



Carlos Chahine : "All the characters in the film are people I know and I love them all

The first feature film of actor-director Carlos Chahine, Mother Valley had seduced the audience at the Institut Lumière with its subtlety and beauty. A luminous story about the fate of a Lebanese family in 1958. On the occasion of this screening, the filmmaker spoke about the genesis of this film inspired by his personal story. Selected excerpts.

The birth of the film *Mother Valley*

I have always considered 1958 to be a pivotal year in the history of the young country of Lebanon. The country was divided at that time, it was like a rehearsal for what was going to happen in 1975. I wanted to talk about Lebanon, to take a step back and show my vision of this country. And the 50's are a very cinematic period: the cars, the clothes, etc... All the people you see in the film are people I knew. It's my grandfather, my grandmother, my two aunts, my father, the inhabitants of the village. I know them all and I love them all deeply. The valley where we shot the film, I know it well for it is the setting of my childhood. I speak about a world that I know. This film is very much inspired by my childhood, it's a bit of what we call "paradise lost", just as Lebanon is a lost paradise.

The script and the cast

I worked with a collaborator named Christian Benoît : the writing of the script was done rather quickly in fact, because I think I had all the ingredients in me to tell this story. Nathalie Baye plays the mother of René (Pierre Rochefort), I know her well, she is a wonderful actress and friend. I offered her the role thinking that she would not accept it. She read the script and said yes right away. In the film, there is a scene where she says "Lebanon, what a beautiful country", which to me, takes on a particular resonance, because it is her, with all that she represents: French cinema, France. Nathalie already knew Pierre Rochefort who played the character of René. What I like about him is that he does not embody a form of triumphant virility. The character of Layla loves him because he does not scare her, he is all soft.

My story is the story of a love

I was looking for a song that was a hit in Lebanon in 1958. At that time, the hits were the same in Paris as in Lebanon. I came across the song "Histoire d'un amour" by Dalida, a song that I like a lot. She is a singer that I love, she liked Lebanon a lot, she went to sing in Tripoli during the war.

A second feature film being written

I am writing my next film. It will be the story of an exile living in France who returns to Lebanon. The film will be shot in both countries and I will play the lead role. For the moment, I prefer to keep the title of this film a mystery...

Laura Lépine