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PRESENTS

A Film by Léos Carax

HOLY MOTORS

Cannes Film Festival 2012 – Official Competition

Winner, Prix de la Jeunesse

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OFFICIAL WEBSITE: <http://www.holymotorsfilm.com/>

NY Publicity	LA Publicity	Online Publicity
Susan Norget Film Promotion	Marina Bailey Film Publicity	Fons PR
Susan Norget (212) 431-0090 - office susan@norget.com	Marina Bailey 323.962.7511 - office marina@marinabailey.com	Brandy Fons Direct: 310-809-8882 Brandy@fonspr.com
Charlie Olsky charlie@norget.com	Sara Tehrani pr@marinabailey.com	Dacyl Armendariz: 512.944.0944 dacyl@fonspr.com

For downloadable images: <http://holymotorsfilm.com/wp/downloads/>

Distributor: Indomina Releasing
9355 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 300 Beverly Hills, CA 90210
310-271-4500 pr@indomina.com

SYNOPSIS

Over the course of a single day, Monsieur Oscar travels by limousine around Paris to a series of nine “appointments,” transforming into new characters or incarnations at each stop. Fetched in the morning by Céline, his trusty chauffeur on this surreal journey, Oscar begins the day as a captain of industry. Then he becomes a gypsy crone, begging for spare change on a bridge over the Seine. Inside a digital production facility, he’s a ninja warrior transformed by cutting-edge technology into a reptilian sex god. Next he’s a gibberish-spewing troglodyte who kidnaps a fashion model from a photo shoot in Père-Lachaise cemetery, ferrying her to his underground lair in the sewers. Then he’s the melancholy father of a teenage daughter, followed by a shadowy assassin sent to kill his own doppelgänger, a dying old man, and finally a thwarted lover revisiting a flame from his past atop a decaying Right Bank department store next to the Pont-Neuf. Monster movie, film noir, romantic drama, musical, crime thriller, futuristic sex fantasia... HOLY MOTORS is all of these and, then again, none of these. It is a ravishing, shape-shifting, fever dream of becoming, unraveling and starting all over again. From celluloid magic to the digital data stream, Monsieur Oscar’s epic journey of the soul is all of our dreams.

THE DIRECTOR: LEOS CARAX RETURNS TO FILMMAKING

With HOLY MOTORS the visionary Léos Carax returns to the screen with resounding force, following a period of more than a decade that saw only a short subject, “Merde” — part of the TOKYO! triptych also including works by Michel Gondry and Bong-Joon Ho — and a small role in Harmony Korine’s MISTER LONELY.

But it was the deliciously confrontational “Merde” (French for “shit”), featuring recurring Carax player Denis Lavant as a sewer troglodyte amok in the streets of Tokyo, which helped give birth to HOLY MOTORS, his first feature film since POLA X in 1999. “The new film was born of my incapacity to carry out several projects, all of them in another language and another country,” Carax explains. “They all ran into the same two obstacles: casting and cash. Fed up with not being able to film, I used “Merde” as my inspiration.” Carax thus set about fashioning a project under similar conditions, exclusively in France: an inexpensive film, made quickly, for a pre-selected actor.

The result is something unique on movie screens — a deliriously entertaining and defiantly strange journey of the soul that careens through the streets of Paris exuding comedy, mystery, romance, intrigue and melodrama. HOLY MOTORS is a love letter to both the City of Lights and the flickering lights of movie magic through the years, as embodied by one of the most mischievously original screen protagonists in memory.

A LOVE LETTER TO CINEMA

Above all else, *HOLY MOTORS* is a love letter to all things cinema, with its own ever-changing gallery of faces, genres, techniques and styles. Carax, a former film critic whose early works evoked some of the stylistic textures of the French New Wave, appears in the opening scene of the film as a slumbering dreamer who awakes to discover a secret door in his bedroom that opens into a vast movie palace. "I first had this image of a large, full cinema that is darkened for the film screening," Carax explains. "But the members of the audience are completely frozen and their eyes seem to be shut. Are they asleep? Dead? I decided to begin the film with this sleeper who wakes up in the middle of the night and finds himself in his pajamas in a large cinema filled with ghosts."

