



The Marching Band (En Fanfare)

Season 46 – 3rd Film – Screening 8th October 2026

France	2025
UK Release date	16 th May 2025
UK Box Office	\$38,365
103 minutes	Certificate 15
Director	Emmanuel Courcol
Writers	Emmanuel Courcol and Irène Muscari
Cinematography	Maxence Lemonnier
Production designer	Rafael Mathé
Composer	Michel Petrossian
Cast	
Benjamin Lavernhe	Thibault
Pierre Lottin	Jimmy
Sarah Suco	Sabrina
Jacques Bonnaffé	Gilbert Wozniac
Clémence Massart	Claudine
Anne Loiret	Claire



Tonight's film *The Marching Band* (also known as *My Brother's Band*) is about making music, but of different kinds – one character is an internationally acclaimed conductor; another plays trombone in the local brass band. It is also about differences in upbringing – in a privileged Parisian family or in the gritty north-east of France. And it touches on the perennial question of whether blood is thicker than water.

At the start of the film, we see Thibault (Benjamin Lavernhe), an orchestral conductor with a globe-trotting career to match his world-class reputation, collapse on the podium during a rehearsal because he suffers from a hitherto undiagnosed leukaemia. He needs a bone marrow transplant, and his search for a donor reveals a family secret. He learns he was adopted, his sister is not his biological sister, but he has a biological brother, Jimmy (Pierre Lottin) who works in a school cafeteria in the Nord-Pas de Calais, far away from Thibault's Paris. There are huge cultural and geographical gaps between the two men but also a similarity. They are both involved in music. Jimmy is a self-taught trombone player and member of an amateur marching band, part of a tradition of popular music linked to industry in an area in marked industrial decline. The film traces the developing relationship between the two men, and asks whether the cultural gap can be bridged.

Previously an actor and screenwriter, the director is Emmanuel Courcol, who has relatively few films to his name. His previous works are *Ceasefire* (2016) starring Romain Duris as a soldier traumatised by trench warfare seeking a new life in Africa,

and A Big Hit (Un Triomphe) in 2020 which tells the story of an actor past his prime who gives drama lessons to prisoners in an attempt to stage 'Waiting for Godot'.

Asked about what inspired him to make The Marching Band, Courcol said: My starting point was an idea I had a long time ago, during a consultation on a film that never saw the light of day, set in Tourcoing [near Lille] in the world of majorettes. I went there to meet a marching band and its troop of majorettes, the "Ch'tis lutins¹". No one could read music, not even the conductor. The band's entire repertoire was made up of pieces that he adapted by ear. He would break down the parts by section, and the others would reproduce what they had heard. After the rehearsal, we all went for a drink at his place, and seeing these people of all ages so warmly together made me realize the importance of music and the marching band as a social and emotional bond: it is a family and a way of life, a remedy for isolation, the omnipresence of screens and our dematerialized world. As I watched their boss, I wondered what his destiny would have been had he been born into a more privileged environment. That is when I had the image of a great conductor discovering the existence of a brother who plays in a marching band: a cultural, emotional, social and musical shock.

Courcol also said that in looking for a location to set the film, he remembered having seen 'a very nice documentary, La fanfare ne perd pas le nord (The Band Plays On – see page 3), and I had asked the director, Frédéric Touchard, which marching band to contact'. That led him to the town of Lallaing close to Lille and the Belgian border, and to the town's marching band to feature in the film.

The film's main characters are played by Benjamin Lavernhe, an actor well known for his stage performances. He is a member of the Comédie Française, and has played in Molière, Racine, Corneille, Brecht and many others. But he has also played in some 30 films. The other principal actor is Pierre Lottin, who had previously worked with Courcol in A Big Hit and recently in Francois Ozon's film adaptation of Albert Camus' classic novel of alienation, L'Etranger (The Outsider) where he won the César award for best supporting actor at a ceremony co-incidentally hosted by Benjamin Lavernhe.

The film was well received by the critics world-wide. The Sydney Morning Herald opined 'Emmanuel Courcol's Gallic charmer is [...] the film we need right now: a story in which people learn to be their best selves; that pays respect to working communities torn apart by the global economy; a story, moreover, centred on a brass band.' The Financial Times said 'Warm and sure-footed, the film has the feel of a richly satisfying meal in an excellent neighbourhood bistro. Old world pleasures of character and story are generously apportioned'. The Guardian added 'Director and co-writer Courcol has to manage the plot so that the question of Thibaut's own emotional life and relationships is more or less forgotten, but the bromance chemistry works well enough and the final concert encore is touching'. The Sunday Times said 'A low-key egalitarianism pushes the film into an unexpectedly thoughtful, almost Rousseauesque examination of nature versus nurture.'

Some have classed the film as a Gallic Brassed Off. I'm not sure I go with that, and agree more with The Observer: 'The predictable elements are mitigated by lived-in performances from an engaging cast of French character actors, and a closing sequence so shamelessly and cheerfully manipulative that any resistance is entirely useless'.

