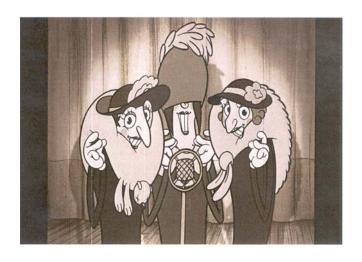# THE TRIPLETS OF BELLEVILLE

2004 Academy Award Nominee - Best Animated Feature Film, Best Song
2003 Telluride Film Festival
2003 Toronto International Film Festival
2003 Boston Film Festival
2003 Chicago International Film Festival
2003 AFI Film Festival

A Sony Pictures Classics Release
80 minutes, Rated PG-13 by the MPAA

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Synopsis

Adopted by his grandmother, Madame Souza, Champion is a lonely little boy.

Noticing that the lad is never happier than on a bicycle, Madame Souza puts him through a rigorous training process. Years go by and Champion becomes worthy of his name. Now he is ready to enter the world-famous cycling race, the Tour de France.

However during this cycling contest two mysterious men in black kidnap Champion. Madame Souza and her faithful dog Bruno set out to rescue him.

Their quest takes them across the ocean to a giant megalopolis called Belleville where they encounter the renowned "Triplets of Belleville," three eccentric female music-hall stars from the '30s who decide to take Madame Souza and Bruno under their wing.

Thanks to Bruno's brilliant sense of smell, the brave duo are soon on to Champion's trail. But will they succeed in beating the devilish plans of the evil French mafia?

"My main influences in animation: 101 Dalmatians, The Aristocats, The Jungle Book...
Golden age of the Disney studio. Also Betty Boop for the surrealistic kind of animation,
and finally Winsor MacKay for his beautiful animations, done a century ago but yet so modern."
– Sylvain Chomet

Sylvain Chomet

Sylvain Chomet was born in 1963 in Maisons-Lafitte, France. In 1982, he graduated from high school specializing in art and in 1987 received a diploma from the prestigious comic-strip studio at Angoulême (France). In 1986, he published his first book-length comic, **Secrets of the Dragonfly** (Futuropolis) and drew an adaptation of a Victor Hugo novel, **Bug-Jargal**, in collaboration with Nicolas de Crécy. Moving to London to work as an animator at the Richard Purdum studio, in September 1988 he established a London-based freelance practice working on commercials for clients such as Swissair, Principality, Swinton, Renault, etc.

In 1991, Chomet started work on his first animated film project, **The Old Lady and the Pigeons,** with backgrounds designed by Nicolas de Crécy. In 1992, he wrote the script for a comic entitled **The Bridge in Mud** (Glénat), a science-fiction and historical saga, now in its fourth episode. The following year, he wrote the story **Léon-la-Came**, drawn by Nicolas de Crécy and serialized in (A SUIVRE) magazine. The book version was published by Casterman in 1995. It won the René Goscinny Prize in January 1996.

Since 1993, Sylvain Chomet has been based in Canada. He spent 1995 and 1996 finishing his short film **The Old Lady and the Pigeons**. This film won the Cartoon d'Or prize, the Grand Prize at the Annecy Festival, a BAFTA, the Audience Prize and the Jury Prize at the Angers Premiers Plans Festival and received nominations for both the French Césars and for the Oscars.

In early 1997, Sylvain Chomet published **Ugly, poor and sick**, again with Nicolas de Crécy. The book version (Casterman) won the Alph-Art Best Comic Prize at the Angoulême Comic Strip Festival in 1997.

Writer/Director Sylvain Chomet

Q: What led you first to comic strips then to cartoon films?