Careful viewers will recognize echoes of French cinema's rich past in everything from the film's casting (in addition to Scob, veteran leading man Michel Piccoli appears in a crucial cameo) to its stylistic elements, including a Minogue-sung musical number in the film's heartbreaking final scenes atop the empty Samaritain department store in Paris that invokes the works of Alain Resnais and Jacques Demy. "*HOLY MOTORS* runs through or encompasses all the genres of cinema within the model of a film-within-a-film," explains producer Martine Marignac. "It's a comedy, a musical, a film noir, a horror film, even the continued adventures of *Merde in Paris*."

IN A SINGLE DAY: THE PAST and FUTURE

Although shot on high-definition digital video, *HOLY MOTORS* is obsessed with celluloid's romantic (and vanishing) past — though equally concerned with digital cinema's infinite possibilities, as explored in the film's daring motion-capture sequence in which Monsieur Oscar, covered in white sensors, morphs into an animated reptilian creature. "He's not so unlike Chaplin in *MODERN TIMES*," Carax insists of his shape-shifting protagonist. "Except that the man is no longer caught up in the cogs of a machine, but in the threads of an invisible web."

Indeed, motors, motorization and the importance of machines are all crucial components to the film's unique composition and trajectory, beginning with the limousine that ferries Monsieur Oscar from appointment to appointment over the course of *HOLY MOTORS*' singular day, becoming something of the heart of the film — or rather its motor. "One of the images I had in mind was of these stretch limousines that have appeared in the last few years," Carax explains. "I first saw them in America and now every Sunday in my neighborhood in Paris for Chinese weddings. They're completely in tune with our times — both showy and tacky. They look good from the outside, but inside there's the same sad feeling as in a whores' hotel. They're outdated, like the old futurist toys of the past. I think they mark the end of an era, the era of large, visible machines."

HOLY MOTORS emanated from a feeling that there was some kind of solidarity between the characters, animals and machines in the film, according to Carax. "That's why I called the film *HOLY MOTORS*," he explains. "We have incredible

motors inside ourselves, too. The film is a kind of science fiction in which humans, beasts and machines are on the verge of extinction — ‘sacred motors’ linked together by a common fate and solidarity, slaves to an increasingly virtual world. A world from which visible machines, real experiences and actions are gradually disappearing.”

THE APPOINTMENTS:

Denis Lavant as Monsieur Oscar

Carax knew that HOLY MOTORS’ driving force, the world-weary, wild-hearted and chameleonic Monsieur Oscar, would once again be the handiwork of virtuoso screen and stage actor Denis Lavant, a perennial figure in his early works, including BOY MEETS GIRL (1984), BAD BLOOD (MAUVAIS SANG; 1986) and THE LOVERS ON THE BRIDGE (LES AMANTS DU PONT-NEUF; 1991), in which Lavant played separate characters named Alex. (The name Léos Carax itself is an anagram of Alex Oscar, a shorter version of Carax’s birth name, possibly suggesting a kind of shared alter ego or middle ground between Carax and his beloved recurring central player).

Describing Oscar, Carax has said only that the character played by Lavant is “an actor, but it is not a film about actors, but about a man, a person, and the experience of being alive.” Had Lavant declined the role, Carax adds, cryptically, “I would have offered the part to Lon Chaney or to Charlie Chaplin. Maybe Peter Lorre or Michel Simon.”

With his distinct features and vagabond mien, Lavant has been a familiar presence in French cinema for more than three decades, showcasing his kinetic abilities in such memorable works as Claire Denis’ BEAU TRAVAIL (1999), in which he played a rogue legionnaire in an East African military training camp, or Jean-Pierre Jeunet’s A VERY LONG ENGAGEMENT (UN LONG DIMANCHE DE FIANÇAILLES; 2004), navigating grueling trench warfare during World War I as the brooding soldier Six-Sous. “Like cinema itself, Denis comes from the stage, the fairground and the circus,” Carax says. “His body is sculpted like those of the athletes chrono-photographed by Marey (which surface periodically during HOLY MOTORS). And when I film Lavant’s body on the move, I feel the same pleasure I imagine Muybridge felt watching his galloping horse.”

