



Karlovy Vary
International Film Festival
Proxima Competition

SAY

Thomas Imbach walks from Zürich to Rolle

GOOD

to say hello to Jean-Luc Godard.

BYE

SAY GOD BYE

Cast and Crew

Production	Okofilm Productions, Zürich	CH
Producers	Thomas Imbach Andrea Štaka	CH CH
Clearing	Emmanuelle Koenig	F
Crew		
Written and directed by	Thomas Imbach	CH
Transcripts	Sylvie Marinkovic	CH
Photographed and Edited by	Thomas Imbach	CH
Location Sound /2 nd Camera/		
Consultant Editor	David Charap	UK
Consultant Editor	Mary Stephen	F
Coaching Author's Voice	Phil Hayes	CH
Editing Support	Rosa Albrecht	CH
Artwork by	Kurt Eckert	CH
Trailer Editor	Aron Nick	CH
Sound Design by	Peter Bräker	CH
Music by	Lukas Langenegger	CH
Lab		
	Cinegrell, Zürich	CH
	Free Studios, Geneva	CH
	Boris Rabusseau	
Sound Studio	Studio Bräker, Zürich	CH
	Loft Studios, Hamburg	D
	Sascha Heiny	
Cast		
JLG	Jean-Luc Godard	CH
David	David Charap	UK
Thomas	Thomas Imbach	CH

124 minutes, 24 fps

Format: Iphone HDR und 35mm

Aspect Ratio: 1:1,85

Colour und B/W

Sound: 5.1

SAY GOD BYE

Logline

A cinematographic dialogue and a forty-year obsession with the "God of cinema".

Synopsis

SAY GOD BYE tells the story of a teenager's transformation into a filmmaker under the spell of the cineaste who has lived and worked on Lake Geneva since 1975: Jean-Luc Godard.

We delve into this teenager's past, from his conception in the Paris of *A Bout de Souffle*, where his parents were working at the time, to his first forays into filmmaking. Fascinated by the already legendary filmmaker, Thomas dreams of becoming his assistant. He writes to JLG, asking him if he could "look over his shoulder" while he is at work. JLG never answers.

Rejected by the master, the teenager must now find his own way as a filmmaker until that day in 2021 when he senses JLG's end is near. Thomas decides to visit the master. On foot. A pilgrimage to pay his (last) respects. His aim is to meet JLG in person. Thomas Imbach dreams of filming not the master, but WITH the master, for which reason he has packed his Aaton camera in his backpack. The closer he gets to Lake Geneva, the more intense his emotions, his anxiety, his uncertainty.

SAY GOD BYE is the story of an obsession; it is also a story about the universal theme of love. It is the story of a man who finally summons the courage to seek out his beloved, to tell him face to face about his lifelong love and to say, "Thank you, JLG".

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

My first Godard film was *Vivre sa Vie* at the Lucerne Film Club's Godard retrospective in autumn 1980. The opening sentence in the programme struck me like a thunderbolt:

"En fait je ne fais pas seulement du cinéma quand je tourne, je fais mes films quand je rêve, quand je déjeune, quand je lis, quand je parle avec vous."

"Actually, I don't only make films when I shoot; I make my films when I dream, when I have lunch, when I read, when I talk to you."

That was the first JLG storm that I weathered. And a few months later

I saw the film that was to change my life:

Sauve qui peut (la vie), "my second, first film" as Godard himself called it. In the wake of the black-and-white classic, it was a film from my own world. During the screening, my moped was stolen in front of the cinema, as if to physically prove that my puberty had been blown away. Obviously, I only understood the film intuitively and emotionally. But even though it

was a "Swiss film" because of the locations and the plot, it made an impact on me that was completely different from any other Swiss films I had ever seen in Solothurn.

Since the 1960s, Godard has been considered a legend of cinema; in the 1970s he started experimenting with video and in the 1980s he had still another impressive career. For young cinephiles from the USA to Europe to Asia (cf. the YouTube comments on the Kerala interview), he is still a reference, an innovator, a deconstructivist of cinematic conventions. Significantly, his obsession with the history of cinema is not about cinema as such, but about the perception of the world through cinema. That was a crucial influence and my political socialisation was partly triggered by Godard's films: the Palestine-Israel conflict, the Vietnam War, family violence, prostitution, emancipation.

I want to involve the audience in the film in the spirit of JLG. I don't want to praise the great master; I want to get closer to the way he thinks, to the way he perceives the world.

I was still a teenager when I wrote to JLG asking if I could be an intern with him: "Dear Jean-Luc Godard, like an apprentice in the Middle Ages, I would like to look over your shoulder." I waited and waited for a reply. In vain. Instead, I ended up doing my internship in a centre for Vietnamese refugees, "boat people" as they were called. This experience gave me the courage to make a political documentary as a self-taught filmmaker in the Basque Country.

