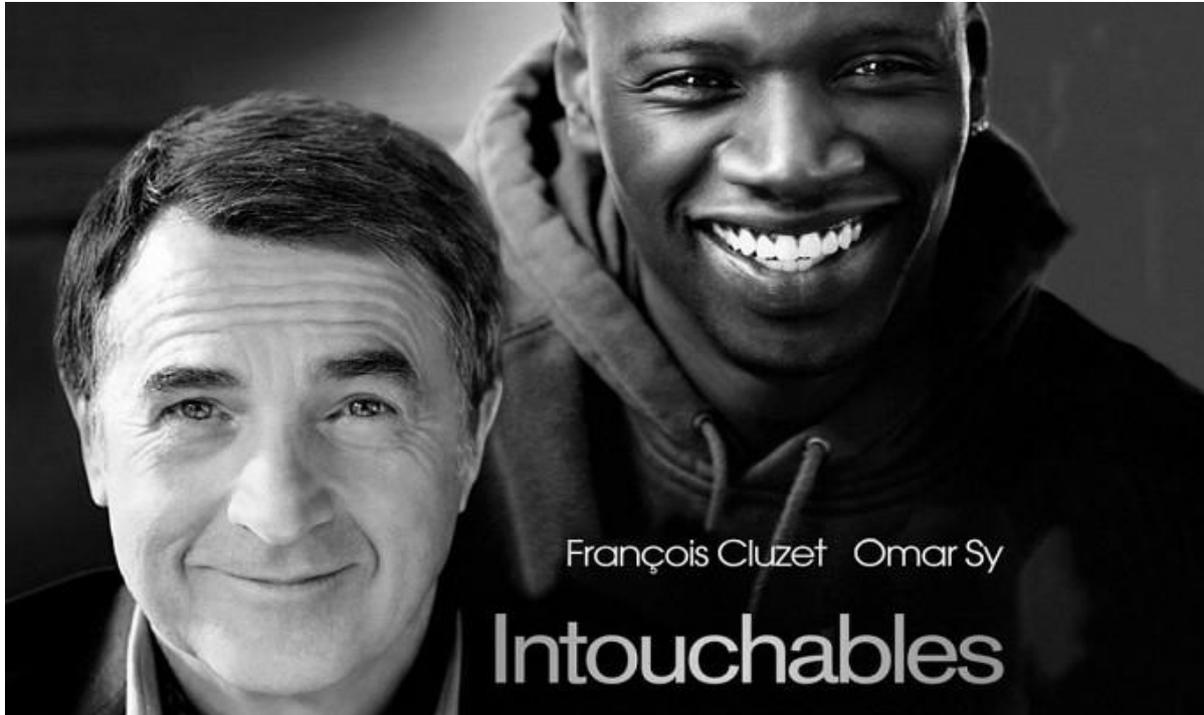


The Main Feature



Season 34 - Issue 8 (screening 9.1.14)



France 2011 Certificate 15 113 minutes

Directors	Olivier Nakache and Éric Toledano		
Producers	Nicolas Duval-Adassovsky, Laurent Zeitoun, Yann Zenou and Harvey Weinstein		
Cinematography	Mathieu Vadepied	Music	Ludovico Einaudi
Cast			
Philippe	François Cluzet	Driss	Omar Sy
Magalie	Audrey Fleurot	Marcelle	Clotilde Mollet

Philippe Pozzo di Borgo was director of Pommery, the French champagne company, when in June 1993 he suffered a serious hang-gliding accident which left him in a wheelchair as a tetraplegic. He wrote about his experiences in his book *Second Souffle* (Second Wind) in 2001. The book recounts his self-confessed gilded youth, his background in the Corsican aristocracy, and his marriage to Béatrice, the daughter of a French Prefect.