Sylvain Chomet: When I was small I loved comic books like *Tintin* and *Pif Gadget*. I started to draw very young. My parents say I asked for a pencil at the age of two, so I could draw our TV set that had an ornament of *Juanita Banana,* from the Henri Salvador hit, sitting on top of it. Then whenever anyone said, "What would you like to do later?", I always replied "Draw comics". After graduating from high school, I was trained as a stylist at the school of applied arts. I soon realized I'd taken a wrong turn. Luckily for me, Pichard, the man who drew Paulette, was there. He recommended I apply to join the school at Angoulême which had just been started. I sketched out a strip and this got me in to the school. I stayed there for three years and met both Hubert Chevillard and Nicolas de Crécy . I wrote a script for a strip called **The Bridge in Mud** for Hubert (published by Glénat), who is a great draughtsman. He has gone into animation as well now. I remember a gorilla he animated which was really impressive. His kindness and friendship led me to Didier Brunner, the producer of **THE TRIPLETS OF BELLEVILLE**. I also wrote scripts for Nicolas de Crécy's **Léon-la-Came.** Nicolas did the backgrounds for **The Old Lady and the Pigeons.** When I graduated from Angoulême, I needed to find a way to earn my living. At the time, I felt that animation was somehow too technical for me. I decided to go to England to become an illustrator. I arrived knowing no-one and was advised to show my drawings to people who worked in animation studios. People were much nicer to me than they had been in France. I was told not to worry, no-one becomes an animator overnight, animation is learnt in stages. I passed a test and was set to work. I found myself working with some great people. I went to festivals and discovered fantastic films. One day, at the Annecy Festival, I saw Nick Park's short, **Creature Comfort** which has plasticine animals explaining what life is like in a zoo. The voices are in point of fact real voices of people talking about their homes. The film is a masterpiece. It made me want to make one of my own. I met Didier Brunner, of Les Armateurs, who wanted to produce quality animation. I pitched **The Old Lady and the Pigeons** to him. From the day I gave him the synopsis to the day the film was finished, ten years went by.

Q: Ten years!

Sylvain Chomet: It was a long and complicated business. At first, no French TV station would back us. We raised some money from the French National Film Centre, but not enough to finish the whole film. We decided to start anyway. I went to work with one assistant and with Nicolas de Crécy designing the backgrounds. We shot the first part at Folimage Studios in Valence, animating scene by scene in chronological order till we had a four-minute sequence. We showed these opening scenes all over the place but no one would give us money. After a while, I left for Canada, totally disheartened, determined to make a new start. I worked on commercials till Didier Brunner managed to get Colin Rose of the BBC interested. Thanks to Colin we were able to raise funding from other TV stations and so got a Franco-Canadian co-production going.

Q: **The Old Lady and the Pigeons** was a huge success and won many prizes. How did you raise funding for a feature?
Sylvain Chomet: **THE TRIPLETS OF BELLEVILLE** was five years in development, which is an improvement on **The Old Lady…** It was finished in half the time, though it's three times longer. At first, Didier Brunner, who had just had a hit with **Kirikou and the Witch** suggested I make a feature in three parts, using the Old Lady as main character. I wasn't so sure, because by the end of the movie she's crazy as hell and also I didn't like the idea of recycling a character. I thought about using triplet sisters. The first would be the Old Lady with the Pigeons, the second would live in the suburbs of Paris and love cycling, the third would run a roadside motel in the St Lawrence wilderness of Quebec. The second part was called **The Old Lady and the Bicycles** and the third **The Old Lady and the Ouaouarons** which is Quebec dialect for a kind of frog. When I started to develop the second section, I realized I had enough material to make a whole picture. Didier accepted this, but it meant raising more money, to make up for the missing third, as **The Old Lady and the Pigeons** was no longer a part of the project. So I went ahead and developed my story, using the frog idea from what had been going to be the third part. I kept the French title Les Triplettes de Belleville (The Triplets of Belleville) that later became **THE TRIPLETS OF BELLEVILLE** for the English version. Then, it turned out I had to change the design of Champion's grandmother from the original 'Old Lady' when the Canadian co-producer of my short asked for an astronomical amount of money in exchange for letting us re-use the character. And so Madame Souza was born, a Portuguese lady with a club-foot. She brought us a great deal more than the original Old Lady would have done. We kept the title when the three music-hall singers appeared in our tale.

Q: Tell us about your crew.

Sylvain Chomet: I was anxious to work with Evgeni Tomov on design again. Evgeni is the Nureyev of animation. When his plane stopped over in Newfoundland on its way to Cuba, he jumped a barrier and demanded political asylum. He left everything behind and became refugee in Canada. He is immensely talented and his modesty can be infuriating, judged in terms of the quality of his work. He's always doing himself down! Then I got an animation crew together. I met with young animators who had liked **The Old Lady and the Pigeons** and who wanted to work with me. They had to wait two years before we could offer them a job, but most of them hung on in there. Jean-Christophe Lie was one of these people. He had just graduated from the Gobelins school when we met. When he appeared, he got going by practicing on one of the Triplets, Rose. His sequence was so good that I immediately gave him Rose as a character and overall responsibility for all three triplets. He was one of the animators who most impressed me. I even created a scene specially so I could use his little test in the finished film. I met Benoît Charest, the composer, in Montreal and I loved his work as soon as I heard his demo. He is unbelievably precise and at the same time crazy enough to write a solo for a vacuum-cleaner. Since working on the movie, he's given his vacuum-cleaner a name – it's called Mouf-Mouf – and is thinking about recording a compilation of Luc Plamandon songs with it. Pieter Van Houte, who did the 3D design, arrived during production. We had badly underestimated the digital effects we would need. We had a team of just two people to work on bike and vehicle sequences. As we realized just how much work there was going to be, we called Walking the Dog, the Belgian studio, and Pieter was hired by them to oversee 3D effects in Montreal. We started off by having a fight because he gave me the impression he wanted to run everything. But he's a great guy, who brought us a hell of a lot, in terms of image treatment. We got on so well that I have asked him to be my AD on my next film. When we worked on the storm sequence, Pieter managed to create really graphic