Michael Hipkins

¹ Ch'ti is slang for someone from Northern France; un lutin is variously translated as an elf, fairy, gnome, goblin, pixie – you get the idea

Marching Bands in Northern France

Now here's a co-incidence.

As the notes on the previous page record, the director of The Marching Band says he recalls seeing a documentary about brass bands in North-East France "**La fanfare ne perd pas le nord**" a punning title which refers to the solid roots of brass bands in the Nord Pas-de-Calais region of France but also the idea of maintaining direction as circumstances change. This documentary rang a bell with me. On a trip to Lille a few years ago, we had paid a visit to the nearby town of Lens where a branch of the Louvre museum had opened. The museum is striking architecturally and is built – symbolically - on a reclaimed spoil tip from previous coal mining. Browsing the museum shop, I noticed a DVD on special offer so I bought it. It turned out to be "**La fanfare ne perd pas le nord**" which, for these notes, I rewatched with pleasure.



The histories of marching bands in France and brass bands in the UK have striking similarities. They were often linked to traditional industries (the mills, the mines, big manufacturers) and provided musical and social activities close to the workplace. Likewise, some have survived the decline and closure of those industries.

The documentary, which was made around 2000, emphasises that brass bands in France are one of the last vestiges of

popular music: music for the people, played by the people with a particularly lively tradition in the Nord-Pas de Calais region where the decline of heavy industries has called so much into question. However, some 50,000 amateur musicians and 744 bands for the most part remain attached to their musical associations.

It is striking to see the variety of bands' uniforms – some parade in miners' working clothes complete with helmets and lamps; others have more elaborate uniforms with gold braid on their caps and exaggerated epaulettes.

One of the bands has a link to Poland. After World War I, French industry, especially the mines, lacked manpower, which held back economic growth. The French government struck a deal with their Polish counterparts to allow Poles to be recruited alongside the French. These immigrant miners, often musicians themselves, joined bands because there was no language barrier to their integration. Polish music therefore became part of the repertoire of local bands, and the second and third generation Poles remain strongly attached to their musical roots.

The life of miners was punctuated by rehearsals and marches where everyone could forget for a moment how hard they worked. Thanks to the bands, this spirit of solidarity remains, and is all the more needed in a region which has seen unemployment erode links between people, and some of the young leave in search of work. But in some communities, young musicians see the continuation of the tradition of bands where their grandfathers played demonstrates their links to society.

As a sign in one of the rehearsal rooms says: a town without music is like a body without a soul.

Michael Hipkins



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Club website: www.wncc.org.uk. Prefer to leave your comments on the film and your score online rather than on paper? Email to reactions@wncc.org.uk by close Tuesday 13th October.

DVDs and Blu-Rays from previous presentations are available to borrow!

Comments and reactions to **I Swear** - shown on September 24th 2026

No of reaction slips received = **31**

Average score = **8.45**

Rating	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Number	0	0	0	0	1	0	5	9	10	6

Position	Film	Score	Reactions	Attendees
1	I Swear	8.45	31	47
2	Hamnet	7.36	25	46

****I Swear is the 15th highest rated film ever shown by Woking Film Club****

Utterly absorbing. A little sugary at times!

Sad and very moving

Wasn't that keen to turn out having read the synopsis but glad I did

Amazing film, Heart-warning, informative – will defo watch again

Amazing film, very well presented. In a couple of scenes, I almost cried

Thanks to the committee for being brave and showing this film. Excellent acting by all the cast

Excellent docudrama

Uncomfortable to watch but it sure packed a punch!

Absolutely f-ing great choice for film club. Thank you

Very moving

Great! Heartwarming and educational and superb acting

Excellent film, very well-presented and acted Heartbreaking and heartwarming story

Traumatic but uplifting A very powerful film but would not look to see it again!

I found it hard to watch him being teased and attacked but very worthwhile to see it

We enjoyed this more than we expected. Very well-acted. An eye-opener

Fabulous performance by Robert Aramayo, making his character so sympathetic

Well-acted and told the true story of a very difficult condition. The BAFTA was certainly well-deserved

Well-balanced content and well-acted

What an incredibly moving and powerful film – it should be compulsory watching for all from an educational perspective. Thank you for choosing this film and for the additional information given in the handout and briefing

The acting was superb; you would think that Robert Aramayo was himself suffering from Tourettes. It was a powerful film that was sad, funny and moving, I was absorbed in the story from beginning to end. The best film that I have seen for a long time.

Our Next Film – Thursday 22nd October – The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie



Maggie Smith is handed a part in the eccentric, trite, purposeful and finally pathetic Jean Brodie which allows her to play to all her considerable strengths – **Time Out**

Maggie Smith's tour-de-force performance as a school-teacher slipping into spinsterhood is one of several notable achievements in this sentimental and macabre personal tragedy - **Variety**

See it for Maggie Smith who was much deserving of her Best Actress Oscar in 1969. The focus is the wonderful adapted screenplay and the great cast – **IMDb Reviewer**