

France

Sattouf, Riad

Creator of famous comics such as *La Vie Secrète des Jeunes* and *Manuel du Puceau*, Riad Sattouf is presenting in Cannes his first film, *Les Beaux Gosses*, a "light comedy"; in which he treats some of his favourite themes: adolescence; its fears and discoveries; its relationship with sex, family and religion.

In your books *Ma Circoncision* and *La Vie Secrète des Jeunes*, you show a very critical posture towards the Muslim religion. How does your religious background influence you work? I was born into a very traditional Muslim society in Syria, so I have a concrete vision of religion. I'm always surprised by the ability that human beings have to believe, whether it's in God, in UFOs, in lies, in anything. Even myself, I believe a lot in science for example, I believe in progress and in the human ability to bring us some light. Religion, on the other hand, is like the night.

The portrait you make of society concerns mostly the lower classes. The few times wealthy people are mentioned, it's in a deeply sarcastic way. Why is that? Well, because I don't spend my life in rich neighbourhoods. When I have the occasion, I visit some. But I show them as it feels [to me], I don't keep asking myself questions. My subject is not class warfare.

Tell us a little bit about *Les Beaux Gosses*. How did you have the opportunity to make your first film? *Les Beaux Gosses* is a film with 14 year-old teenagers, all non-professional actors. It was the producer, Anne Dominique Toussaint, who came up with this idea. I would never have taken the initiative of looking for producers, convincing them, putting up with their fears and concerns, changing a screenplay a hundred times to avoid disturbing some catholic association & Anne Dominique Toussaint loved my work, and she gave me total freedom. I was very lucky. I really liked doing this film, it was like paradise. Low budget, no big stars (just a few, actually), no pressure & perfect!

In *Les Beaux Gosses*, there are two death scenes which are shown in a surprisingly soft way. Why have you decided to include death and suicide in your comedy? It's pretty easy: I thought from the point of view of the teenagers in the film, in the way that the world seen through their eyes isn't charged of such a moral content as people may think. I didn't want to say "look how strange these teenagers are", but "look how strange the world is when seen through their perspective".

Has your experience with comic strips helped you develop your characters and dialogues? How did you proceed in the choice of frames and compositions? I realized pretty fast that comics and cinema had nothing to do with one another. They are two very distant languages, despite what people may

think. I thought about making a storyboard, but once I found my actors, I gave it up. I saw it had to come from them. I would ask them not to act, to do the scene as they felt like it; and then we would modify, make some adjustments & I wanted to be really close to them, so I used a lot of close shots and bizarre compositions; to really feel their animal side. And I chose to have little movement with the camera, since there is some heaviness in them; the world is turning around them, they are their own prisoners.

Your film has been chosen for the Cannes film festival, which doesn't normally select many comedies. What does this selection mean to you? I was really happy, of course. But I'm not really sure what that means, I'm just happy that people are going to watch my film and that they will be able to see something different from hundreds of other comedies, even if it sounds pretentious to say that!

After the experience with *Les Beaux Gosses*, do you intend to pursue a career in the cinema? Do you have other film projects in mind? I loved doing this film. Of course, I'd like to repeat this experience, as long as I can work in the same conditions as this time, I mean, with complete freedom to do anything I want.

By Bruno Carmelo