images that I love. He knows how to get the most out of his machines.

Q: How would you describe your style?

Sylvain Chomet: It's based on mime and character-acting. I'm more influenced by live camerawork than by animation. By Jacques Tati of course, but also by all those silent movie stars, Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton… Timing is crucial too. That's why I love Louis de Funès and all those British comedies like Absolutely Fabulous or Black Adder with Rowan Atkinson. I also like Richard Williams' animation and Tex Avery. In comic strips, Goossens is a master of timing.

Q: In **The Old Lady and the Pigeons** and in **THE TRIPLETS OF BELLEVILLE**, the interiors are humble but welcoming, they are reminiscent of France in the 1950s and 1960s. The exteriors are evocative of Paris. Why are you attached to this atmosphere and the characters that go with it.

Sylvain Chomet: Because I come from a humble background not a smart one. I remember going to see an old lady who lived next door to one of my aunts and finding her in a small flat that smelled of polish where every object, however insignificant, was shown at its best. I could never direct a story set in a world of rich people. My inspiration comes from my own experience.

Q: What is so fascinating about railway landscapes, about bridges and the Tour de France?

Sylvain Chomet: I'm more interested in the people one sees during the Tour de France than in the race itself. I remember watching in fascination as guys would throw pens and caps by the handful all along the way. And as I grew up in the suburbs, trains were a part of my life. Suburban trains are a constant reminder that tomorrow you are going to have to get up and go to work. When I was a student, I'd look at old photographs, and try to picture the scenes behind them. I remember a picture of a bridge with an engine driving along above a small town below.

Q: Where did you get the idea for the character of Madame Souza, the wonderful granny who will do everything she can to protect her grandson?

Sylvain Chomet: She is not directly drawn from my own grandmothers, who died when I was very little. My maternal grandmother, as described to me by my parents, was more of an inspiration for the Triplets with their joie de vivre.

Q: Were you a sad little boy, like Champion in your film?

Sylvain Chomet: When I was small, I spent a lot of time alone. My older sister was ten years older than me and as I was always drawing, I was happy to linger in my inner world. I enjoy other people's company, but I also need to gather strength alone. When I was a child, I had a toy called "Minicinex" which projected tiny super-8 reels. When I watched cartoons on this I didn't know what they meant. I thought people just filmed whatever was in front of the camera, as if the characters really existed.

Q: You honor many artists in **THE TRIPLETS OF BELLEVILLE**, Charles Trénet, Django Reinhardt, Jacques Tati, Fred Astaire, Josephine Baker, Max Fleischer… Why refer to them directly?

Sylvain Chomet: Because major American stars often appear in American cartoons, but French stars of the period never appeared in French cartoons because there was no cartoon industry in France. I wanted my film to be a fake, a film we should have been able to see at the time but never did. I also wanted to pay my respects to Dubout, whose wonderful work fascinated me when I was a child. His style is so perfect for animation, I wish he had been able to make cartoons of his own.

Q: What inspired you for Belleville? What relates to Montreal and what relates to New York in the architectural mix?

Sylvain Chomet: The first image of Belleville in my film shows the Chateau de Frontenac in Quebec. We

used many details from Quebec and Montreal in trying to show how these cities might have turned into New Yorks. When Quebec looked like it might secede, the money went to Toronto, which is the big English-speaking city. The bridge in my film is the Jacques Cartier Bridge, shown surrounded by typical Quebec architecture. There is a passing reference to the Statue of Liberty which relates to the American way of life and also to the incredible number of fat people one sees in US cities. I've always been struck by that.

Q: Your film is nostalgic. Is this because you don't like the way we live now?

Sylvain Chomet: No. I benefit from it too. But from a design point of view, the 50s were more inspiring. Town-planning, cars, clothes were creative and interesting. Drawing and design were an important part of life, on posters, in schoolbooks. It was also a period when people relaxed after the trials of the Second World War. They were less cynical, keener on their freedoms.

