

THE ILLUSIONIST

ORIGINAL SCRIPT – JACQUES TATI

**DIRECTOR/ADAPTATION/CHARACTER DESIGN –
SYLVAIN CHOMET**

PRODUCERS – BOB LAST / SALLY CHOMET

PG | UK/ France, 80 mins

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Academy Award and Golden Globe Award nominee for Best Animated Feature Film, *THE ILLUSIONIST* is based on an unproduced script by French comedy genius and cinema legend Jacques Tati (*Play Time*, *Mon Oncle*).

Adapted for the screen by Sylvain Chomet (Academy Award nominee for 2003's *The Triplets of Belleville*), his distinctive hand-drawn animated style brings the story to life.

In the late 1950s an out-dated and aging magician travels the globe in search of work, forced to accept increasingly obscure engagements to get by. Travelling to Scotland, his gloom is lifted when he encounters Alice; an innocent young girl who will change his life forever. Watching his performance, Alice becomes fascinated by *The Illusionist* and believes his tricks are real magic. Though they don't speak the same language, the two lonely strangers quickly bond through small kindnesses afforded one another. As they travel together to Edinburgh for work, *The Illusionist* cannot bring himself to reveal that real magic does not exist for fear of disappointing Alice.

THE ILLUSIONIST is a love letter from a father to his daughter. For Sophie Tatischeff, the daughter of Jacques Tati, comedy genius and French cinema legend, this touching correspondence could not be left undelivered. Catalogued in the CNC (Centre National de la Cinématographie) archives under the impersonal moniker 'Film Tati N° 4', this un-produced script has waited half a century for hands to flick through its pages and realize its potential. Those eager hands belonged to Sylvain Chomet, the Oscar nominated and critically acclaimed creator of *The Triplets of Belleville/Belleville Rendezvous*, who enthusiastically rose to the challenge to fulfil an impossible dream – to once again bring the magic of the incomparable Jacques Tati to life.

THE ILLUSIONIST is a story about two paths that cross. The first path belongs to an outdated, aging entertainer, forced to wander from country to country, city to city and station to station in search of a stage to perform his act. The second path belongs to a young girl at the start of her life journey. Alice is a youngster with all her capacity for childish wonder still intact, but she plays at being a woman without realizing the day to stop pretending is fast approaching. She doesn't know yet that she loves him like she would a father – he knows already that he loves her as he would a daughter.

Their destinies will collide, but nothing – not even magic or the power of illusion– can stop the voyage of discovery

SYNOPSIS

The Illusionist is one of a dying breed of stage entertainers. With emerging rock stars stealing his thunder in the late 1950s, he is forced to accept increasingly obscure assignments in fringe theatres, at garden parties and in bars and cafés. However, whilst performing in a village pub off the west coast of Scotland, he encounters Alice, an innocent young girl, who will change his life forever.

Watching his performance to the excited villagers who are celebrating the arrival of electricity on their remote island, Alice becomes awestruck by his show and believes his tricks are real magic. Following him to Edinburgh, she keeps his home while he goes to work in a small local theatre.

Enchanted by her enthusiasm for his act, he rewards her with increasingly lavish gifts he has 'conjured' into existence. Desperate not to disappoint her, he cannot bring himself to reveal that magic does not exist and that buying these gifts is driving him to ruin.

But as Alice comes of age, she finds love and moves on. The Illusionist no longer has to pretend and, untangled from his own web of deceit, resumes his life as a much wiser man.

JACQUES TATI: THE DON QUIXOTE OF CINEMA

Jacques Tati (1907 – 82) is considered one of the greatest movie directors of all time. Shortening his name from Tatischeff for simplicity, the future Oscar-winning icon of French cinema made his first feature length movie at the age of 42. Tati had spent his privileged early life (his ancestry traced back to Russian aristocracy) playing truant, indulging his passion for rugby and making his school friends laugh with improvised sports skits during post-match drinks.

Between 1930 and 1945 he transformed this talent for observation and fascination with the work of cinema slapstick artists such as W.C. Fields and Buster Keaton into a comedy stage act he toured around the music hall circuits of America and Europe. The experience gave him all the material he would need for the six movie masterpieces he made over the next three decades. Each captured an endearing combination of idealism, imagination and generosity – the reason Tati liked to call himself “The Don Quixote of cinema”.

