



Festival del film Locarno
Official selection

Climage presents



Official Selection
idfa 2015

ABOUT HEAVEN

a film by Stéphane Goël

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DIRECTED BY: STÉPHANE GOËL - CINEMATOGRAPHY: CAMILLE BOTTAGNIUO, STÉPHANE GOËL, DYLAN PERRAUD, SÉBASTIEN REICHENBACH - EDITED BY: KARINE SUDAN - ASSISTANT DIRECTOR: CÉLINE PÉNET - PRODUCTION: CLIMAGE - EXPLOITATION: RADIO TÉLÉVISION SUISSE / UNITE DES FILMS DOCUMENTAIRES - IRENE CHALLAND, GASPARD LAMUNIERE, SRG SSR / WWW.SRGSSR.CH - OFFICE FÉDÉRAL DE LA CULTURE (OFC) - FONDATION CULTURELLE SUISSE, FONDATION ERNST GÖHNER, SUCCÈS CINÉMA, SUCCÈS PASSAGE ANTENNE, CINEFORM, LOTTERIE ROMANDE

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SYNOPSIS

If Switzerland is sometimes perceived as heaven on earth, the question that follows is: do its inhabitants believe in heaven? Believers, agnostics and atheists all feel the need for a narrative when confronting death. So, what is left of paradise, which once promised eternal happiness?

Encountering people in the twilight of their years, this film offers a moving, offbeat and personal quest within the depictions of this place common to all of humanity, faced with hope and shared doubt.



DIRECTOR'S NOTES

I live in a country, Switzerland, which is often perceived as paradise on earth. But the question is: what is Heaven and do we still believe in it? Therefore I did embark on a serious and joyful journey throughout my country to meet people who are at the end of their life and ask them about their vision of the hereafter. Heaven, hell, reincarnation or total void: I interrogated the dying about their hopes, their doubts and their relation with the Sacred. Because, facing death, believers, agnostics, atheists, everyone needs to build a story.

What is left of Heaven?

I've reached the age at which fathers are beginning to disappear. Mine is 80 years old, crippled with pain after a life of labor as a farmer. He contemplates his "last mile" - as he says - with humor and philosophy. One summer day, while I was walking with him in the pastures of the Alps where he led his flocks for decades, he said: "It is up there, at the foot of this cliff, that I want you to spread my ashes. If heaven exists, that is how it should look. That's it. I do not know if I deserve the heavenly paradise, but at least I will rest in an earthly paradise."

My father was never a very religious man. His generation has seen the disappearance of the church as the backbone of this rural society. But, now that he is at the end of his life, what relationship does my father have with the religious? What is his hope of a life in the hereafter? What images does he have of heaven? Or hell? Does he still fear God's judgment?

I accompanied my father on several occasions to visit some of his friends in a nursing home. I asked this group of old men about their vision of paradise. That question fueled strong, moving and endless debates. Those who believe and those who do not believe. Those who do not know who or what to believe. I collected these words with passion. It is touching, sometimes tragic - when the fear of death is too unbearable - and always rich in emotion. I realize that there is here a wonderful material for a documentary film. Talking about heaven is a great way to talk about death, but also about the good and bad things of life, the joys and the fears that are transcending cultural or religious traditions. Death is a "common ground" of humanity, and we all share the necessity of building a vision of the afterlife. Talking about heaven, as I did with my father, can reveal people's innermost convictions. Our representation of the afterlife is largely conditioned by our religious sentiment, but also by our education, cultural identity, socioeconomic status and our life experiences in general.

These meetings confirmed my intuition. The words of those who are facing death, have a force, a power, both narrative and poetic, far greater than any scholarly or theological discourse.

I found in these stories an expression of profound humanity. Beyond the differences of expression, beliefs and practices, I feel an access to something essential, common to men: the solitary confrontation with the inevitable.

Stéphane Goël

STÉPHANE GOËL

Biography

Born in 1965 in Lausanne. Stéphane Goël studied documentary filmmaking at Global Village Experimental Center in New York and collaborated with artists like Nam June Park and Shigeko Kubota. He directed several artistic and experimental videos before moving to documentaries. Back to Switzerland he joined the producer's association Climage. He produced and directed several documentaries for cinema and television.

Filmography

- 2015 ABOUT HEAVEN - Feature
- 2012 FROM THE KITCHEN TO THE PARLIAMENT - TV doc
- 2010 LABOUR'S COURT- Feature
- 2008 THE TWILIGHT OF THE CELTS - TV doc
- 2007 THE SECRET - TV doc
- 2006 QUE VIVA MAURICIO DEMIERRE - Feature
- 2005 IN THE LAND OF THE BLACK PHARAOHS - TV doc
- 2005 ATELIERS DU NORD - TV doc
- 2003 THE POISON - TV doc
- 2001 ARCHITECTOUR DE SUISSE - doc TV
- 1997 LOST CONTRYSIDE - TV doc
- 1996 RESERVATION GOLD – TV doc
- 1995 THIS BOY'S NAME WAS APACHE - TV doc
- 1993 WEST OF THE PECOS – Feature
- 1990 THE REPUBLIC OF UTOPIA - TV doc



CREDITS

Directed and produced by	Stéphane GOËL
Written with	Claude MURET
Assistant director	Céline PERNET
Cinematography	Camille COTTAGNOUD Stéphane GOËL Dylan PERRENOUD Sébastien REICHENBACH
Sound	Stéphane GOËL Céline PERNET
Editing	Karine SUDAN
Music	Jean-Philippe ZWAHLEN
Color correction	Jean-Baptiste PERRIN
Sound design and mix	Jérôme CUENDET
Graphic design	Manon ROLAND
Production	CLIMAGE Audiovisuel
Coproduction	RTS – SSR, Irène CHALLAND et Gaspard LAMUNIÈRE
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Documentary – 2015 – Switzerland – 85' – DCP 5.1 – 1.77 – French with English subtitles