrée, a farmer couple who, at the age of 80 years, find themselves at trouble feeding their remaining livestock.



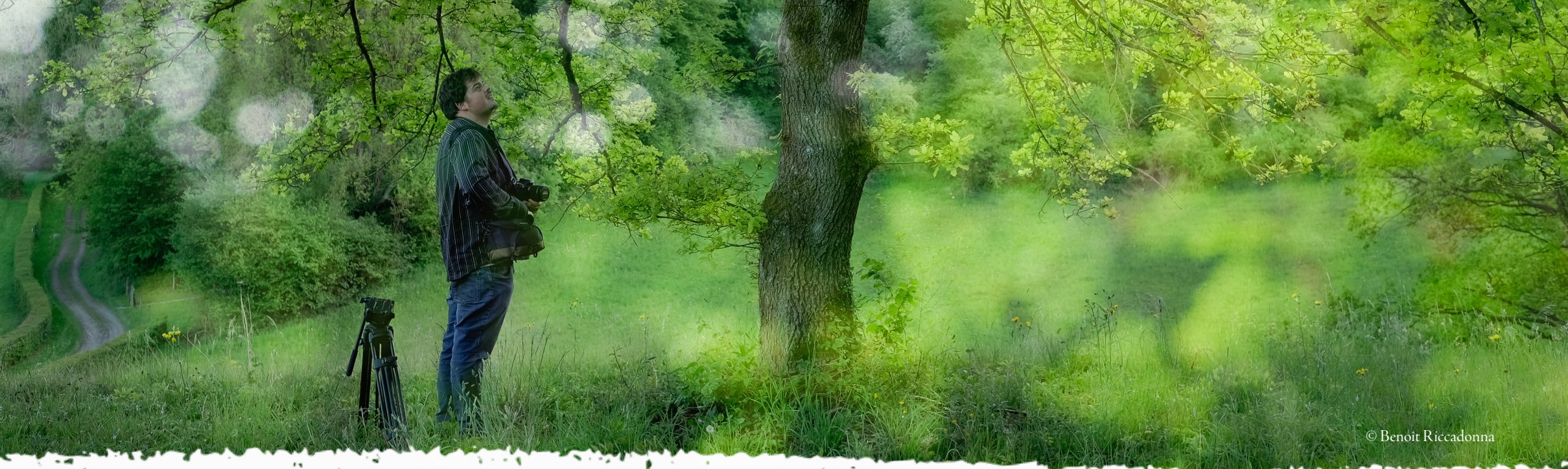
Director's note

As a director, I want to show a lifestyle where time seems to run differently, like the farmer who waits for the swallows' return in spring, or the child who loves feeding the farm animals... Long ago, a lot of farmers lived with only a few animals. They had a special attachment to their animals, who became part of their day-to-day life. It's this taste for the simple things and this admiration for the small joys in life that I'd like to share through this film.

I'd also like to show through my pictures the failure of a life's work, witnessed by a child. But this child also understands that even though old age might weaken the farmers physically, their love for their animals doesn't wither. The film shows this way the importance of intergenerational links with all of the meaningful exchanges that they bring with them.

Julien Pin





© Benoit Riccadonna

Why did you choose “When swallows fly away” as film title ?

After the cows left, the swallows, who brought joy to Fernand and Andrée, never came back to the stable... The title symbolizes the end of a story, as well as the end of an era.

Did you have any difficulties during the shoot ?

The shoot went well, but due to the health of our farmer, we were always on standby to call it a day or to postpone the shooting day, because they were

too tired to endure the camera. So the film was made by capturing fleeting moments during a few hours on a sporadic timetable.

The most difficult moment for me was the departure of the cows... As it was very probable that Fernand and Andrée wouldn't keep me informed about the day of the sale, I stayed in contact with Nicolas, the cattle dealer who was supposed to go get the livestock from them.

