

THE VALET

Written and Directed by
Francis Veber

Starring

Gad Elmaleh Alice Taglioni Daniel Auteuil
Kristin Scott Thomas Richard Berry
Virginie Ledoyen Dany Boon

RUNNING TIME: 1H 25M

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SYNOPSIS

Francis Veber (*The Dinner Game* and *The Closet*), the living master of French farce, has combined his classic elements of hilarious slapstick with quick-witted dialogue in the new film *THE VALET*. The tale begins when François Pignon, (Gad Elmaleh) a restaurant car service valet at a posh Paris hotel gets caught-up in a billionaire industrialist's sneaky infidelities. Veber's plot quickly turns on the fall guy, when François – an innocent passerby - is photographed by a paparazzo leaving the hotel along with Pierre Levasseur (Daniel Auteuil), the wealthy tycoon and his beautiful supermodel mistress Elena (Alice Taglioni).

In a desperate attempt to avoid an ugly divorce with his wife Christine, (Kristin Scott Thomas) Pierre's scheming lawyer Maitre Foix (Richard Berry) concocts an outrageous plan. By paying the valet a large sum of money to live with Pierre's mistress, the two men hope to mislead the tabloids and most importantly hide the affair from his wife. Meanwhile, the ruthless Pierre must convince the stunning Elena to live with François in his cruddy apartment until the dust settles. All the while, continuing to reassure his wife that the other man in the photo, François, is really Elena's boyfriend.

Francis Veber's intricate and lively plot, tick-tock timing and variety of unusual characters make *THE VALET* a hilariously good time.

An Interview With Writer/Director Francis Veber

How did you get the idea for The Valet?

Francis Veber – That's the hardest question for an author: where does an idea come from. Sometimes, I have inspiration. For example, with L'Emmerdeur ("Pain in the A..."), it was when someone shot Martin Luther King from a motel room. And I thought to myself: "It's pretty daring to shoot someone from a public place when a maid can come in at any moment." So, that's how it started. With The Valet, it was more mysterious. I tried to imagine what it might be like when a multimillionaire who is married to a dangerous woman (dangerous as she owns a large part of the shares in his company) finds himself in a photo with his mistress, a supermodel, in a celebrity magazine. And a little guy is passing by in the background of the photo – François Pignon, played by Gad Elmaleh in the film – and the man says to his wife in a panic, "She's not with me – she's with him!" I don't know how it came together in my mind, but gradually the situation started to take shape until one day, I said to myself, "This could be fleshed out into a film." When you have an idea, a concept, or the beginnings of a film, you're never sure it'll last the distance. It can just be a starting point. Then, you start to bug your family and friends, saying, "It's the story of a guy who..." And you see from the interest in their eyes if the story is good enough.

Did the writing of The Valet take long?

F.V. – For me, writing is the hardest part of making a film. And The Valet was particularly difficult, because I had a problem that took me a while to solve. When this supermodel is forced to live with the little guy in the photo to get the millionaire out of a corner, I thought to myself, "What can convince her to accept something so absurd?" When I started to describe the basic premise to my American assistant, that was the first question he asked me. My answer was, "Because she gets three or four million dollars." "Oh, okay," he said. When I came back to France, several friends asked me the same question, and I gave them the same answer. Their reaction was, "So, she's a whore!" And I was stuck, because either she accepted out of love and she was dumb (since the billionaire had been taking her for a ride for two years) or else she accepted for the money and so, she was a whore. That was one of the problems in the script, the kind I can spend three weeks agonizing over until I find a solution.

As a master of comedy, you are very concerned about the rhythm of your films. Do you pay attention to the tempo right from the writing stage?

F.V. – Yes, of course! Since I began as a writer and became a director after eighteen screenplays, I know that a film is made at the writing stage. I have trouble understanding people who write a film lasting 2 hours and 20 minutes, and end up with 40 minutes on the cutting room floor. If your film is written in the

right rhythm, you won't need to make up for anything during the shoot or the editing! An ideal film is a 90-minute movie where the first edit runs 92 minutes. This compels you to shave off 2 minutes to speed up the rhythm without wasting any rawstock.