The idea for the pilgrimage occurred to me in March 2021, during the second lockdown. By chance, I discovered the 90-year-old Godard during an online discussion with the Indian festival Kerala. Having lost track of JLG a bit, I was startled by his age. As he settled in before talking to the interviewer and translator, tears came to my eyes. It dawned on me that he was not going to live very much longer. Quite spontaneously, I decided to visit him on foot and pay my respects before it was too late.

By walking to Rolle on Lake Geneva, I wanted to embark on a journey through my 40-year relationship with JLG. Traversing the countryside on foot, I was able to find time to reflect and be inspired by encounters with passers-by and conversations with my English companion David. At the same time, I had to cope with the physical exertion of marching 15-20 km a day with a 20 kg backpack.

The closer we got to Rolle, the more anxious I became; I didn't even know whether Godard would open the door for us. I wasn't interested in talking to him about cinema and the world. I'd seen and heard enough of that already. What I really wanted was a very practical exchange with JLG about filmmaking. I would have loved to film him, following his instructions. For this reason, and also to film selected images along the way, I took my 35mm camera along. In addition, I knew from my lab that JLG had recently shot tests in 35mm for a new project.

I invited David Charap, my long-time editing consultant and co-editor, to join me on the pilgrimage. David is very curious about variations on cinematic storytelling. He also has a healthy detachment from JLG's universe, so he was able to play the devil's advocate: a productive starting point for our conversations along the way.

JLG's sudden death is a bitter blow. Of course, I would have infinitely preferred to complete the film while he was still alive. And I wanted to revisit him to shoot this shot according to his

instructions. It is all the more important to me now for JLG to remain alive in the film after meeting him in the flesh in Rolle.

This encounter will also contribute significantly to film history, as it is probably JLG's last public appearance.

One of the numerous obituaries states:

"Le cinéaste était un messie sans disciples. Le copier, l'imiter, s'en réclamer, c'est courir à l'échec. Mais s'il n'est pas un modèle, son influence, elle, est essentielle. Unique."

"The cineaste was a messiah without disciples. To copy him, imitate him or refer to him is to be doomed to failure. But even if he is not a role model, his influence is essential. Unique."
Camille Nevers, *Libération*

It is this contradiction that has been with me for 40 years:
JLG is like a sun, as soon as you get too close to it, you burn.
If you ignore it, you miss the light.

It was this insight that made me embark on my adventure. Once I opened Pandora's box, I couldn't go back.

THOMAS IMBACH – Writer/Director/Producer



As one of Switzerland's most innovative and internationally renowned filmmakers, Thomas Imbach moves with virtuoso mastery between documentary and fiction. He has acquired a reputation for courageous experimentation both formally and as a storyteller. His early successes include *Well Done* (1994) and *Ghetto* (1997). The feature films *Happiness Is a Warm Gun* (2001), *Lenz* (2006) and *I Was a Swiss Banker* (2007) as well as the auto-fiction *Day Is Done* (2011) premiered at the Berlinale. His English-language period drama *Mary Queen of Scots* (2013) was selected for Toronto. His fiction feature *My Brother My Love* (2018) premiered at Locarno in Competition. With the documentary feature *Nemesis* he won the Award for "Best Cinematography" at IDFA 2020.

In Postproduction: LILI, Fiction Feature on Arthur Schnitzler's *Fräulein*

Else 2023 **SAY GOD BYE**, Essay feature, 120 Min.

- Karlovy Vary IFF, Proxima Competition

2020 **NEMESIS**, Feature documentary, 35mm, 131min.

- IDFA Competition 2020: Award for "Best Cinematography"
- luxfilmfest, Best Documentary Award 2021
- Dok.fest München, DOK.edit award 2021
- Istanbul International Film Festival, Special Jury Prize 2021

2020 as producer: **MARE** by Andrea Štaka, Fiction feature, 84 min.

Coproduced by Okofilm Productions, Zurich und Dinaridi Film, Zagreb

- Berlinale 2020, Panorama, Sarajevo 2020, Competition "Best Actress"

2018 **GLAUBENBERG – MY BROTHER MY LOVE**, Fiction feature, 114 min.

Coproduced by Okofilm Productions, Swiss Radio and Television, SRG SSR

- Nominated for the Golden Leopard 2018, Locarno

2014 as producer: **CURE – The Life of Another** by Andrea Štaka, Fiction feature, 83 min.

Produced by Okofilm Productions, Coproduced by Produkcija Ziva, Deblokada Films

- Locarno 2014, Competition, Sarajevo 2014, Competition

2013 **MARY QUEEN OF SCOTS**, Fiction feature, 35mm (DCP), 119 min.

