Directed by Sylvain Chomet  
Written by Sylvain Chomet  
Produced by Didier Brunner  
Music by Benoît Charest  
Film Editing by Dominique Brune, Chantal Colibert Brunner, and Dominique Lefever  
Production Design by Evgeni Tomov  
Art Direction by Thierry Million  
Artistic Supervision by Bruno Ghigou  
Color Design by Carole Roy  
Sound Editing by Germain Boulay  
Digital Composition by Christel Boyer  
Visual Effects Supervision by Bruno Ghigou  
Key Animation by Sean Branigan  
Music by Thomas Dutronc, Christopher B.J. Smith, and Béatrice Bonifassi  

Lina Boudreau ... Triplets (singing voice)  
Michèle Caucheteux ... Triplets (voice)  
Jean-Claude Donda ... (voice)  
Mari-Lou Gauthier ... Triplets (voice)  
Charles Linton ... (singing voice)  
Michel Robin ... (voice)  
Monica Viegas ... (voice)  


Alysa Salzberg: “The Triplets of Belleville” (CinemaSource)  
Attention, fans of any/all of the following: the 1920's-1940's, classic cartoons, old-school jazz, French culture, and cutting-edge animation — our wishes have been granted at last, and in a very big way.  

The name of our fairy godmother (or, I suppose, godfather), is Sylvain Chomet. We lucked out on this one: instead of the ability to change pumpkins into elegant carriages, our fairy godparent has the power to bring together an incredibly diverse number of sources, including: musical hall stars/acts of the 1930's,
the Tour de France, the illusive French Mafia, animation styles from the early days cartoons, computer animation, and the works of celebrated French director Jacques Tati. With this amalgam of old and new, we get a movie that's at once reminiscent of something like early Mickey Mouse, say, or Betty Boop, yet at the same time totally different from just about any cartoon you've ever seen. *The Triplets of Belleville* is the name of this wonderful, ambitious project.

Besides a feast for the eyes, there's also a story in the film: when young Champion loses his parents, he's taken in by his grandmother, the kindly, resolute, club-footed Mme. Souza. Determined to cheer the boy up, she gives him gift after gift in hopes of inspiring him to become passionately involved in a hobby. But nothing works. And then, one day she realizes the boy loves bicycling. So, without further ado, Mme. Souza buys Champion a bike. A few years later, Champion is a lean, hulge-legged champion cyclist, competing in the Tour de France, with Mme. Souza and his loyal dog Bruno riding high—literally—behind him, on top of a truck that picks up exhausted cyclists. All seems well, but when Champion is kidnapped by strange, hunched-shouldered men in black suits, Mme. Souza and Bruno leave their routine lives without hesitation and go to his rescue, taking a paddle boat across the sea to a city called Belleville. Belleville's an interesting place, with impossibly towering, Woolworth Building-like skyscrapers, and corpulent inhabitants. Eventually, Mme. Souza runs into the Triplets of Belleville, three withered yet feisty old women who were once a hit music act, singing in clubs as the likes of Josephine Baker danced along. The Triplets take Mme. Souza and Bruno in, and together the group decides to find Champion.

The story, as you can see, is fairytale-like in some ways, but in the sense that a Roald Dahl book is fairytale-like—there's magic and beauty, but also a good deal of darkness and even violence. The film's visual style fits this mood perfectly. Every character is like a caricature, their proportions highly exaggerated. For example, Champion has a long, pointy nose, and Chomet loves to show him from slightly above the viewer's eye-level, so that his nose seems absurdly sized, as though it is as big as the rest of his face. Or, take the Triplets, who, even as old women, move as though music and rhythmic beats are always running through their bones (we get to see them at the height of their fame, as well, in a wonderfully manic opening scene). This caricaturizing isn't limited to humans and animals, though—houses, architecture, and boats are also distorted, often stretched and elongated to impossible heights.

Yet for all of its un-reality, what shines through in this film, and brings out most of the laughs, is Chomet's insight into human and animal nature and behaviors. From Mme. Souza's quiet air of determination, to a sycophantic waiter who literally bends over backwards for his most valued clients, the characters' forms allow us to see what they are inside: talk about wearing your heart on your sleeve! Perhaps the most stellar example of characterization is Bruno: the happily obese dog snorts, scratches, barks, even chews and shows his teeth exactly like a real-life dog, and like them, he also has his own idiosyncratic behaviors (the Souzas live next to an elevated train line, and Bruno likes to bark at the train as it goes by)! he does this so frequently, in fact, that we see he eyes the clock to be able to tell when a train is coming so he'll be ready at his post by the window).

