



## **PROJECT TITLE: CABBALE (FRANCE)**

### **LOGLINE**

Julien Schulmann is a comedian. He's just lost his father, a Polish Jew who survived the concentration camps. Before dying, Julien's father had drawn up a will stipulating this his other son, Pierre, should be the one to spread his ashes over his homeland. The problem is, Pierre has been missing for two years. The family preference for Pierre opens a deep wound in Julien that gradually sheds light on an unspeakable secret, to be unveiled at the film's climax.

### **CREDITS**

**Director:** Charles Najman

**Scriptwriter:** Charles Najman

**Production Company:** Sedna Films

**Producer:** Cécile Vacheret

**Total Budget:** €2.268.955

**Secured Financing:** €900.000

**Percentage of Secured Financing:** 40%

### **SYNOPSIS**

JULIEN SCHULMANN is a comedian. He's just lost his father, a Polish Jew who survived the concentration camps. Before dying, Julien's father had drawn up a will stipulating this his other son, PIERRE, should be the one to spread his ashes over his homeland. The problem is, PIERRE has been missing for two years. The family preference for Pierre opens a deep wound in JULIEN that gradually sheds light on an unspeakable secret, to be unveiled at the film's climax.

The very night his father dies, while premiering his new show, JULIEN acts out the fraternal conflict on stage. In a cathartic exercise, he improvises a blistering sketch in which he plays the roles of both his father and his brother, sparing them nothing. Then, as though possessed by their voices, he calls for all Ashkenazi Jews in Israel to return to Poland. JULIEN's sketch causes a scandal. It provokes a veritable controversy. The media announces the creation of a "Party of Returners" who support the comic's assertions and believe the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be resolved this way. The theatre is vandalized by detractors and JULIEN's tour is subsequently cancelled. JULIEN declares he has been the victim of a conspiracy and is soon convinced his own brother PIERRE is behind it. He decides to go to Poland, to spread his father's ashes and to find PIERRE, who, rumour has it, is preparing to do something dramatic in his name.

This trip (in both the literal and figurative senses) takes him to Pitchipoi, a mysterious place where those who have disappeared find each other. There, JULIEN's own personal truth will be revealed.

For two years, JULIEN has kept a dark secret buried deep within him: he murdered his brother during a fatal confrontation. But his father's death and the injunction in the will have transformed JULIEN's repressed act into a persecution fixation. Like two ghosts, or two dybbuks from Yiddish tradition, his brother and father have haunted him to the point of possession. It is in Pitchipoi where, reliving his crime, JULIEN will finally break free of these demons.

### **DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT**

I have no desire to make an educational film about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. What I'm interested in doing above all with CABBALE is to push the limits of an absurd situation, a situation punctuated by the irony and self-deprecation that fundamentally characterizes Jewish humour in my view. Much like *La mémoire est-elle soluble dans l'eau?*, in which I filmed my mother at a spa in Evian where she and other Holocaust survivors received hydrotherapeutic treatments paid for by the German government, the aliyah of "fake Russian Jews" to Israel, which sparked my desire to write CABBALE, resembles absurdist fiction. And yet, the veracity of this movement to usurp identity and take advantage of the benefits provided to Jews who settle in Israel provides an opportunity to reflect on what it means to be Jewish, something I want to approach from the angle of comedy.

I've always felt Jewish but I've never felt any link to Israel. Those have always seemed like two separate identities to me. With CABBALE, I want to emphasize just how separate the Jewish identity is from Israel. Jewish identity is defined, in my view, by a desire to pull up roots and break free from any attachment to



specific lands. There is a propensity to create new spaces, a form - sometimes tragic, sometimes joyous - of wandering. In their ability to integrate, to live without borders or limits, to nourish an existence which might seem uncertain, nebulous, detached, rootless, the Jewish people possess a uniqueness that I believe is disappearing today. I want to exalt the poetic dimension of that uniqueness. Therein lies the meaning of the old Yiddish legend that concludes the film.