Coproduced by Okofilm Productions, Schweizer Radio und Fernsehen, SRG SSR, ARTE, Sciapode

- Nominated for the Golden Leopard 2013, Locarno
- Toronto Film Festival 2013, "Special Presentations"

2011 **DAY IS DONE** an autobiographical fiction, 35mm (DCP), 111 min.

Coproduced by Okofilm Productions, SRF Schweizer Radio und Fernsehen and ARTE

- World Premiere Berlinale 2011, Forum
- Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival, Competition

2007 **I WAS A SWISS BANKER**, Fiction feature, 35mm, 75 min.

Underwater fairy tale of the Swiss Banker Roger Caviezel.

- Premiered at the 57th Berlinale
- Swiss Film Awards 2008, Nomination Best Actor
- Zurich Film Awards 2008, Special Jury award

2006 **LENZ AM BERG**, 35mm; Film Installation, 3-Channel-Projection Kunsthaus Zurich: In the Alps

2006 **LENZ**, Fiction feature, 35mm, 96 min.

Contemporary adaptation of Georg Büchner's „Lenz“

- Premiered at the 56th Berlinale

2002 **happy too**, Essay, 60 min. “happy too” parallels the Kelly-Bastian relationship with the struggles of the actors in “Happiness is a Warm Gun”

- Premiered at the International Film Festival Locarno 2002, Cinéastes du Présent

2001 **HAPPINESS IS A WARM GUN**, Fiction feature, 35mm, 92 min.

Drama on the murder of Petra Kelly (peace activist) by Gert Bastian (ex-general).

- Nominated for the Golden Leopard 2001, Locarno
- Official Selection Berlinale 2002
- Zurich Film Award 2001, Nominated for “Best Swiss Feature Film”, Quality Award (OFC)

2000 **Portrait Film** on Thomas Imbach “Die Kamera als Sonde”, Beta-SP, 60 min.

by Christoph Hübner for WDR/3Sat

1998 **NANO-BABIES**, 35mm (Cinemascope), Documentary, 45 min.

Science-Fiction essay on babies of high-tech researchers for Swiss Television/3SAT

- Commissioned by Swiss Television and 3Sat

1997 **GHETTO**, Feature documentary, 35mm, 122 Min.

Docudrama with teenagers on the sunny side of Zurich's Gold Coast

- Best Documentary, International Film Festival Mannheim
- Premio Giampaolo Paoli, International Film Festival Florence
- Quality Award (Swiss Ministry of Culture), Zurich Film Award

1994 **WELL DONE**, Feature documentary, 35mm, 75 Min.

Documentary on employees of a Swiss high-tech bank corporation.

- FIPRESCI-Prize in Leipzig
- Quality Award (OFC), Zurich Film Award, Art award of the city Lucerne

1991 **RESTLESSNESS**, 16mm, Fiction, 58 min.

Rail-movie with three homeless people in the IC-triangle ZH-BE-BS

- Nominated for the Max-Ophüls-Prize, 1991
- Quality Award (Swiss Ministry of Culture)

1988 **SCHLACHTZEICHEN**, 16mm, Docu-fiction, 56 min.

Doku-comedy about the Swiss Army

- Opening film at the Solothurn Film Festival 1988
- Quality Award (Swiss Ministry of Culture)
-

Book publications by / on Thomas Imbach:

- Kino CH / CINÉMA CH, Reception, Aesthetic, History
EINE ÄSTHETIK DER WIDERSPRÜCHE. VARIATIONEN ÜBER THOMAS IMBACH
(Monographie) by Marcy Goldberg, Schüren Verlag 2008
- CINEMA 50, „Variations on a True Story“, a conversation with Thomas Imbach by Veronika Grob and Nathalie Böhler, Schüren Verlag 2005
- CINEMA 46, „Den Schleier der Wahrnehmung zerreißen“ by Marcy Goldberg
(on WELL DONE), Chronos Verlag 2001
- Dokumentarisch Arbeiten, a studio conversation with Thomas Imbach by Christoph Hübner and Gabriele Voss, Schüren Verlag 1999
- „My Filmschool“: Werner Nekes Retrospektive, Katalog 1986/87, by Thomas Imbach and Christoph Settele, Zyklus Verlag 1986

Other Activities:

- Chairman of the Board of Neugass Kino AG (Cinemas: Riffraff, Houdini, Bourbaki)
- Jury member, Dusiburger Filmwoche, 2015
- Jury member at the Zurich Film Festival, Intl. Comp. 2013
- Jury Sarajevo Film Festival, Competition, 2012
- Jury Max-Ophüls-Preis, Saarbrücken 2010
- Directing-Workshops at the international film schools in Berlin (dffb), Munich (HFF) and Cape Town 1999 – 2008
- Guest speaker at the Swiss film schools Zurich, Lausanne, Geneva, Lucerne 1994 – 2016
- Workshops at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich (ETH) 1991 – 2007