Since the perfection of a screenplay can be ruined by bad actors, the casting must be a crucial stage for you.

F.V. – Milos Forman once said: "Casting is destiny." If you get the casting wrong, you're shooting yourself in the foot. I was lucky to have great actors like Jacques Villeret in *Le Dîner de Cons* ("The Dinner Game") and Gérard Depardieu in *La Chèvre* ("Knock on Wood"), *Les Compères* ("Father's Day"), and so on. The right actor coming together with your text is the most wonderful thing that can happen to a writer.

How did François Pignon come about?

F.V. – He grew out of Jacques Brel's character in *L'Emmerdeur*, and then from one film to the other he emerged as a kind of alter ego character, a good-luck charm. Knowing that Pignon is waiting in the wings makes me feel much more at ease when I start writing a script.

Daniel Auteuil says it's exhausting to play the part of Pignon. How did Gad Elmaleh manage?

F.V. – Gad is a very good Pignon, because he realized that you mustn't overdo it. He had to forget the Gad Elmaleh he plays on stage to get into this character, which isn't easy. Because Pignon isn't the one who creates the effects – others do. Pignon is like those boxers who counterattack. At the end of the fight he may have won, but he's taken a beating.

Dany Boon is another newcomer to your world...

F.V. - Dany Boon is a great actor. I was very satisfied with all the actors in *The Valet*, but I was most surprised by Dany Boon, because I hardly knew him. My casting director, Françoise Méridrey, saw him in *Joyeux Noël* ("Merry Christmas") and said to me, "He's a future Bourvil." It's a real bonus for a director to have modern young actors like Gad Elmaleh and Dany Boon, and also veteran actors like Richard Berry and Daniel Auteuil, two monuments of French cinema.

In *The Valet*, you wrote several female roles for the first time, including a lead role...

F.V. – The part of Elena was played by Alice Taglioni – who looks like Candice Bergen and who does comedy to perfection. I was surprised myself. I had no preconceived notions against women – it's just that I didn't have the right subject

matter. The stories that came to me most readily were buddy stories. And then, all of a sudden, this love story emerged, so I just had to roll up my sleeves and write a female part. While I was at it, I wrote several for *The Valet*, including the ones for Virginie Ledoyen and Kristin Scott-Thomas. In the end, writing for women isn't any harder than writing for men! I want to do more of it.

On the set of *The Valet*, you apparently had a memorable burst of uncontrollable laughter with Alice Taglioni and Dany Boon. Moments like that must be sheer joy...

F.V. – They're very rare, that's for sure. I worry so much that I don't laugh a lot on the set. I can only remember two occasions in all my films: one was on *La Chèvre* with Depardieu and the other was on *The Valet*: Alice started, Dany Boon caught it, then gave it to me!

You were exhausted by the end of the shoot. Despite all that, do you find it a pleasurable experience?

F.V. – It's wonderful. It's a drug. In fact, that's the danger. People wonder why directors make so many films. It makes sense, because that's the one time when they have the power. A screenwriter/director is someone who writes on his own, staring at a wall – I do, anyway – and who struggles for so many months. Then, all of a sudden, you arrive on the set and you have the power – it's something I knew nothing about until I was nearly 40. You're looked after during the shoot and then, one day, everything stops. And you end up on your own again.

Apart from escaping the loneliness of the writer, what drives you?

F.V. – There comes a time in your life when you realize that you no longer work for money, but for success. Success is addictive. And if all of a sudden, you have a flop, you feel like you've betrayed everyone, including yourself. It's so painful to end up in that predicament. And you can get there without realizing it, because you never set out to make a bad movie! That's what I say to critics, "Don't be too hard on people who make bad movies– they don't do it on purpose!" So, as much as possible, you try to have this incredible communion with the audience. In comedy, you do it with laughter. And you have to be a perfectionist for that. When Claude Sautet was at his most successful, he said, "Those idiots think I have a secret!" There was no secret: he just worked hard. If you let yourself go, if you get too confident, if you say to yourself, "I don't need to do a second or third draft. The producers will get out their checkbooks anyway." That's when you take a dive!