Despite their favourable backgrounds, his marriage to Beatrice was not the perfect fairytale, since she had a series of miscarriages. Eventually she was diagnosed with cancer of the bone marrow. Consequently, they adopted two children. Béatrice died in May 1996 whilst Phillippe was still recovering from his accident.

His book concentrates on Phillippe's life as an invalid: the pain, the need to re-learn how to breathe, and on the treatments he underwent to improve his quality of life, as well as his wife's devoted attention coupled with her failing health. But as a tetraplegic (the royalty of the disabled, he reckons) he needs constant help from all kinds of people and he devotes one chapter of the book to his assistant Abdel, a muslim from North Africa.



After publication of the book, a one-hour documentary *À la vie, à la mort* (To life, to death) was made in 2002, setting out (as Philippe puts it) 'the improbable meeting between a rich, privileged tetraplegic which I am and the young Arab from the suburbs, Abdel.' He description of Abdel is: 'He is unbearable, vain, proud, blunt, inconstant, human. Without him, I would have decomposed. Abdel looked after me continuously, as if I was an infant. Noticing the least sign, present whilst I wandered,

he released me when I was a prisoner and protected me when I was weak. He made me laugh when I was low. He is my guardian devil.'

The directors Olivier Nakache and Éric Toledano saw the documentary and thought it provided suitable material to be adapted into a feature film. Philippe collaborated with the directors, and said he followed the development of the script with delight. He said he liked the title of the film (in French it is *The Untouchables*) because both he and Abdel were on the margins of society - the one for his disability, the other for his background - and they leaned on each other for support.

The film was an immediate success: nine weeks after its release on 2 November 2011, it became the second biggest box office hit in France, just behind the 2008 film *Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis* (Welcome to the Sticks); after sixteen weeks it had been seen by 19 million people in France. It is the highest-grossing film in a language other than English worldwide. Omar Sy, who plays Driss – the character based on Abdel – won the César for best actor (though for my money François Cluzet has a better case for his portrayal of Philippe). And in December 2012, Omar Sy topped the poll in the newspaper *Le Journal de dimanche* for the most popular French personality.



Why so popular? A (British) critic said 'one of the reasons [for the film's success] seems to be that it gives the audience permission to laugh with, not at, disabled people, and see their lives as they have never seen them before'. There may be another reason. Not only does the film embroider the story somewhat (though that is to be expected, and many of the incidents are drawn from life) but it also sanitizes it. As a nation, France still cannot decide what it thinks about immigrants, though those who have achieved sporting success are exceptions. When Abdel was asked what he thought about casting Omar Sy to play him, he

said 'I'm a small ugly guy, he's a beautiful athlete. They found the opposite of me.' Whilst it goes a long way, in the end the film hedges its bets. Abdel might have added that Sy is neither Arab nor Muslim.

Michael Hipkins

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Repropoint

15 Poole Road, Woking

Tel: 01483 596280

Untouchable: France's unconventional Oscar hopeful

Source BBC website 28 September 2012 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-19640298>

"From the people that brought you *The Artist*," cries the poster for the French comedy *Untouchable*. The tagline is a bold and obvious statement of the film's intent to recreate the critical success of the winner of 2012's best picture Oscar. In financial terms, though, *Untouchable* has already surpassed it.

However, both films share more than a few things in common other than the obvious French connection.

First of all, neither was a particularly easy sell to potential investors - one of whom asked the film-makers if the main character "could walk a little at the end". Co-director Eric Toledano says: "Even with friends at dinner, when they asked what the subject was and we'd try to pitch it, you would see their faces drop. "I said, 'Let's stop the pitching'."

Instead, he and co-director Olivier Nakache relied on the fact that they already had three relatively successful films under their belt. So they decided to let the tale - based on the true story of French aristocrat Philippe Pozzo di Borgo and his carer Abdel Sellou - speak for itself.