After a few weeks of silence, I called Nicolas one evening to know the date when he would go to the Fernand's place. He told me that it would happen on the next day. It became a race against time to find a sound engineer, to rent a camera and to convince Fernand and Andrée about the importance

to call me when their cows would be taken away. I didn't tell them the cattle dealer had warned me about his arrival, because it was essential to me to respect their decision about my presence on that day. I knew my film would lose its strength if I didn't capture this scene.

On the day of the sale, my sound engineer and I saw the cattle trailer go towards the farm. I thought that Fernand and Andrée decided against me being there. But 1 hour later, probably after talking to Nicolas, Andrée called me to say the cattle dealer was there and that I could come by. Shooting this scene was particularly intense, because I didn't want to miss anything.

In a documentary, the emotions of the people you film aren't fake, so it was heartbreaking to see the extent of the farmers' sadness during that moment. Their whole life was being taken away, and something inside them broke on that day... The moment lasted less than thirty minutes, but it took me several weeks to recover from this day, which had a lasting impact on me.

Who is the young boy in the movie ?

The magical part of the old couple's story comes from the refreshing energy that the young boy brings into their daily routine. He's not suspecting the underlying tragedy that's unfolding, he's discovering it step by step.

Benjamin is Fernand and Andrée's neighbor. I was just like him when I was young... always riding around on my bike, feeling free while racing around the farms. I loved farm work just like him, and I was eager to help the village farmers – including Fernand and Andrée – during haymaking times. When



I noticed the close relationship between Benjamin and the farmer couple, I instantly knew there was a film to be made.

What space did you give to the importance of sound in your film ?

The film finds its rhythm through Benjamin's voice-over, David Reyes' music, and a great lot of sound editing. It's a documentary where silence tells us a lot. The sound editing and the music needed to bring a new life into the pictures without suffocating them, giving the whole film an added value. The sound editing and mixing allowed me to insist on the idea of the village being like a cocoon "out of our time". But most of all, it added real emotion



to the project. The voice-over rehearsals with Benjamin were great moments punctuated by good humor and dedication.

How was the technical part of your work ?

At the beginning of the shoot, I wanted to use some machinery to make my shots more cinematographic, but I quickly left that idea behind, preferring a handheld camera-style that grants more reactivity.

This way of filming gave another added value to the project: it allowed me to be closer to the protagonists' emotions without being held back by technical restrictions. The boom operator, however, felt like he ran a marathon to stay

behind the camera so he could do his job adequately. A documentary set can be fast-paced and unpredictable... but it's exciting !

Why does the cattle dealer seem to know well Fernand and Andrée ?

The cattle dealer Nicolas, who buys the remaining cows from Fernand and Andrée, has actually known the couple for years.

When he started his profession as cattle dealer and breeder, he bought his first cow from them, and now he takes the last ones away from them... While filming this scene, I felt Nicolas' awkwardness in this situation, full of compassion towards the two farmers who gave their whole life to their animals. Nicolas gained Fernand and Andrée's trust during all those years, they considered him like part of their family.

The schedule of a cattle dealer is way busier than one might think... Every day was a marathon with Nicolas ! He works everyday often till 11pm, and has to leave at 1am to bring the cows to the cattle market. A frenetic rhythm, worlds away from Fernand and Andrée's lives.