What do you get from making people laugh?

F.V. – Incredible satisfaction. One day, someone said to me, "When I watch *The Dinner Game*, I feel better. Your films should be funded by Medicare." That's the

nicest compliment I ever got. Because when I count up the number of people who've made me laugh or cry in literature or in films, there are a lot. But if I just count the ones who've made me laugh, there are a lot less. I don't know if God gave me the gift of amusing people, but if he did, I can't thank him enough.

Francis Veber Biography

FRANCIS VEBER (Writer/Director/Producer) is one of the most successful and prolific French writer/directors of all time.

As a writer, Mr. Veber has over 30 produced screenplays to his credit including “La Cage aux Folles” (parts I and II), “Le Grand Blond avec une Chaussure Noire,” and “L’Emmerdeur.”

As a director, Mr. Veber has helmed some of the most popular and critically acclaimed comedies in French cinema. They include, “Le Placard” (The Closet), *Le Jouet* (*The Toy*), and three in a series teaming Gerard Depardieu and Pierre Richard: “Le Chevre” (The Goat), “Les Comperes” (The Buddies), and “Les Fugitives” (The Fugitives), all from original screenplays. His hit comedy, “Le Dîner de Cons” (The Dinner Game), earned Mr. Veber a French César Award for Best Screenplay, and a nomination for his Direction. His latest film, “La Doublure” (The Valet), was one of the highest grossing films in France in 2006.

In addition, many of Mr. Veber’s screenplays have been remade into American movies. “Le Jouet” became “The Toy,” starring Richard Pryor; “L’Emmerdeur” was the basis for Billy Wilder’s “Buddy Buddy”; and “La Cage aux Folles” became the Robin Williams starrer, “The Birdcage.” Recently, it was announced that “La Doublure” will be remade next year by Dreamworks and the Farrelly Brothers as “The Valet.”

Born in Neuilly-sur-Seine, Mr. Veber comes from a family of writers. His mother has written forty books and two plays. His father, grandfather, two uncles, and both sons also write. Mr. Veber originally planned on a medical career, and completed four years of medical school before the urge to become a journalist compelled him to switch professions.

While serving in France’s military, Mr. Veber began writing for BLED, a publication of the Algerian Army. Upon his discharge, he spent three years as a reporter with Radio Luxembourg in Paris. Television was his next frontier, and Mr. Veber worked on 30 episodes of the hit 1969 comedy, “L’Agence Interim,” which starred Pierre Vernier and Daniel Ceccaldi.

His first play, *L’Enlèvement* (The Kidnapping) was produced in Paris in 1968, and had a successful eight-month run at the Theatre Edward VIII. He then finished another play, *Le Contrat* (The Contract) and began penning screenplays, his first being “Appelez-moi Mathilde” (Call me Mathilde), a 1970 crime film.

He found his first major success in the screenplay for Yves Robert’s “Le Grand Blond Avec Une Chaussure Noire” (1972), a wildly popular mistaken-identity farce that was turned into the 1985 Tom Hanks vehicle, “The Man with One Red Shoe.”

Mr. Veber worked steadily through the next four decades, enjoying particular success for his collaborations with director Edouard Molinaro, which included “L’Emmerdeur” (1973) and the internationally acclaimed comedy “La Cage Aux Folles,” for which he earned a 1980 Best Adapted Screenplay Oscar nomination.

More recently, Mr. Veber dipped his feet back into theater, writing and directing a new adaptation of his hit film “L’Emmerdeur” for the French stage in early 2006. Met with rave reviews, performances of the play were sold out throughout the run.

Mr. Veber lives in Los Angeles, California.