The first was *Jour de fête/Holiday* (1949), a rural ballad starring Tati as a local postman too easily distracted from his bicycle rounds. Following this international box-office hit Tati then introduced the world to the character with which he is most fondly associated, Monsieur Hulot. This charming, self-effacing, amiably oblivious and elegantly maladroit comic creation, wearing his signature trench coat and stripy socks peeping out from his too-short trousers, tripped through assorted mishaps lampooning modern society in *Les vacances du Monsieur*

Hulot/Mr. Hulot's Holiday (1953), *Mon oncle/My Uncle* (1958), *Play Time* (1967) and *Trafic/Traffic* (1971).

His last film, *Parade* (1974), produced for Swedish television, saw Tati return to his vaudeville roots with a circus performance, showcasing clown, juggling, acrobatic and mime acts. From early burlesque to highly stylized modernism, Jacques Tati's body of work continued the tradition of the silent comedy long after most audiences had forgotten it. Subtle, whimsical, gentle and very funny, with punch lines often coming after slow, deceptive build-ups, Tati's greatest achievement was creating his own self-contained movie universe with a delightful disregard for what anybody else was doing.

THE ILLUSIONIST ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

GENESIS: FROM JACQUES TATI TO SYLVAIN CHOMET

One of the most extraordinary projects in recent cinema history began with *The Triplets of Belleville/Belleville Rendezvous*, creator, writer and director Sylvain Chomet's award-winning instant animation classic released to worldwide acclaim in 2003. "There was a moment in that movie where the triplets are watching television in bed", explains Chomet. "I thought it would be funny to have the cartoon characters view a live-action clip close in feeling to its Tour de France cycling story. Jacques Tati's wonderful *Jour de fête/Holiday* sprang to mind because it featured him as a postman on a bicycle. So Didier Brunner

(the producer) contacted the Tati estate, run by his sole surviving daughter Sophie Tatischeff, for permission to use an extract. Her authorisation was based on pictures and a set of design developments for *The Triplets of Belleville*. She clearly liked what she saw because she mentioned an un-filmed script by her father and hinted that my animation style might suit it.”

THE ILLUSIONIST was written by Tati between 1956 and 1959. “The story was all about the irrevocable passing of time and I understood completely why he had never made it. It was far too close to himself, it dealt in things he knew all too well, and he preferred to hide behind the Monsieur Hulot mask. You could tell from the start it was not just another Hulot misadventure, all the heart-on-sleeve observations made that crystal clear. Had he made the movie - and I’m certain he had every camera angle already worked out - it would have taken his career in a totally different direction. He is actually on record saying **THE ILLUSIONIST** was far too serious a subject for his persona and he chose to make *Play Time* instead”.

“Because the character of the illusionist is definitely not another Monsieur Hulot, Sophie Tatischeff didn’t want to see any of that character’s familiar trademarks dramatised by another actor. So animation seemed to be the ideal medium to solve all those problems by providing the ideal way to create an animated version of Tati playing the illusionist character from scratch. Sadly, Sophie died four months after our first contact. But the relatives who took over the estate agreed with her decision to entrust me with the family jewels. I had no intention

of doing anything they wouldn't approve of and because we shared the same precise vision they felt in completely safe hands."

Chomet read **THE ILLUSIONIST** script for the first time on his train journey to the Cannes Film Festival in 2003 for the world premiere of *The Triplets of Belleville*. "It was quite beautiful and rather touching. The surroundings couldn't have been more appropriate either, as much of the story takes place on railways. And if *The Triplets of Belleville* told a complicated story in a simple way, **THE ILLUSIONIST** was the complete opposite. Its narrative was so deceptively simple it was highly complex. Yet I could picture every single scene as I read the script, it visually spoke to me. It was something you'd never see normally done in animation. Nor did it follow the basic rules of animation as it really was squarely aimed at adults. How to make a grown-up cartoon equally appealing to kids? Those were exciting challenges."