Q: Some scenes seem to poke fun at the clichéd view of France, such as one sometimes finds in America, the lack of cleanliness, the fondness for eating frogs' legs and snails and other disgusting foods.

Sylvain Chomet: I wanted to push gastronomic clichés to an extreme. I've lived abroad longer than I've lived in France so I've often come across people's repulsion at the thought of eating frogs' legs or snails. I played a joke once, creating enormous frogs' leg out of plasticine, with bones made of Q-tips and cotton thread for veins which I covered in greenish sauce and put on a dish. Despite their extreme courtesy, none of my British friends would try one. But when my back was turned, an elderly gentleman nibbled at one: he was Swiss! Luckily, I rescued him before he could swallow anything!

Q: Your characters' forms are exaggerated. Black rectangles for French Mafia sidekicks, a tiny triangle for the grandmother's silhouette, obese people or stick-thin people… Why do you like animating geometric forms?

Sylvain Chomet: Because I want to use the freedom that animation brings. You can't do those things with live camerawork. I like extreme caricature, though it's the way characters move which really characterizes them.

Q: The Triplets use everyday objects as musical instruments. Are these sounds you enjoy?

Sylvain Chomet: Yes. I was inspired by **Stomp** which I saw in Montreal a few years back. I also saw a musician make music out of a refrigerator shelf placed on a sound-box.

Q: The world you depict is a far cry from our technological era yet you make use of technology and digital effects.

Sylvain Chomet: 3D effects give the film more consistency. Showing the Tour de France, you can't use conjuring tricks to get round the problems which arise when bicycles are animated: you have to have many bikes. Roadside crowds were animated using traditional techniques, but I had to show the pack. At first, we thought we'd use 3D imagery for the bicycles alone but then we decided to model the cyclists as well and show them in wide-shot. They are tiny in the frame and fit perfectly into the rest of the animation. That's something we're very proud of. You can't turn something like a bicycle into something emotional and animating the spokes is an absolute nightmare. Originally, the use of 3D imagery was a technical necessity, not an aesthetic choice. In **The Old Lady and the Pigeons**, I was not able to show a crowd or many vehicles. In **THE TRIPLETS OF BELLEVILLE**, it was essential to show the streets of Belleville packed with cars. By getting to know 3D techniques, I discovered I could use them to create images and animations that would touch people, skies that were interesting and a whole host of things I hadn't conceived of previously…

Q: The scene in which they cross the ocean is very beautiful too…

Sylvain Chomet: It's one of my favorites. We filmed the storyboard to get an Animatic assembly, lasting

about three minutes. At around the same time I bought a prize-winning record, Mozart's C-Minor Mass conducted by Elliott Gardiner. As soon as I heard the overture, I realized it would make a perfect accompaniment to this sequence. When I laid the music over the pictures, all the effects seems perfectly synchronized to fit. It was an incredible piece of luck.

Q: How would you like people to react to your film?

Sylvain Chomet: I'd like them to make it their own and match it to their own memories. One gentleman came and told me that the film had moved him because Madame Souza reminded him of his own Greek grandmother. I liked that.

Q: What are you working on now?

Sylvain Chomet: I am going to make a film that is set in Les Halles, the Paris neighborhood, Delete: entitled based on dance, not a musical but a film where dance comes into the story. I am reading a lot at the moment and I think there is lot of hilarious humor to be found in the world of dance. I want to concentrate even more on the way characters act.

Q: Will you re-use the Triplets as characters?

Sylvain Chomet: No. Maybe Madame Souza will have a cameo, just as a laugh, but I don't intend to make a sequel.

Direct animation, special effects and 3D compositing : Pieter Van Houte

Q: How did you work with Sylvain Chomet on digital effects? Did he seem nervous about using 3D imagery initially?

P. Van Houte: I was originally contacted by Walking the Dog, a Brussels-based company. They wanted me to spend two months in Montreal supervising the insertion of 3D-modelled vehicles made in Brussels into animated sequences. In the end, I spent a year working on the film, shuttling back and forth between France, Belgium and Canada and between three talented crews. I soon realized that Sylvain had a shrewd idea of the way he intended to use 3D imagery to help create certain scenes. Initially, he was somewhat reticent. He likes to learn but he is also extremely impatient. My job involved working out what he wanted to see on the screen and finding the best way to obtain that result.

Q: How did you share the work to be done between the different 3D imaging crews ?