Yes, our fairy godfather takes us into a strange and fabulous world, a world that echoes our own, yet which also transforms and re-interprets it, channeling emotion and observation in its forms the way Vincent Van Gogh painted the growing grasses in a wheatfield: this is a film that would make the Post-Impressionists proud.

Two more things make *The Triplets of Belleville* an enormously entertaining and interesting experience. First, there's contemporary Franco-American relations. It's hard to watch a movie set partially in France and partially in a sort of imagined America (Belleville is at once New York, a fictitious French super-city, and something altogether new) and not think of the shaky relationship between our countries. Chomet seems to take it all in stride. At times, he pokes fun of the French, making, say, the French Mafia run, not a chain of casinos as its front of respectability, but rather an enormous wine-importing conglomerate. At other times, he mocks Americans. Off the shore of Belleville, there is a statue that looks very much like a certain Lady Liberty (a thought: The Statue of Liberty was given to America by France, as proof of our countries' mutual friendship). The Belleville statue is quite fat, and holds a hamburger where our New York one would have a Bible. In addition, as was pointed out earlier, most of the people walking the streets of Belleville are portrayed as fat and unfashionably dressed. Are these playful (?) jabs at our countries? Or is it merely a reflection of Chomet's artistic taste? He does, after all, populate the film with numerous thin, drawn characters (even in America) as well. Could it merely be that he likes to have a little variety in his exaggerated figures? All this is truly just a reflection of Chomet's artistic taste in no way affects the film, unless you find it all humorous (which is okay, too). I mean, how many times have we Americans depicted French people as beret-wearing, cigarette-smoking, croissant-

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To call it weird would be a cowardly evasion. It is creepy, eccentric, eerie, flaky, freaky, funky, grotesque, inscrutable, kinky, kooky, magical, oddball, spooky, uncanny, uncouth and unearthly. Especially uncouth. What I did was, I typed the word "weird" and when that wholly failed to evoke the feelings the film stirred in me, I turned to the thesaurus and it suggested the above substitutes -- and none of them do the trick, either.

There is not even a way I can tell you what the film is "like," because I can't think of another film "like" it. Maybe the British cartoonists Ronald Searle and Gerald Scarfe suggest the visual style. Sylvain Chomet, the writer and director, has created an animated feature of appalling originality and scary charm. It's one of those movies where you keep banging your fist against your head to stop yourself from using the word "meets," as in Monsieur Hulot meets Tim Burton, or the Marquis de Sade meets Lance Armstrong.

Most animated features have an almost grotesque desire to be loved. This one doesn't seem to care. It creates a world of selfishness, cruelty, corruption and futility—but it's not serious about this world and it doesn't want to attack it or improve upon it. It simply wants to sweep us up in its dark comic vision.

The movie opens in France, where a small boy and his dog live in the top floor of a narrow, crooked house. The Metro roars past on schedule, and his dog races upstairs on schedule to bark at it, and the boy's grandmother gives the boy a trike and eventually a bike, and soon he is the foremost bicycle racer in the world.

Meanwhile, the Metro has been replaced by an elevated highway that shoulders the house to one side, so that it leans crookedly and the stairs are dangerous for the dog to climb.

The grandmother is a ferocious trainer. A little whistle seems welded to her jaw, and she toots relentlessly as the boy pedals. Then he is kidnapped by thugs who want to use him for a private gambling operation, and the key to his rescue may be the Triplets of Belleville, who were music hall stars in the era of Josephine Baker, so how old would that make them now? The action leaves Paris for New York, maybe, although it is more likely Montreal, where Chomet lives. Doesn't matter so much, since there has never been a city like this. Jazz joints from the 1930s exist with noir hideouts and bizarre tortures. After a certain point it isn't the surprises that surprise us -- it's the surprises about the surprises. We take it in stride, for example, when the Triplets go fishing for frogs with dynamite. Wasn't it only earlier this week, in "Big Fish," that Ewan McGregor hunted a giant catfish with dynamite? No, what amazes us is that one of the exploded frogs survives and crawls desperately from a scalding pot in its bid for freedom.