He continues, "Being French I knew Tati's cinematic work very well, but I did do major research on his non-screen life. I read everything about him, and learned a lot I didn't know that I included as texture in the final adaptation. For example, when one of his clown friends was in serious financial difficulties Tati helped him out. So along with all the other circus acts that were woven through the original script, I added in my own characters to give further emotional resonance to the overall arc of the story which is the end of one showbiz era – the music hall - and the beginning of another teenage-oriented one – rock 'n' roll music. Parallel to that you have this universal theme about father/daughter relationships and how bittersweet they often are. **THE ILLUSIONIST**

contained everything I love about Tati and his connection to human foibles. But I never thought I'd get that close to him by recreating one of his scripts. Yet it now seems natural in retrospect. All I had to do was add my visual poetry to his and I knew in my heart that combination was going to work."

Aside from a few structural shifts there was only one major change to Tati's treatment Chomet insisted on: "The story originally took place between Paris and Prague and I wanted that changed to Paris and Edinburgh. I went to Prague but just couldn't picture the action taking place there. And I had fallen in love with Edinburgh when I presented *The Triplets of Belleville* at the Edinburgh Film Festival. I found the city a very magical place - something about the constantly changing light - and my wife Sally and I decided to move there to set up a studio. I had lived in Montreal when making *The Triplets of Belleville* and there is a very Canadian feel to that movie. I believe it's important to live in the same environment you are trying to animate because your inspiration is then all around you".

He continues, "There is also the story strand that takes place in a remote village where the community gets electricity for the first time. I thought that isolation would fit one of the Scottish islands more than a hamlet outside Prague. I initially looked at Mull, which led me to the Isle of Iona, its small neighbour in the Inner Hebrides, off the west coast of Scotland. When I read their local history I was astounded to discover that at exactly the same time the Tati story is set (1959), the islanders had a party to celebrate the arrival of electricity from the

mainland. So it was 100% historically accurate. Also during the same time period the community would virtually be untouched by outside civilization, which made Alice's naivety work in context. It also made perfect sense for the illusionist to be playing in these last outreaches of vaudeville, too."

SETTING UP DJANGO FILMS

Once the Chomets were based in Edinburgh they began the daunting task of setting up an animation studio entirely from scratch. "It wasn't easy," Sylvain recalls. "Studio Django started out in February 2004 with just me and Sally. Once we were established with a number of potential projects in hand we contacted some friends who worked on *The Triplets of Belleville* to come and work with us. From a core team of four or five we developed **THE ILLUSIONIST** as well as a number of other projects while waiting for funding for **THE ILLUSIONIST** to be confirmed. One was an animated penguin movie for Miramax, another was *The Tale of Desperaux* for Universal. Neither worked out for us though mainly because we were anxious to begin working on **THE ILLUSIONIST**. Finally once things were nearing take-off point we contacted Bob Last to ask him to collaborate as a producer and that was when Django Films was established."

The Chomets had contacted Bob Last because the producer of *The House of Mirth*, and a series of BFI films on the history of cinema, had already set up an animation unit in Scotland. Bob Last explains, "Because of my Dundee-based animation studio INK.Digital I was one

of the few people in Scotland who had their feet placed in both the production and animation worlds. I had been impressed by *The Triplets of Belleville*, the opportunity to work with Sylvain, was one I just couldn't turn down. The demands of **THE ILLUSIONIST** were unique. There was no one single place we could have gone to find what we needed, the reason why we had to create our own flagship studio”.

Last continues, “I was not as familiar with the work of Jacques Tati as Sylvain. Sure, I knew he was considered a comic artist of some stature in Gallic film circles but I had only watched his movies on a very casual level. When I first read the script, already elegantly finessed by Sylvain to include the Edinburgh and Western Isles change in locale, I could see immediately how perfect a choice he was for the Tati script. Yet it had to stand on its own story merits, working for an audience who might not know Tati. And the classical nature of its core story about loss and growing up was its greatest asset. The Tati embellishments are there for those familiar with his work.”