P. Van Houte : The Belgian team was in charge of making the cyclists and vehicles of the Tour de France, as well as the vehicles in Belleville. The French team was responsible for the car chase and the Canadian team did everything else. It had to be that way because most of the effects demanded such precise and detailed decisions that Sylvain had to be there to OK them all the time. In the end, the Canadian team run by the animator Alain Dumais with his number two Bisser Maximov who worked on the most effects. At first, Alain's job was to provide models for 3D elements like the team-car, Bruno's dream-machine, the trains and so on. But he was entirely responsible for animating the impressive storm sequence.

Q: 3D effects were incorporated into film's graphic style extremely effectively. How did you manage to make it so unobtrusive?

P. Van Houte: By paying careful attention to hand-drawn sketches and making the best copy we could. 2D effects are mainly about finding the right color tone and the right line, avoiding all the facile effects that 3D provides. We spent a lot of time replicating the hand-drawn style of a line, though we never managed to get a perfect copy of Evgeni Tomov, the designer's, shaky style! We used a rendering device available on most current 3D software that gives any object you want a sharp contour. We perfected this procedure by using Digital Fusion, which produces highly complex 2D effects very fast. I'd take a line from a paper sketch and integrate it into the rendering of a 3D object. I'd alter the contour until the 2D and the 3D

versions were indistinguishable. You must have noticed that the characters are not shaded. Carole Roy found dozens of different color tones for more than a thousand shots. She did an astonishing amount of work. We used the same process for 3D effects, choosing colors that would meld into the background and avoiding complicated or rendering.

Q: How did you combine 3D bicycles with traditionally animated cyclists?

P. Van, Houte: We started out by animating a very simple cyclist's silhouette on a 3D bicycle, or sometimes only the bike. We printed each of these images as a line drawing and gave them to the animators so that they could draw a cyclist on the bicycle. Then the animators drawings were scanned and colorized, the bicycle details filled in, with matts over every bit that came into contact with human bodies: feet, hands and so on. Sometimes we were forced to draw in the matts frame by frame, which is an extremely long and exacting process. A lot of curses flew around.

Q: Some of the background figures beyond the pack of cyclists are done entirely in 3D. How did you make them look like 2D?

P. Van Houte: The same way we did the vehicles, i.e. by reproducing hand-drawn contour and color effects. Sylvain was so pleased with the result that he used 3D cyclists in mid-shot, though in the beginning they were only supposed to appear in the background.

Q: What were the main digital effects?

P. Van Houte: There are a lot of water effects: ocean, swamp… We spent a lot of time mapping newspaper headlines and comic strips on papers held in characters' hands. Because proportions in drawings rarely relate to geometrical reality, this is a more complex task than one might think. Other effects like explosions, fireworks or lightening were made using software designed for live camerawork. They needed adapting to a 2D world. We also used a great deal of particle animation to generate snow, fog, car exhaust, flame and so on… For the fire beneath the bridge, we projected shadows that moved in time to the rhythm of flame. We isolated the characters on one layer of effect and put the background on another. If the fire accelerated, the shadows automatically sped up.

Q: Which was the most demanding sequence?

P. Van Houte: The explosion in the swamp. I think it's a good example of how 2D and 3D effects can be combined. The explosion effect was animated by Nicolas Ferrere in 2D, then we added a further 150 elements, 3D effects, volume and particles. It took the computer more than two days to render the final result.

Q: How would you sum up the experience of working on **THE TRIPLETS OF BELLEVILLE?**

P. Van Houte: I was trained as a traditional animator but I have spent a great deal of my life working on pure 3D effects. Working on this movie made me fall in love with traditional animation all over again, and at the same time I was able to discover new ways of using 3D. My job on **THE TRIPLETS OF BELLEVILLE** was to get the best of both worlds. It brought me pride and joy.

Animation Supervisor: Jean Christophe Lie.
Q: How did you end up animating Rose and supervising the animation of the three triplet characters?

Jean-Christophe Lie: I produced a first test in Paris which got me hired as an animation assistant. I went to Montreal. I was determined to work on this film, so I was delighted to be there, even though I was in a hurry to become an animator. Sylvain gave me another go at animating Rose when I got to meet him. I created a dance routine which he liked so much that he put me in charge in animating the character and supervising the animation of the other two triplets. But before that I had also animated the driver with Hughes Martel who was my assistant at the time. Hughes went on to animate Blanche under my

supervision.

Q: How would you define the animation style of the triplet characters?

Jean Christophe Lie: I don't know if Sylvain is aware of this or not, but the Triplet's long thin bodies are a lot like his, so I had a life-model to work from everyday. Sylvain is tall, his arms are long… just like the Triplets! He does not explain what he wants, he gives you a general sense and then lets you express yourself. It's a question of feeling.