"We thought the story had all the ingredients that we loved in cinema," says Nakache. "We wanted to make a realistic comedy with a real deep subject. Watching Abdel carry Philippe out of his car was a powerful image. How these men connected was through humour." Toledano continues: "And not just humour but a special humour, a humour without any limit, a humour which put them outside of convention. One is black, one is white; he is rich, he is poor and they can say anything."

The pair cite British films like *Brassed Off*, *Billy Elliot* and *The Full Monty* as examples of what they hope *Untouchable* will achieve, having more to say on a social level than simply making people laugh.

So far the gamble has paid off, to Toledano's delight. "It has been a big, big surprise, especially in France where people were sending us texts saying, 'It's impossible to see your movie, every theatre is full'." He adds: "The movie has been born under a good star but we don't know how and why, maybe because it speaks to people and touches people. Also, especially in France, we wondered if it would work because of the bad economic situation in Europe. But it seems people need to laugh."

"We are so proud," says Toledano of the film's Oscar nomination, "Representing France is always an honour and we are only the fifth comedy film in Oscar history to go forward for a nomination."

"I think there's no question that it's going to be an Oscar favourite," Harvey Weinstein told the BBC. "It's such a moving story, it's funny and charming, it's everything I like in a movie."

"I've always said that it's just about getting people to see your movie," says the US producer. "It's as simple as that and every time I say it, people think there's a magic formula involved."

Weinstein's support was never more vocal than when the film was seized upon by French right-wing politician Jean-Marie Le Pen, who accused it of being an example of France's move toward ethnic diversity.

In the film, wealthy Philippe's carer Driss, played by French comedy actor Omar Sy, is a Senegalese immigrant. The real life Abdel Sellou is Algerian.

"France is like this handicapped person stuck in this wheelchair," Le Pen told a French TV network. "It would be a disaster if France would find itself in the same situation as this poor handicapped person."

A furious Weinstein called Le Pen's attack "repulsive," saying it represented "a bigoted world view".

"He has a right to his opinion but it's dangerous," says Toledano. "Len Pen always does the same thing, he did a similar thing during the World Cup in 1998. He said there were many black and Arab players in the team and this was not the French team. He's inviting himself into a debate and we didn't respond, because we don't want him involved with our movie. I'm not a politician, I'm just a writer and a director. But I think that when you have some success, like the Americans say, you end up swimming with the sharks."

Reactions to **Rare Exports** – 12.12.13

Score **0** **1** **2** **3** **4** **5** **6** **7** **8** **9** **10**
 ~ 1 ~ 4 3 2 10 6 5 ~ ~

Total received – 31

Average Score – 5.71

Your Comments

Baffling Frightening Enjoyed it! What a weird film
 Fantastic – none of that Coca Cola rubbish! Not my idea of an Xmas celebration
 The most original truly dreadful film I've seen Really entertaining – good choice!
 A bit weird – must be the cold climate!
 A bit too way out for my taste but brilliant scenery
 Bizarre film : a good antidote to traditional Christmas.
 One of the oddest and quirkiest nightmares before Christmas
 I much preferred the Chaplin (Scores for Chaplin – 10; 8 (two); 7(two); 6; 5 ;4)
 (Thank you for playing the South African national anthem as we left – a subtle tribute to a great man)

Position	Film	Average Score
1 st	Argo	8.07
2 nd	All About Eve	7.79
3 rd	Even the Rain	7.38
4 th	Amour	6.46
5 th	Rare Exports	5.71
6 th	Ivan's Childhood	5.22
7 th	Sightseers	4.56

Our next film

8pm on Thursday 23 January 2014



"I came to this film knowing nothing about it, except that it was based on the highly-acclaimed novel by Kazuo Ishiguru. I had no foreknowledge of its story or premise—and I'm glad."

"A beautifully realised adaptation of a profoundly affecting novel."

"Driven by terrific lead performances, this achingly beautiful work challenges audiences emotionally and intellectually."

"Real men will see this and weep, as I did. It is one of the most moving and profound films in a long time."