ANIMATION TECHNIQUES – 2D VERSUS 3D

The main challenge for producer Bob Last was to help build and recruit the studio talent, and put in place a specialized pipeline of departments and communication to meet the animation style Sylvain Chomet insisted upon. And that demanding style was mainly based around 2D animation. Chomet remarks, “1960s vintage Disney is my absolute favourite animation period. *The Aristocats* and especially *101 Dalmatians* sum up the energy and artistic roughness you just don't get

from CGI 3D computerized animation. My insistence on hand-drawn 2D graphics comes from the fact the technique gives a more ethereal charm to the art, ensuring the story is always a pleasure to behold, even during moments of inaction. The strength of 2D in my opinion is it vibrates and it's not perfect, just like reality in fact. Imperfections are important when you are dealing with a story about human characters. It adds to the realism, makes it even more potent. And 2D is created by humans. CGI is good for robots and toys less for humans. I want to see the work of an artist on the screen not a machine whose visuals are too neat, shiny and clean. I prefer me and my pencil - not me with a laptop! Something indefinable is lost designing with a computer. When I draw, aesthetically pleasing things comes to life with a magical quality and visual power.”

Bob Last adds, “That complex richness to the animation lines is exactly what gives Sylvain’s work its extraordinary edge. The problem was the lack of available 2D animation talent because the conventional wisdom at the moment is everything has to be 3D. However, what with Disney making a big deal about going back to the hand-drawn style with *The Princess and the Frog*, the time is right for worldwide audiences to rediscover the classic pleasures of 2D animation and the subtlety that style brings to the table.”

Animation director and assistant director Paul Dutton points out the production had to search far and wide for talented 2D artists. “While there is a small animation tradition in Edinburgh, it wasn’t a pool we could draw on for Sylvain’s specific requirements that **THE**

ILLUSIONIST had to be in the vintage *101 Dalmatians* vein. There was also the fact that a lot of animators who were doing hand drawing for years had long since moved on to the computer animation industry. So we really had to scour Europe, visiting many cities, before we found our team. Some were old school animators with forty years of experience. Others were recent graduates driving buses in Germany to make ends meet because of the lack of available positions. We eventually built up to a crew of 80 people in the core studio and they all delivered amazing work. The lead studio was eventually augmented by over 100 creatives working in other studios”.

CREATING THE ILLUSIONIST

The first job the Django Films personnel had to do was make an Animatic of the entire script for future design reference and to assure the Tati estate no great liberties were being taken with the project. “Usually just a storyboard and a few sketches are required,” explains Jean Pierre Bouchet, the Lead Composer responsible for assembling and finalizing all the elements of the finished product. “But Sylvain wanted a moving Animatic pushing the tones and character design to try and give a really strong impression of what the overall aim was. The Animatic took a year to do, quite a long time, but there’s no question it speeded up the actual production in real terms.”

Once the Animatic had been completed and the narrative and artistic levels set, the animators were each given specific characters to work on. Producer Bob Last explains, “Because of the complexity of each of

our characters' performances we had to devise ways of splitting up the workload by performance and character rather than by shot, which would be the normal method. For example, Laurent Kircher was the lead animator on the Jacques Tati character. This created all manner of logistical problems but it allowed us to push the bar regarding fine-tuned detailing."

Laurent Kircher had worked on *The Triplets of Belleville* with Sylvain Chomet and was more than happy to continue that mutually respectful relationship. "Before starting work on the film," recalls Kircher, "Sylvain insisted on all the animators taking life-drawing classes. That was important to me because Tati's hands had to be anatomically correct and controlled because of the magic tricks. The sleight-of-hand illusions were researched but the other magic wasn't because in animation we can do what we like. Sylvain also invited me to France to meet one of Tati's old acquaintances so I could ask all the questions I needed about his personality. Then during the first three months of production I watched *Mon oncle* and *Play Time* about ten times over to get a feel for Tati's physical movements and mannerisms. One of the most difficult scenes for me to draw was the drunken sequence because no reference existed in any of his films. So I really had to rely on my imagination for that while hoping I kept it true to his behaviour."

Kircher continues, "Another problem was the fact that Tati doesn't tell the joke in any of his films. He isn't the funny thing, the actions around him are. So I couldn't use too much expression on his face. When you look at *Mon oncle* or *Mr. Hulot's Holiday*, Tati doesn't play with his

face, it's more about gestures. I had to experiment a lot to get that important mime aspect into his body positions.”