Q: Did he show you live-camera shots as reference-points for certain scenes?

Jean Christophe Lie: No, though we did film a dance sequence, the "Gumboot", which is a Louisiana hand-clapping and thigh-slapping step. Sandy Silver, a dancer from Montreal was our model. This was just for reference, not to be put through a Rotoscope (a Rotoscope is a machine which breaks down live-action so that it can be animated). But it enabled us to observe highly complicated hand-clapping routines.

Q: How did you go about supervising the animation of the Triplets and what problems did you encounter?

Jean Christophe Lie: I put myself at the disposal of Sylvain's personal vision. The Triplet's long thin bodies were not always easy to fit into the horizontal rectangle of the frame. They were designed in great detail, which makes continuity a problem over a long animated sequence. Things like folds in a dress, strands of hair and so on.

Q: How did the three animators you supervised work together to animate the three Triplets?

Jean-Christophe Lie: We always worked together, scene by scene. We sketch out an initial layout and show it to Sylvain. He'd correct it, then each animator would work on his character according to what had been set out. We would then film our animations with a Line-Test camera (this is a video-camera which allows frame-by-frame filming of paper-drawn animation) and check for mistakes in blocking, in relation to the background perspective, and in terms of the interactions between characters. For the dance scene beneath the bridge, I first animated Rose's part entirely, then the other two (Hughes Martel and Zhigang Wang) fitted around the central Triplet.

Q: How does it feel to see a character you've drawn take shape on screen?

Jean-Christophe Lie: It's a great pleasure. It's amazing to see them move in color, against a background, with music and sound effects. Animators tend only to see their own work in any given scene and not to be able to take in the whole I've often watched rushes in a mirror to try and refresh my eye after I've seen a scene hundreds of times. If you watch a scene backwards, you can sometimes see mistakes that have slipped your notice. But it also provides confirmation that there are no mistakes.

Q: How does one "learn a part"?

Jean-Christophe Lie: Through practice. If you draw a character enough, according to the original design, you end up knowing it by heart and seeing it in three dimensions. When you get to that stage, you can safely abandon the original for effect, on a case-by-case basis. If you reproduce a character too accurately, which is what happens on TV, then it soon becomes boring. Sylvain always encouraged us not to stick too closely to the model, so that the character improves from one scene to the next, without losing the essence of it.

Q: What did you most like about Rose?

Jean-Christophe Lie: That I could show her need to seduce. In one of my first animations, I showed her brushing her hair, so she looked good. I wanted her to be very feminine, as a contrast to the old-fashioned aspect of her home and the big-nosed ugliness of the characters.

Music: Benoît Charest

Q: Can you tell us about your music in a few words, what you've done and what you're involved in now?

B. Charest: My music is an accumulation of bad habits acquired over a lifetime in music. One's faults are what makes one different: you need to make the most of them. I have been influenced by jazz, by French singers of the fifties and sixties, by Frank Zappa, Neapolitan music and many other things. The only music I really dislike is too obviously commercial music. I've written music for a few films in Quebec. The first was for a documentary film based on archive footage of the thirties and forties, called "Montreal Retro". That was in 1991. As I didn't have a clue how people wrote music for film, I took a flyer and it worked out. Then in 1998, there was "Matroni and Me," a satirical, philosophical, comedy written by Alexis Martin, then in 2000 "Life After Love", a romantic comedy with Latin-flavored music. I worked on other stuff, drama, documentary and commercials, before getting to write for **THE TRIPLETS OF BELLEVILLE.**

Q: How did you collaborate with Sylvain?

B. Charest: I met Sylvain a few times in clubs I played. One night, he said, "I hate guitar music usually, but it has to be said you play really well." So then I knew we were friends for life. After that, he saw "Matroni and Me". He called me and asked me over to the animation studio. I played him my demo tape. I'd written a little theme I liked for a documentary which hadn't been used because it was "too fun" for the subject (that's what they said). When he heard it, Sylvain said, "That's the theme tune for my film!". The rest of the creative business was truly a pleasure. The more I gave in to my vilest creative impulses, the more Sylvain liked it.

Q: What did they show you so you get the idea of a scene before it was finished?

B. Charest: Storyboards, a video assembly and drawings.

Q: What was the inspiration for the music?

B Charest: Django Reinhardt's music. Otherwise the images themselves, the characters, Sylvain's instructions, a few stylistic touches that relate to the periods the film covers.

Q: Tell us about Mouf-Mouf and the secrets of home jazz?