The music

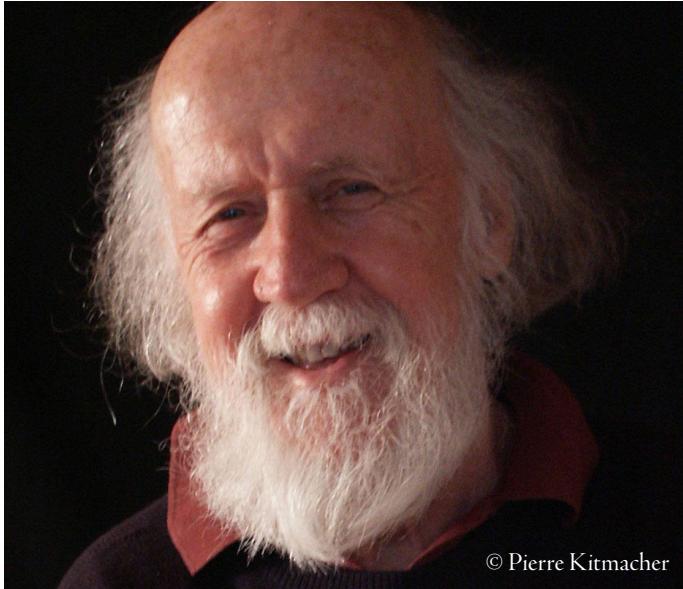
“After the wonderful adventure of ‘Traces’ which saw the beginning of our collaboration, I was glad that Sébastien Pins asked me to compose the music for the film “When swallows fly away”. The challenge here was different, we needed less lyrical music, less of a “huge space” sound, because Sébastien was handling more fragile, internalized feelings. So the music needed, in my opinion, two aspects.

On one side, it should be introspective, refined and modest, because it’s accompanying the last workdays of farmers, while their livestock is being sold one by one, leaving them slowly alone on an empty farm into which they put their whole life. The subject was already strong enough, so we didn’t need to insist on emotion, we should even avoid any pathos. Some sporadic notes, a few delicate strings – all to evoke fragility of old age and time gone by.

On the other side, the film is being narrated by a child full of life, the personification of optimism as well as a relay between generations. I wanted to write something full of energy, light and positive, through percussion and guitar. So when the farmer and the child are together, we’d find a crossing between the child’s percussion and the melancholic themes of the farmer, one supporting the other, to illustrate the relationship shown on screen.

As a common thread to link it all, I had to compose a theme for the swallows, announced from the very beginning in the stable, which would underlie and unify all of the music.





Hubert Reeves

Mr Hubert Reeves, honorary president of “Humanity and Biodiversity”, astrophysicist, popularizer of science, and important ecologist, renews with “When the swallows fly away” his support to the cinematographic projects of the Belgian director Sébastien Pins. A support of no small amount, knowing Mr Reeves commitment to the preservation of biodiversity.



Nelly Boutinot

Ex-head of administration of the “Humanity and Biodiversity” association, and previous vice-president of the the “Ligue ROC” next to Hubert Reeves, Ms Boutinot never ceased her support towards Sébastien Pins’ work, and that for already over 10 years! She’s also the author of multiple literary works about biodiversity.



Thierry Machado

Renowned director of photography, member of AFC and director, Thierry Machado is the author of the most beautiful nature documentaries. DOP of the film “Winged Migration” by Jacques Perrin, and also the film “The Last Trapper” by Nicolas Vanier, he won the César for Best Cinematography in 1997, for his work in “Microcosmos”. It’s Mr Machado’s incredible work that inspired Sébastien Pins, and pushed him into film studies.

Condroz, the film decor

The set of the film took place in the village Grand Marchin, in the region of Condroz. This village kept its charm since its founding, and it is particularly proud of its 15th century church and its old stone buildings.

A few years ago, Grand Marchin was the homestead of lots of small farms, and Sébastien Pins, as a child of Grand Marchin, wanted to express in his film his attachment to the farmers who will forever be part of the history of this wonderful little village.



Casting

Fernand et Andrée Gathot
Benjamin Gruslin
Nicolas Herman





Crew List

Producer and Director — Sébastien Pins

DOP — Sébastien Pins

Sound engineers — Luis Trinques, Julien Lagneaux and Emmanuel Botteriaux

An original score composed and arranged by David Reyes

Interpreted by the No Limit Orchestra

Editor — Romain Waterlot

Color grading — Kene Illegems

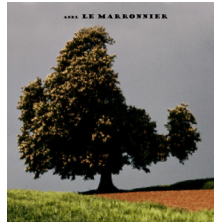
Sound editing — Ingrid Ralet

Sound mixing — Mathieu Cox

Post-production coordinator — Eric Pecher

VFX supervisors — Adrien Olivier and Alexis Faton

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