THE OTHER PLAYERS

Carax’s unique casting in HOLY MOTORS was not strictly confined to Lavant. The director turned to veteran actress Édith Scob, most recently seen as the dying matriarch in Olivier Assayas’ domestic ensemble SUMMER HOURS (L’HEURE D’ÉTÉ; 2008), though perhaps best known for her work as a young disfigured woman forced to wear an ominous-looking mask in George Franju’s unsettling 1960 horror classic EYES WITHOUT A FACE. Scob imparts a sense of elegant mystery to the role of Céline, Monsieur Oscar’s dedicated chauffeur, echoing her early work for Franju during the final moments of HOLY MOTORS, when she dons anew the mask first worn during the earliest phase of her lengthy career. “I had already filmed Édith in THE LOVERS ON THE BRIDGE,” Carax explains, “but all that was left after editing were her hair and her hands. So I

owed her a real part. Also the shadow of Franju was hanging over this project — so Édith’s figure, face and voice became essential. She became the film’s fairy godmother.”

With a raucous supporting cast that includes model-actress Eva Mendes and veteran French matinee idol Michel Piccoli, Carax’s most daring casting coup for HOLY MOTORS was Kylie Minogue, the Australian pop icon, screen actress and former soap star who leaves an indelible impression near the end of the film with her sung performance of “Who Were We?” — the tragically romantic number written specifically for the film by Carax and Neil Hannon of The Divine Comedy — wearing a pixie haircut that echoes Jean Seberg’s iconic character in BREATHLESS. “Kylie is purity herself,” Carax insists. “Shooting with her was the gentlest experience I’ve ever had on a set.”

Carax was introduced to Minogue through the director Claire Denis, who recommended the pop icon for another unrealized Carax project. He admits that he knew nothing of her pop stardom, save for “Where the Wild Roses Grow,” her 1995 duet with Nick Cave. To prepare for the brief but challenging role as a doomed woman briefly reunited with an old lover, Minogue ditched her pop-world trappings in favor of a more unvarnished approach to screen acting. She likens her work with Carax to starting on fresh ground, professionally, though she has appeared in several films, including Baz Luhrmann’s MOULIN ROUGE!, in which she played the Green Fairy. “I banned my entourage from coming with me during filming,” Minogue recounted after the HOLY MOTORS premiere at the 2012 Cannes Film Festival. “I stripped myself of being Kylie and tried to go back to being as basic as possible so that I could be a blank canvas for Léos. From reading the script and from the few days I was on set, I did get to thinking that HOLY MOTORS is about how we present ourselves in the world in different moments.”

ABOUT THE FILMMAKER

LEOS CARAX was born Alexandre Oscar Dupont but took his working name from an anagram culled from the nickname Alex Oscar. He began his career as a film critic and short-film director before making an international splash with his feature debut BOY MEETS GIRL (1984), a tragic Parisian romance starring Denis Lavant and Mireille Perrier that was filmed in stark black-and-white by Carax’s frequent collaborator Jean-Yves Escoffier. Evoking the French New Wave as much as the early-’80s American independents of Francis Ford Coppola (ONE FROM THE HEART, RUMBLE FISH), BOY MEETS GIRL emerged as a key work in the burgeoning *cinéma du look* movement that also included Luc Besson’s BETTY BLUE and Jean-Jacques Beineix’s DIVA — cinematic landmarks of the era typified by a sleek visual style and young, alienated characters navigating lust and danger.