B. Charest: Oh, Mouf-Mouf! It's a fifties cylindrical vacuum-cleaner that used to lie hangdog in a corner of my bedsit. One day, it winked at me. It needed someone to listen to it, someone to love it… Since we met, it's started singing. I have to say that this is quite touching. I put my hand over the tube and let the air pass through my fingers. If I reduce the gaps, the intonation changes and I get notes precise enough to play a tune. I should mention that all the home appliance sounds in the movie were obtained by using true life originals.

Q: You worked with Thomas Dutronc, who is a remarkable guitarist in love with swing. Can you tell us about him and the tribute you both performed to Django Reinhardt?

B. Charest: He's a quiet boy. Plays the guitar nicely. I only met him for a few hours at Mathieu Chedid's. I tried out his great Selmer guitar. Really, he's the big Django expert. I just play along.

Q: Tell us about the Triplet's singing voices.

B. Charest: Betty Bonifassi, Marie-Lou Gauthier and Lina Boudreault gave the Triplets their voices. They had a lot of fun. Betty did more work on the Piaf-style song and in the choruses composed together with M.

Q: How did you work with Mathieu Chedid, alias M?

B.Charest: It was his show. He worked on what I'd composed. I had a bit of trouble at first, allowing him to

do his own thing, but I love the end result. I really love what he did.

Production Design: Evgeni Tomov

Q: What direction did Sylvain Chomet give you about the sets? Did he describe them in word? Did he show you photographs or drawings?

E Tomov: All of the above. Sylvain had already drawn sketches of the sets before even doing a storyboard, which provided an indication of the atmosphere and the effects he was expecting. I was impressed to see how creatively he can improvise. Sylvain is always brimming with new ideas but he is open to other people's ideas too. He was the creative force, the engine which drove the production on. I had a great deal of freedom to design an architectural style for Belleville, which is a baroque combination of Paris, Montreal and New York. We had a lot of fun parodying North American consumerism. It was fun to draw. I was always checking that what I was doing corresponded to what Sylvain wanted.

Q: What were your references, visually speaking?

E. Tomov: I used books of black and white photographs of postwar Paris to draw the scenes from Champion's childhood. I also used archive material from the provinces for the Tour de France and tons of pictures of the Tour itself. Both Sylvain and I were determined to make the atmosphere as plausible as possible. There had to be a feeling of reality, without realistic representation of the real world. We made careful use of Robert Doisneau and Jean Mounicq's photographs to fit authentic details into the backgrounds of the first three sequences (Paris and the Tour de France). We also used lighting to give the illusion that the action was taking place on a set, with real characters.

Q: What materials and tools did you use in making the sets which are, I believe, fairly large?

E. Tomov: The sets were initially designed in the form of tiny drawings. We blew them up to a variety of sizes. The smallest were 25 cms across and the largest, used for pans, were up to 1m50 or 2m in height, like the wide-shot of Belleville. If you can imagine the level detail required to produce such a large drawing, you will realize that making a fair copy is an enormous job. I'd get the fair copy by putting the sketch on a light-board, then tracing over it without disconnecting the two drawings. I would allow myself to improvise and add extra detail. The line drawing was then scanned and colored by computer. The aim was to make the work look natural, as if it had all been done by hand. We even added a paper texture to these 2D sets, to make them look like water-colors. I have to say that I did not produce a thousand sets on my own. I worked with a team of highly talented artists.

Q: The sets are unusual: you distort perspective to create a panorama effect on a flat surface. How do you bring such effects off?

E. Tomov: There is no way of describing how a good animated film set is made. You can look at it logically or analytically, but you must always bear in mind that what you are drawing is going to be a scene in a film. You have to design your set to express the movement of a shot, the pace of a scene. Sometimes, it is necessary to draw impossible perspectives, such as those you mention. With experience, one can do this because one acquires a kind of "cinematic vision". Don't forget that some sets only appear on screen for a few seconds. They must have immediate impact and not break the continuity with the previous shot.

Q: Which were the hardest sets to make?

E. Tomov: The wide-screen panoramas of Belleville were complicated to do because they were designed in several layers to give a sense of depth. Each layer moved at a different speed during the pan, to give the illusion of perspective. We did some computerized tests to get the movement right. I am very pleased with the result, despite all the trouble.

Production company: Les Armateurs

Les Armateurs, founded by Didier Brunner in 1994, has brought two new writer-directors to the world of cartoon films, Michel Ocelot and Sylvain Chomet.

The aim of the company is to discover talent and to produce a range of original and ambitious work aimed at family audiences and young adults.