I am completely failing to do justice to this film. Now you think it is about frog torture. I will get letters from PETA. What happens to the frogs is nothing compared to what happens to the grandson, who is subjected to Rube Goldberg exercise machines, and at one point, has his kneecaps vacuumed. The movie's drawing style is haunting in a comic way. The energy of the story is inexorable. There is a concert which involves machines, and at one point, has his kneecaps vacuumed. The movie's drawing style is haunting in a comic way. The energy of the story is inexorable.

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involving the French nephew and aunt of the Reservoir Dogs, and a score by Spike Jones. No, the other Spike Jones.

Philippe Moins: “Sylvain Chomet’s ‘The Triplets of Belleville’” (Animation World)
Director Sylvain Chomet marries his two loves, comics and film in The Triplets of Belleville. The Triplets of Belleville (Les Triplettes de Belleville or Belleville Rendez-Vous), Sylvain Chomet’s animated feature film, which was released in early summer in France, is well on the way to achieving a success similar to that of Michel Ocelot with Kirikou et lasorcère (Kirikou and the Sorceress). But unlike Ocelot’s film, which was squarely aimed at the children’s audience, Belleville Rendez-Vous, with its idiosyncratic world and insistent cinematic references, is targeted more at adults. The film was produced by Didier Brunner’s company (Les Armateurs) that was also behind Kirikou, and co-produced by The Animation Unit, BBC (Great-Britain), Vivi Film (Belgium) and Champion Prods. (Canada).

Very typically Frenchie (but with no dialogue), The Triplets of Belleville owes a great deal to the world of contemporary French comic strips, but also to filmmakers such as Jean Pierre Jeunet (Amélie Poulain) and Marc Caro (Delicatessen). To date, the film has been sold to 37 countries and will be released in the U.S. by Sony Classic Pictures on Nov. 21, 2003. Its director Sylvain Chomet has, until now, pursued two simultaneous careers: one in comic strips, with his long term collaborator Nicolas de Crecy, the other in film, having made the half hour film La vieille dame et les pigeons (The Old Lady and the Pigeons), which won both the Grand Prix at Annecy in 97 and the Cartoon d Or.

Somewhat dazed by the tumultuous reception of his film at Cannes and then at Annecy, Sylvain Chomet gave Animation World Magazine the following interview.

Philippe Moins: Before you made your first animation, you worked at the Richard Purdum studio in London. Can you tell us about your experience there, which seemed quite decisive in terms of the later choices you made?

Sylvain Chomet: I started there in the mid-eighties, working on line-tests. I never even worked as an inbetweener. It was a job, to earn a living, since I wanted to go on making comic strips at the same time. I first worked as an animator there on a commercial for the medication Actifed. Michael Dudok de Wit was the chief animator on it and the great Belgian animators Paul Demeyer and Dirk van de Vondel were also working there. What I experienced there was part of what made me want to make animation films.

Until then, I used to think that animation was something very hierarchical. Working at the studio, I realized that it was more of a team effort, a group of artisans, a kind of companionship. Richard Purdum recently went bust. I really hold it against the majors who screwed it all up by going there to recruit the best animators.

PM: How did you move on to directing?

SC: I already had the project for The Old Lady and the Pigeons when I was working in London. But I continued to make comic strips and then, in 1990, I went to Annecy and, in the big cinema, I saw a dozen or so films, all really boring experimental films. That reinforced my feeling that animation was either something very commercial with no real value or something very intellectual. I told myself that there was no third way when Nick Parks Creature Comforts came on. From that moment on, I knew what I wanted to do. I then went on making comic strips, particularly as a writer, but I wanted to make animation films like Nick Park did. I met the producer Didier Brunner and from then on everything fell into place. We made The Old Lady

PM: Belleville Rendez-vous is really striking for the quality of its animation, which is sustained throughout the film. It stands out from many European feature films, which can be very uneven in this respect. What’s your secret?

SC: Fundamentally, I am an animator. I know the craft. I’ve worked at all levels within it. Many people making feature films in Europe don’t have that kind of training. The animation is often sub-contracted out to South Korea or China, to purely industrial studios. And then, animations that are adapted from comic strips often fail because the original artists and writers are not involved.