Carax followed up BOY MEETS GIRL with BAD BLOOD (MAUVAIS SANG) in 1986, a work of dystopian science fiction with film noir flourishes in which a mysterious disease kills young people who make love without emotional involvement. Lavant once again returned as Carax’s main focus, this time playing

a rebellious teenager opposite breakout starlets Juliette Binoche and Julie Delpy. BAD BLOOD was nominated for three César Awards and won the prestigious Prix Louis Delluc. But it was 1991's THE LOVERS ON THE BRIDGE (LES AMANTS DU PONT-NEUF) that catapulted Carax to even greater levels of acclaim, with his sucker-punch romance between a gritty street performer (Lavant) and a homeless painter (Binoche) grappling with diminishing eyesight. Set on and around the titular Pont-Neuf bridge, Carax's daring third feature was an ambitious, complex and intoxicating production filmed against the French Bicentennial celebrations of 1989, confirming once again his pronounced affinity for French cultural history.

Carax returned to filmmaking in 1999 with POLA X, the controversial romantic drama that was loosely based on Herman Miller's novel *Pierre: Or, The Ambiguities*. Starring Guillaume Depardieu, Katerina Golubeva and Catherine Deneuve, POLA X debuted at the Cannes Film Festival. Carax contributed the short subject "Merde" to the 2008 anthology film TOKYO!, which also included works by Michel Gondry and Bong-Joon Ho. "Merde" (French for "shit") is the name given to a disheveled, gibberish-spewing subterranean creature living in the Tokyo sewers who emerges from his filthy lair to attack unsuspecting locals in increasingly brazen and terrifying ways, resulting in media hysteria. One of Carax's most indelible statements, "Merde" features a virtuoso central performance by recurring player Denis Lavant, who would resurrect the character several years later in HOLY MOTORS.

CAST BIOGRAPHIES

DENIS LAVANT (M. Oscar / Le banquier / La mendiante / L'OS de Motion-Capture / M. Merde / Le père / L'accordéoniste / Le tueur / Le tué / Le mourant / L'homme au foyer) began his film acting career in 1982, appearing in minor roles before his breakthrough in BOY MEETS GIRL in 1984, the first of several collaborations with director Léos Carax, including BAD BLOOD, THE LOVERS ON THE BRIDGE (in which he played a fire-breathing vagabond opposite Juliette Binoche), the "Merde" segment of TOKYO! and HOLY MOTORS. Other key works among dozens of film roles spanning more than three decades include Claire Denis' BEAU TRAVAIL (1999), in which he played a French foreign legion officer in Djibouti, East Africa, Veit Helmer's experimental Expressionist romance TIVALU (1999), Jean-Pierre Jeunet's World War I drama A VERY LONG ENGAGEMENT (2004) and Harmony Korine's MISTER LONELY (2007), in which he portrayed a Charlie Chaplin impersonator. Lavant is also an accomplished stage actor, delivering memorable roles in French productions of The Seagull, Romeo & Juliette and Richard II. Harmony Korine once declared Lavant to be his favorite actor, comparing him to Buster Keaton, Humphrey Bogart and James Dean.

EDITH SCOB (Céline) launched her career as a screen actress in a quartet of films from the director George Franju, including HEAD AGAINST THE WALL (LA TETE CONTRE LES MURS; 1958), THÉRÈSE DESQUEYROUX (1962), JUDEX (1963) and, in an iconic central performance, EYES WITHOUT A FACE (LES YEUX SANS VISAGE; 1960), playing a young woman whose face was horribly

disfigured in an automobile accident, prompting her to wear a face-like mask for much of the film, which is widely considered a horror classic. Scob has worked steadily through the decades with art-house mavericks including Luis Buñuel, Raoul Ruiz, Pedro Costa, Patrice Leconte and Olivier Assayas, in whose domestic ensemble *SUMMER HOURS* (*L'HEURE D'ÉTÉ*; 2008) she played an aging matriarch grappling with issues of inheritance and legacy.

KYLIE MINOGUE (Eva Grace/Jean) is an Australian singer, recording artist, songwriter and actress who ignited her career as a child star on the popular TV soap opera *NEIGHBOURS*, before segueing into a pop music career in 1987 with her smash first single “The Locomotion,” one of the highest-selling singles of the decade. After four albums with the songwriter/production team Stock, Aitken & Waterman, she established herself as an independent performer. Known around the world simply as “Kylie,” Minogue has sold 68 million albums and won both the Brit and the GRAMMY award. In 2001 her single “Can’t Get You Out of My Head” (employed as a ring tone in *HOLY MOTORS*) reached number one in more than 40 countries, including the U.S. In 2008 she was awarded France’s highest cultural honor, the *Ordre des Arts et des Lettres* from the French government for her contribution to the enrichment of French culture. She began her film career with the Australian teenage period romance *THE DELINQUENTS* in 1989, followed by roles in *STREET FIGHTER* (1994), *MOULIN ROUGE!* (2001), in which she played the Green Fairy, *THE WIGGLES GO BANANAS* (2009), and the gritty indie *JACK AND DIANE* (2011).