Pitchipoi is a mythical village where Jews go to find, beyond tears and despair, the wild dreams of the imagination. CABBALE resides in the mysterious frontier between dreams and reality. Pitchipoi is a fictional village with infinite windy streets and baroque spirals. Pitchipoi turns topology upside-down. It floats in that fuzzy world between the comic and the macabre that seems to characterize Central European Jewish culture. Pitchipoi blurs the line between static reality and the fanciful or fantastical. A place where the dead converse with us, where ghosts no longer need to wear a white sheet, for they come to us as our best friends, our best enemies...

CABBALE is also a "family novel", fuelled by inner conflict, a feeling of persecution, dread and possession. Through the story of JULIEN SCHULMANN and his absent brother PIERRE, the film explores questions about origins, duality, ghosts, false identities, fraud, dissimulation and simulation, hallucination and paranoia; questions which are, in my view, essential to modern cinema. The singularity of cinema is, I believe, to explore the inner workings of the liars, "double agents" and "schizophrenics" who shake the foundations of identity by generating doubt.

Confronted with the ghosts of his father and brother, Julien Schulmann is on an initiatory journey throughout the film, a hallucinatory wander through a labyrinthine world of murky mazes, hazardous recesses, fragmented and unsure spaces; a dark, enclosed place whose rare openings are not enough to pierce the obscurity.

## **DIRECTOR'S PROFILE AND FILMOGRAPHY**

Charles Najman is a French writer and filmmaker. After philosophical studies, he directs several documentaries and writes many books. In 1996, he shoots his first feature film LA MÉMOIRE EST-ELLE SOLUBLE DANS L'EAU ?, combination of documentary and fiction, which attracts the attention of the French audience and obtains the Jury award at Dunkerque Festival, the Audience award at Belfort Festival and the Tübingen International Film Festival Prize. His second feature film ROYAL BONBON is selected at Toronto, Locarno, Havana and New York festivals, before receiving the prestigious French Prix Jean Vigo in 2002. He directs two years later LA FIN DES CHIMÈRES ? (Jamel International Film Festival Prize) and more recently UNE ÉTRANGE CATHÉDRALE DANS LA GRAISSE DES TÉNÈBRES. He's now preparing his new film CABBALE, which has already received the French CNC's Avance sur recettes.

Feature Films:

UNE ÉTRANGE CATHÉDRALE DANS LA GRAISSE DES TÉNÈBRES, 78m - 2011

LA FIN DES CHIMÈRES? 70m - 2004, Released in France in 2004 and broadcast on ARTE, Jamel International Film Festival Prize

ROYAL-BONBON 89m - 2002, Prix JEAN VIGO 2002, Selected in competition at Toronto, Locarno, Havana and New York Festivals

LA MÉMOIRE EST-ELLE SOLUBLE DANS L'EAU?, 86m - 1996, Jury award at Dunkerque Festival 1996, Audience award at Belfort Festival 1996, Tübingen International Film Festival Prize 1997

## **COMPANY PROFILE**

Sedna Films is an independent production company, based in Paris and formed in 2004 by several partners, who came from the cinematic industry. Among them, Cécile Vacheret who is today the main Producer of Sedna Films.

The company has produced and co-produced over ten films, mostly short and medium fiction films, but also documentaries. All films have been selected and awarded at international film festivals (Directors' fortnight and Semaine de la Critique in Cannes Film Festival, Vila do Conde, New York, Winterthur...). Most of them have been broadcast on the main french TV channels (Canal + and Ciné Cinéma).

The company's aim is to accompany continuously young independent filmmakers who develop their own language.

Since 2010, Sedna Films has developed two feature films: «Cabbale» by Charles Najman, who received with his last film the french prestigious Prix Jean Vigo, and «You and the night» by Yann Gonzalez, first feature after four short and medium films produced by Sedna Films and all selected in Cannes Film Festival.