The company's first hit was Michel Ocelot's feature-length **Kirikou and the Witch** which won the Grand Prize at the Annecy Festival in 1999 and was seen by more than one and a half million people.

In 2000, the company produced Michel Ocelot's **Princes and Princesses**, a collection of six medium-length cut-up animations.

In 2002, it co-produced Jannik Hastrup's **The Child That Would Be A Bear** with Danish associates.

Les Armateurs has worked with Sylvain Chomet since **The Old Lady and the Pigeons** (a prizewinner at Annecy in 1997) to the present day with this, his first feature, **THE TRIPLETS OF BELLEVILLE.**

Also in production is Jean-Luc François' feature, **T'choupi,** based on a famous character for tiny tots, as well as several shorts.

Four new features will go into production in 2003/2004.

These are:

Rebel¸ by two young writer-directors from Ireland, Tomm Moore and Aidan Harte, based on the famous illuminated manuscript, the Book of Kells.

The Devil's Song, based on the life of blues-singer Robert Johnson, drawn by Jano, the comic strip author, and directed by Alexis Lavilat and Raoul.

Why I Ate (Or Didn't Eat) My Father, a 3D animation of Roy Lewis' bestseller, published by Actes Sud, adapted by Frédéric Fougea and Jean-Luc Fromtental and drawn by Jeff Newitt from England.

The Child and the River, based on the book by Henri Bosco, written and directed by Michel Fessler.

Finally, a fifth feature is shortly about to go into development: **Attila Marcel**, the new Sylvain Chomet film.

*THE TRIPLETS OF BELLEVILLE was born at the International Animated Film Festival of Annecy. We had just given seven years of ours lives, our energy and passion, to finance and make **The Old Lady and the Pigeons**, a 26' cartoon costing more than 800,000 Euros.*

The writing and directing talent revealed in this film was such that I knew I wanted to pursue my collaboration with Sylvain more ambitiously, taking even greater risks. I wanted to produce his first feature film and give him an opportunity of expressing the full extent of his gifts.

*It was time to capitalize on the theatrical success of **Kirikou and the Witch**, which made Les Armateurs a credible partner in the field of ambitious animated features and to build on the success of **The Old Lady and the Pigeons** within the profession (Oscars, BAFTA, Cesar, Annecy, etc…)*

*Despite the magnificent graphics of **THE TRIPLETS OF BELLEVILLE**, neither the story nor the setting are*

aimed specifically at a young audience. I knew that we were asking our partners to accompany us in a innovative and risky venture, given the expense of the production. We held true to our course, which is one of the fundamental qualities of Les Armateurs. The crew has shown admirable resilience and today we are proud to be able to steer our ship of fantasy into a safe harbor.

Didier Brunner

THE TRIPLETS OF BELLEVILLE

Screenplay, Storyboard, Graphic Design and Director	Sylvain Chomet
Production Design and Execution	Evgeni Tomov
Music – Composition and Arrangements by	Benoît Charest
Colors, Art Direction	Thierry Million
Character Color Research	Carole Roy
Animation Director and Character Graphic Design	Sylvain Chomet
Animation Supervision	Jean-Christophe Lie
3D Animation Direction, Special Effects & Compositing Design	Pieter Van Houte
Compositing Director	Bénédicte Galup
Editor	Chantal Colibert Brunner
Production Manager	François Bernard
Animation Studios	Studio Les Triplettes Artdog Walking the Dog Rija Films 2D3D
Sound mixing	Cineberti
Character Voices	Jean-Claude Donda Michel Robin Monica Viegas
End Credit Song	M
Other Songs Sung by	Béatrice Bonifassi Charles Prevost Linton
Sound Design	Mathieu Cox Eric de Vos Laurent Quaglio
Producers	Didier Brunner (Les Armateurs) Paul Cadieux (Production Champion)
Associate Producers	Viviane Vanfleteren (Vivi Film) Régis Gheselbash (RGP France) Colin Rose (BBC Bristol)

Original soundtrack on DELABEL

Produced by Les Armateurs (Carrère Group)/Production Champion/Vivi Film/France 3 Cinéma/RGP France

With the support of

Canal+ and Gimages 3 and Cofimage 12, Telefilm Canada, a Franco-Belgian-Canadian co-production, with SODEC, Société de développement des enterprises culturelles – Québec, with the support of the Centre National de la Cinématographie, and the Fonds Film in Vlaanderen and Nationale Loterij, in association with BBC Bristol and BBC Worldwide, with the participation of the Département de la Charente and the Région Poitou-Charentes, with the support of Cartoon, of the European Union's Media Programme and Procirep.