THE ILLUSIONIST being dialogue-free only added to Kircher's dilemma too. “What distinguishes Tati's films is the way he uses sound to amplify or contradict the images we see on the screen, adding another layer of detail which both adds to the charm and structural complexity. Most tellingly, dialogue is used not to convey information to the audience, but rather as if it was just like any other form of background noise. It is this curious aural mosaic of background sound, music and image that defines Tati's uniqueness and that was something we had to get right, too. We had to go through a lot of testing to see what worked and what didn't within this virtually silent character medium. But the fact there's no dialogue makes the audience try to understand the characters even more. Because it's not laid out for them they have to invest further and that's the true value of this type of animation.”

“Laurent brilliantly captured the essence of Tati,” enthuses Animation Director Paul Dutton. “He was such a huge fan of Tati anyway and was so focused on capturing every telling nuance. So much comic timing and passion went into his drawings. If you watch the Tati movies, he seems to be a man conflicted, stopping and starting all the time. His brain seems to be telling him to do something, but his body hesitates. And it was that kind of hesitation within his performance that proved difficult for Laurent to capture, but capture it expertly he did.”

“What I began to notice as **THE ILLUSIONIST** was growing before me,” remarks Lead Composer Jean Pierre Bouchet, “Is how much Jacques Tati became his own animated character even though assembled from past images. The walk was recognisable, so was the way his arms moved. We hadn’t created a caricature but a very real personality, one that audiences are going to be thrilled to see on screen again after so many years. I can now look at *Mon oncle* and **THE ILLUSIONIST** and see how the Tati characters in both are sort of the same but entirely different. They both seem to exist in a parallel universe and that’s what everyone worked so hard to achieve.”

While all the character performances are rendered in 2D animation, the 3D process was used to augment those images mainly to save time. Digital Supervisor Campbell McAllister explains. “Many of the shots use 3D animation and my job was to make them fit in with the 2D. Most of the props are 3D for example, like the car and Tati’s trolley. It would have been impossible to hand draw those in such detail, especially in movement. For example, the car steering wheel is 3D but the hands driving it are 2D, so there was much to-ing and fro-ing between hand drawn and computer animation processes.”

“Tati’s rabbit, used in his top hat illusions, is a 2D creation, however,” notes McAllister. “He’s a nasty, aggressive and very obnoxious creature that everyone will fall in love with. He bites, growls and is a complete freak. Like the dog in *The Triplets of Belleville*, the rabbit is a very human character. I think there’s a special connection Sylvain has with animals, and the rabbit just seemed to develop without that much

initial intention how we were going to do it. He's probably the only carnivorous rabbit ever and does all these things that are more human than rabbit-like. His affection for Tati is genuine even though he may not like being shoved into a hat. One of the funniest moments in the movie is where Alice is cooking a stew and Tati thinks the rabbit might be its main ingredient."

Animation Director Paul Dutton agrees. "The stew scene showcases one of the purest Tati moments, although this is one of Sylvain's own creations. He's got this terrible thought that perhaps his rabbit is in the stew yet he still goes through the charade of sitting at the table politely poking at it not knowing how to continue. This sequence also introduces the audience to characters that reside in the same hotel, the clown, which is one of my favourites, and the ventriloquist, and they're all, like Tati, out of their time. That's one of the bittersweet threads in the story: a bunch of vaudevillians in relentless pursuit of an ever smaller audience. When Alice comes into Tati's life, he's just so grateful he is able to entertain this devoted audience of one."

EDINBURGH ANIMATED

The main setting for **THE ILLUSIONIST** is Edinburgh, Scotland, the city Sylvain Chomet moved to and made his base of operations. "Sylvain wanted a recognizable Edinburgh, created authentically on screen in the animation idiom," explains producer Bob Last, "And he wanted to capture the glorious constantly shifting light that is distinctive to Edinburgh. A conventional live-action movie would find that an

enormous challenge from the continuity point of view. In animation terms, of course, it's an artistic plus point and a completely controllable aspect."

