



AIME TON PERE

12 August, 2002 | By Staff reporters

Gerard Depardieu re-teams with son Guillaume for a powerhouse two-hander that will appeal to upscale arthouse audiences, writes Sheila Johnston

AIME TON PERE

Reviewed by Sheila Johnston in Locarno Screened in Competition
Dir: Jacob Berger. Fr/Switz/Canada/UK. 2002. 100 mins.

Two powerhouse performances drive *Aime Ton Pere* (provisionally entitled *A Loving Father in the UK*), an intelligent psychological road movie about the tortured relationship between a father and son, played by a real life father and son, Gerard and Guillaume Depardieu. Elegantly directed and ferociously acted, this is a natural contender for thoughtful audiences on the upscale arthouse circuit.

Leo Shepherd (Gerard Depardieu) is a distinguished writer living in an isolated farmhouse in the French Alps with his latest mistress (Hiam Abbass), his neurotic daughter (Sylvie Testud) - also his personal assistant - and her boyfriend. When news reaches them that he has won the Nobel Prize for Literature, Leo insists on travelling alone by motorbike to Stockholm to collect the award.

Meanwhile his estranged son, Paul (Guillaume Depardieu), has phoned with his congratulations and, when his calls are rebuffed, sets out in pursuit of his father. Their first meeting at a petrol station is charged with coldness and tension. Blazing off at high speed, Leo is involved in a serious road accident and (in a somewhat implausible plot development) mistakenly presumed dead by the police. In fact, Paul has abducted him.

As the writer listens to his own obituaries on the car radio, we learn details of their stormy history. Leo has written poetically about childhood but was bullying and emotionally inaccessible when it came to his own family. In retaliation, Paul as a small boy destroyed one of his manuscripts and as an adult took refuge in drugs. For a while murder hangs in the air - as Leo shrugs, all sons normally want to kill their fathers. But it soon becomes clear that what's at stake is a settling of scores.

The electrifying quality of these long scenes comes from the close match between the actors and their characters and the many echoes of the two men's colourful, very public personal lives. Depardieu pere gives a generously low-key performance, acknowledging that this is Paul's story and ceding the spotlight to Guillaume, who proves himself a worthy match for his father in the acting stakes. Though the two have co-starred before - as older and younger versions of the same character in *Tous Les Matins Du Monde* and in a television adaptation of *The Count Of Monte-Cristo* - it's the first time they have appeared at this length on screen together.

The son of the writer John Berger, the director states he "wanted to talk about the world of literature in which I grew up, the sacrifices involved, and the victims it leaves on the side of the road". However, this could also be the story of any domineering, brilliant father and his children's struggle to escape from his shadow.

While this is primarily a two-hander, Testud's character brings an interesting third dimension to the story and comes into her own in the later scenes, which lead to an graceful, unsentimental resolution. Minor roles are well-cast and technically the film is very polished, with a script which knows when to leave things unsaid, a fine sense of landscape and a brooding score by Jean-Claude Petit.

Prod cos: GMT Prods, DD Prods, Vega Film

Fr dist: UFD - UGC Fox

Int'l sales: FTD International Cinema (ex President Films)

Exec prods: Patrick Bordier, Michael Lionello Cowan, David Rogers, Jason Plettte

Prod: Jean-Pierre Guerin, Gerard Depardieu

Scr: Jacob Berger, Ed Radtke, Pascal Barollier

Cinematography: Pascal Marti

Prod des: Pierre Allard, Ivan Niclass, Kay Brown

Ed: Cathy Chamorey

Music: Jean-Claude Petit

Main cast: Gerard Depardieu, Guillaume Depardieu, Sylvie Testud, Hiam Abbass, Noemie Kocher

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- 4 A Nightmare On Elm Street (\$12.9m)
- 5 How To Train Your Dragon (\$12.7m)
- 6 Alice In Wonderland (\$11.9m)
- 7 Date Night (\$8.6)
- 8 Just Wright (\$8.8m)
- 9 The Back-up Plan (\$7.6m)
- 10 Clash Of The Titans (\$6m)

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