For me, it is very important to be there, at the heart of the team, its that companionship element I mentioned earlier. With Belleville Rendez-Vous, I continued to animate scenes, its that team spirit that is important, you have to be totally involved in the physical production. For me, animation is like a manifesto. You have a style, a technique, but it is an art and you express yourself through that art. Were lucky in Europe to have people who have a sensibility, a culture and have also acquired all the techniques contributed by the Anglo-Saxons. It is like that in Eastern Europe, Germany, Spain, Belgium, Italy.

PM: But all these people disperse once the production is finished.
SC: That’s the problem; there are not enough permanent studios, there are too many structures created just for the one production. That was what happened with Belleville Rendez-Vous: the Belgian and Canadian studios that worked on it have since closed down; the people involved have gone their different ways. Many animators can’t find work or they are under-employed in the sense of not being used to their full capacity. You would have to create networks of studios like there were in London in the 70s and 80s, which worked pretty well. People were very united and often worked together on particular projects. That’s why I really admire a setup like Folimage; they have really understood this.

PM: Where did the idea to make a feature film with no dialogue come from?
SC: I’m very involved with the whole line test thing. For me, when you’ve worked all day on an animation and that moment when you see the drawings move, that’s a really magic moment, and there is no sound to it. I also think that an animation without the constraints of spoken words is stronger. If you have to fit everything to the words, all the gestural movement revolves around the mouth. Without it, you are much freer to create true animation, to talk through animation itself. Animation modeled around the dialogue is like something, which has already been set in stone, there’s less scope for interpretation. I have always wanted the animators to bring something to it.

PM: So no dialogue in your next project?
SC: There will be some dialogue in my next animation, but it won’t be that talky. I’d like to get near to what Grimault and Prévert did with Le Roi et loiseau (The King and Mr. Bird), something poetic. It is set at the time of the Paris Commune in 1871, with a tough, dark side to it, and Baudelaire.

PM: To return to Belleville Rendezvous, it has been well received, hasn’t it?
SC: At Cannes, I got the reception, which I would have expected from Annecy. And at Annecy, it was just absolutely crazy. The film has already notched up one of the highest foreign sales scores for a recent French production. Before Cannes, 25 countries had already acquired the film; its now 37, including the U.S., which was initially quite wary, as usual. I’m worried about the Americans. Will they cut some things out? I know that a lot of there appreciate my work. The problem is that the people in charge at the big companies are rather more censorious.

PM: What do you think of John Lasseter’s work?
SC: I adore what he does, along with the work of Nick Park and Miyazaki. I met him in San Francisco, and visited Pixar. But I am more skeptical about 3D computer animation in general.

PM: You wouldn’t like to work in 3D?
SC: No, I draw, and its drawing that interests me. 3D terrifies me. The idea that, in plasticene, one of your characters might melt, or that you might have to start all over again from scratch because you’ve knocked against the edge of the table that’s not for me. If I don’t like a drawing, I simply tear it up and start again.

Computer 3D doesn’t interest me; I like a pencil and a piece of paper. That said, what wave done in 2D in my film was sometimes treated in 3D underneath. But what I am really interested in is drawing caricature, how far you can push it, seeing if you can achieve something really strong, almost abstract. If one day I really want to do something three-dimensional, I think I would shoot live-action. I am, as it happens, likely to be doing some live-action, a story involving dance.

PM: Do you have any desire to work on projects for children?
SC: But I am doing already! My film has been seen by children, even very young kids, and it works very well for them. We have to stop being so over-protective of children. If we want them to become tolerant and non-violent we have to show them lots of different things, and above all, not only stories that have happy endings. If we don’t then we end up with notions like that of Bush’s cherished axis of evil.

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Fall 2015 Buffalo Film Seminars preliminary screening schedule:

Sept 1 Pabst, *Diary of a Lost Girl*, 116 min, 1929
Sept 8 Mayo, *Petrified Forest*, 82 min, 1936
Sept 15 Welles, Citizen Kane, 119 min, 1941
Sept 22 Montgomery, *Lady in the Lake*, 103 min, 1946
Oct 6 Tarkovsky, *Ivan’s Childhood*, 95 min, 1962
Nov 10 Miyazaki, *Princess Mononoke*, 134 min 1997
Nov 17 Suleiman, *The Time That Remains*, 105 min, 2009
Nov 24 Gilliam, *The Imaginarium of Dr. Parnassus*, 122 min, 2009
Dec 1 Tarr, *The Turin Horse*, 143 min 2011
Dec 8 Powell and Pressburger, *A Matter of Life and Death/Stairway to Heaven*, 104 min. 1946