"I had never been to Edinburgh before," remarks Animation Director Paul Dutton. "Coming from Canada, I had my eyes wide open in amazement at the architecture and unique atmosphere of the city. Art Director Bjarne Hansen did a great job researching the way everything looked in the 1950s from the town centre to the fish 'n' chip shops in the side streets. Everything had to feel authentic so the characters against this backdrop would seem specific to their time."

"I kept clocking another period building that would have to be included in our animation map every time I walked from the station to the studio," laughs Lead 3D Animator Campbell McAllistar. "The Royal Mile is really the Royal Quarter of a Mile because all the key landmarks are crunched in. This was perfect for my favourite of the scenes I worked on – the flying away farewell to Edinburgh. It's the most extreme sequence in the movie because you go from quite a static shot to basically the camera being attached to a rocket for an aerial view of the city. I had to make loads of versions until Sylvain was completely happy with the final result. 'Stretch the castle thinner and taller' or 'Add tiny buses around that more identifiable monument', he would say. It was an enjoyable and satisfying moment when the sequence was perfected to his precise instructions."

ROCK AROUND THE CLOCK CHOMET STYLE

The changing face of the showbiz landscape the hero of **THE ILLUSIONIST** comes up against is embodied by the rock 'n' roll sensation Billy Boy and the Britoons. "They weren't based on anyone specific," chuckles Animation Director Paul Dutton. "But certain influences did eventually creep in. The drummer definitely looks like Ringo Starr from The Beatles. Buddy Holly could be playing lead guitar and that just might be an early John Lennon on bass. Billy Boy himself was simply an amalgam of every single 50s pop idol you could imagine. We did end up looking at a lot of Elvis Presley hip-swivelling, mainly from *Jailhouse Rock*, I recall, and referencing that for when Billy Boy's performances get more carried away into the typical over-the-top behaviour of the period".

Dutton adds, "The ventriloquist character definitely has a touch of camp pianist Liberace about him. Some of the animators make cameo appearances too. In the scene where the clown is getting roughed up, it's three of our animators' look-alikes doing the beating! I'm pretty sure somebody has put their grandmother's likeness into a shot as well...."

For the three songs sung by Billy Boy and the Britoons, Sylvain Chomet turned to guitarist/composer Malcolm Ross from the bands Orange Juice and Aztec Camera for material. "Bob Last introduced me to Malcolm Ross," recalls Chomet. "They had worked together in the music consultant capacity on The Beatles bio-pic *Backbeat* and *Chocolat*. I asked him for a sound in the vein of early Cliff Richard and

he composed three perfect recreations of pop hits from the 50s Golden Era. The Britoons sequences were probably the hardest to animate mainly because the milling crowd of dancers were complex to visualize. It took two years and help from a team in France to achieve via live-action capture techniques.” Neomis and La Station were the French studios used in this outsourcing.

But Chomet wrote the original soundtrack as he explains. “Even though I’m not a professional musician, it was a career I was interested in before I started doing animation. I had composed a couple of songs for *The Triplets of Belleville* and thought I should extend myself a bit more with THE ILLUSIONIST. Anyway, I realised by the time I had told another musician what I wanted, and the atmosphere I was after, I might just as well do it myself. So I composed on a computer keyboard, and gave the printed score to Terry Davies to clean it up and orchestrate. (Davies is a noted conductor and orchestrator whose recent stage credits include ‘Edward Scissorhands’ and the film *Glorious 39*). Only a professional like Terry knows things like you need two flutes instead of one for a certain sound, so it was important to do this fine tuning process”.

Chomet adds, “The Billy Boy and the Britoons songs were recreations of the 50s era and I wanted to keep my score in the same vein. I also wrote the theme music for the illusionist’s stage act, the one he enters to and has playing whilst performing. That was turned into a song for the end credits where an assortment of imitators in the style of Charles Trenet, Serge Gainsbourg, Edith Piaf and Jacques Brel sing what is a

very funny medley. The song is very evocative of the music Tati used in his own films, heavy on piano and embellished by vibraphone to give it that circus flavour. That was the only piece of music I made into a real Tati homage”.

The film ends with a piano concerto lasting eight minutes. We lose the sound effects while it plays so the music becomes the emotional conclusion. So it was of vital importance to me - and the movie. I edited the picture to that music so it would be carried emotionally. Because there is no dialogue in the film I used the music as the inner voice of the Tati character and his emotional heart. It wasn't just music I was composing; it was an extra layer of feeling”.