EVA MENDES (Kay M.) began her career in b-movies in the early 1990s before catapulting into the Hollywood mainstream with *TRAINING DAY* (2001), *2 FAST 2 FURIOUS* (2003), *ONCE UPON A TIME IN MEXICO* (2003) and *HITCH* (2005). Her work in independent productions includes *WE OWN THE NIGHT* (2007), *BAD LIEUTENANT: PORT OF CALL NEW ORLEANS* (2009), *LAST NIGHT* (2010). Mendes’ role in *HOLY MOTORS* came as the result of a chance meeting with Léos Carax at an international film festival, for a part that was initially written for Kate Moss. She has worked as a spokes-model for Revlon, Calvin Klein, Cartier, Thierry Mugler, Reebok and Campari.

MICHEL PICCOLI (*The Man with the Birthmark*) is a legend of the French screen who has appeared in more than 170 movies, including classic gangster and policiers of the ‘60s and ‘70s. He has worked with dozens of maverick directors including Alain Resnais, Jean Renoir, Jean-Pierre Melville, Jean-Luc Godard, Claude Lelouche, Jacques Demy, Claude Sautet, Louis Malle, Agnès Varda, Luis Buñuel, Costa-Gavras, Alfred Hitchcock, Marco Ferreri, Jacques Rivette, Nanni Moretti, Jacques Doillon, Mario Bava, Manoel de Oliveira, Raul Ruiz and Theo Angelopoulos. Key works include *LE DOULOS* (1962), *CONTEMPT* (*LE MÉPRIS*; 1963), *DIARY OF A CHAMBERMAID* (1964), *BELLE DE JOUR* (1967), *LES DEMOISELLES DE ROCHEFORT* (1967), *THE DISCREET CHARM OF THE BOURGEOISIE* (1972), *LA GRANDE BOUFFE* (1973), *THE PHANTOM OF LIBERTY* (1974), *THAT OBSCURE OBJECT OF DESIRE* (1977), *ATLANTIC CITY* (1980), *BAD BLOOD* (1986), *MAY FOOLS* (*MILOU EN MAI*; 1990) and *WE HAVE A POPE* (2011).

CREW

Director and Screenplay: LEOS CARAX

Photography: CAROLINE CHAMPETIER AFC, YVES CAPE AFC SBC

Editor: NELLY QUETTIER

Sound: ERWAN KERZANET, KATIA BOUTIN, JOSEFINA RODRIGUEZ,
EMMANUEL CROSET

Make-up and hair design and supervision: BERNARD FLOCH • SFX MAKE-
UP JEAN-CHRISTOPHE SPADACCINI, DENIS GASTOU

Set design: FLORIAN SANSON

Costumes: ANAÏS ROMAND AFCCA

Assistant director: JULIE GOUET

Production DIDIER ABOT

Continuity MATHILDE PROFIT POST

Production manager EUGÉNIE DEPLUS

Cybermonster design DIANE SORIN Datamoshing JACQUES PERCONTE

Visual effects director THIERRY DELOBEL

VFX supervisor ALEXANDRE BON

VFX producer BÉRENGÈRE DOMINGUEZ

3D supervisor OLIVIER MARCI

CAST

Denis Lavant
Edith Scob
Eva Mendez
Kylie Minogue
Elise Lhomeau
Michael Piccoli
Jeanne Disson
Leos Carax
Nastya Golubeva Carax
Reda Oumouzoune
Zlata contorsionniste
Geoffrey Carrey
Anabelle Dexter Jones

CREDITS

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