PUSHING ANIMATION BOUNDARIES

There was another key challenge set by Sylvain Chomet for his team of animators: “I wanted to do something that had never been done before” he explains. “When you think of the animation format you think of short scenes with lots of camera moves because usually the characters are constantly moving to fill the screen with diversionary action. I wanted the camera for **THE ILLUSIONIST** to be locked at eye-level, basically a wide-shot, like watching something on-stage in a theatre. This way you spend time with the characters as if you were standing with them in the same room. The audience can absorb the background depth and detailing, too, because the camera is not constantly roving, mainly to keep kids from getting bored. This

technique was just as much of a test as making a new Jacques Tati movie from the ground up.”

Producer Bob Last concurs: “Blocking the scenes in this way is unusual territory for the animation medium. Because the camera was still, the average shot was three times longer than normal. Because it was so wide, the attention paid to detail had to be painstaking. That’s why the movie took five years to make and was a labour of love for everyone involved.”

VIVE JACQUES TATI

“Am I worried what die-hard Jacques Tati fans will think about **THE ILLUSIONIST**?” poses Chomet. “Or those who took *The Triplets of Belleville* to their hearts? Not really because it’s a very different film experience from either of those. Sure, it’s a Tati film, but it’s my Tati film. Nor does it deal with the same kind of weirdness that *The Triplets of Belleville* indulged in. I’ve eschewed black humour for Tati’s innate poetry. Sometimes I can be too harsh with my characters, but not here. I truly adore them all from Tati to Alice and the Scottish Drunk to the rabbit”.

Says Chomet, “I like the fact it wasn’t based on a script I wrote. It has a more interesting dynamic because of its unusual genesis. Getting into someone else’s shoes really forced me to creatively think in different ways and that was refreshing. If I hadn’t lucked out with **THE ILLUSIONIST** I probably would have done something similar to *The Triplets of Belleville* and that wouldn’t have been good for my own inspiration or drive. **THE ILLUSIONIST** really does push the boundaries of what animation can do. And I pushed myself along with it. I’m captivated by the characters and find the ending still moving even though I’ve now seen it countless times. There won’t be a dry eye in the house. I watered the Jacques Tati plant well that was entrusted to me, and it’s grown into something with its own personality that I absolutely love. What more could I have hoped for?”

SYLVAIN CHOMET BIOGRAPHY

Sylvain Chomet was born in France in 1963. He obtained his baccalauréat in fine arts in 1982 and in 1987 graduated with a diploma in animation from the school of visual arts in Angoulême.

In 1986 he published his first graphic novel 'Le secret des libellules (The Secret of Dragonflies)' and adapted Victor Hugo's first novel, 'Bug-Jargal', into a comic book.

Sylvain began his career in animation in September 1988 working as an assistant at Richard Purdum's studio in London. Soon afterwards he began a freelance career, working for several London animation studios where he directed a number of animated TV commercials.

In 1989 (whilst continuing to write and publish graphic novels) he embarked on his first animated short film, *La vieille dame et les pigeons (The Old Lady and the Pigeons)* which was completed in 1996 and was nominated for an American Academy Award® in 1997.

In 1997 Sylvain worked briefly for Disney Animation Studios in Toronto, before being given the go-ahead by his producers to start the storyboard for his first animated feature film, *The Triplets of Belleville*. The Montreal-based movie took five years to make and was sold to more than 33 countries worldwide, including the USA and Japan. *The Triplets of Belleville* was nominated for Best Animated Feature Film and Best Song at the 2004 Academy Awards®.

More recently, Sylvain wrote and directed a five-minute live action slot for the collaborative feature film involving 20 internationally acclaimed directors, *Paris je t'aime*. A live action musical feature film set in 1970s Paris is currently in development in partnership with *Paris je t'aime* producer Claudie Ossard.

During the pre-production and production period of **THE ILLUSIONIST** Sylvain lived near Edinburgh, Scotland, where his studio, Django Films, was based and where **THE ILLUSIONIST** was created. He now lives and works in Provence.