Francis Veber Filmography

2006 THE VALET (Veber wrote/directed) starring Gad Elmaleh, Alice Taglioni, Daniel Auteuil, Dany Boon, Virginie Ledoyen, Kristin Scott Thomas
American remake: TBD (dir. Farrelly Brothers)

2003 TAIS-TOI! aka Ruby & Quentin (Veber wrote/directed) starring Gérard Depardieu and Jean Reno

2000 LE PLACARD (Veber wrote/directed) starring Daniel Auteuil, Gérard Depardieu
American remake: THE CLOSET, TBD (dir. Gurinder Chadha/writer Veber)

1997 LE DINER DE CONS (Veber wrote/directed) starring Thierry Lhermitte, Jacques Villeret

1996 LE JAGUAR (Veber wrote/directed) starring Jean Reno and Patrick Briel

1992 OUT ON A LIMB (Veber directed) starring Matthew Broderick, Jeffrey Jones and John C. Reilly

1991 MON PERE, CE HEROS (director/writer Gérard Lauzier) starring Gérard Depardieu
American remake: MY FATHER THE HERO, 1994 (dir. Steve Miner/writer Veber) starring Katherine Heigl and Gerard Depardieu

1986 LES FUGITIFS (Veber wrote/directed) starring Pierre Richard, Gérard Depardieu
American remake: THREE FUGITIVES, 1989 (Veber wrote/directed) starring Nick Nolte, Martin Short

1985 HOLD UP (dir. Alexandre Arcady/writer Veber) starring Jean-Paul Belmondo and Kim Cattrall
American remake: QUICK CHANGE, 1990 (dir. Howard Franklin and Bill Murray/writer Howard Franklin) *No Veber association

1983 LES COMPERES (Veber wrote/directed) starring Gérard Depardieu, Pierre Richard and Anny Duperey.
American remake: FATHER'S DAY, 1997 (dir. Ivan Reitman/writer Veber) starring Robin Williams, Billy Crystal, Julia Louis-Dreyfus

1981 LE CHEVRE (Veber wrote/directed) starring Gérard Depardieu, Pierre Richard
American remake: PURE LUCK, 1991 (dir. Nadia Tass/writer Veber) starring Martin Short and Danny Glover

1978 LA CAGE AUX FOLLES (dir. Édouard Molinaro/writer Veber)
American remake: THE BIRDCAGE, 1996 (dir. Mike Nichols/writer Veber)
starring Robin Williams, Gene Hackman, and Nathan Lane

1976 LE JOUET (Veber wrote/directed) starring Pierre Richard, Michel Bouquet,
Fabrice Greco
American remake: THE TOY, 1982 (dir. Richard Donner/writer Veber) starring
Richard Pryor, Jackie Gleason, Ned Beatty and Scott Schwartz.

1973 L' EMMERDEUR (dir. Edouard Molinaro/writer Veber) starring Jacqueline
Bisset and Jean-Paul Belmondo.
American remake: BUDDY, BUDDY, 1981 (dir. Billy Wilder/writer Veber) starring
Jack Lemmon and Walter Matthau

1972 LE GRAND BLOND AVEC UNE CHAUSSURE NOIRE (dir. Yves
Robert/writer Veber)
American remake: THE MAN WITH ONE RED SHOE, 1985 (dir. Stan
Dragoti/writer Veber) starring Tom Hanks

CAST FILMOGRAPHY

Gad Elmaleh – Filmography

2004 OLÉ!
2002 CHOUCOU

Alice Taglioni – Filmography

2004 THE PINK PANTHER
SKY FIGHTERS
2003 MENSONGES ET TRAHISONS

Daniel Auteuil – Filmography

2004 HIDDEN
2000 THE CLOSET
1998 THE GIRL ON THE BRIDGE
1995 THE EIGHTH DAY
1992 QUEEN MARGOT
1992 A HEART IN WINTER
1985 JEAN DE FLORETTE

Richard Berry – Filmography

2002 RUBY AND QUENTIN
2000 AUGUST 15TH
1994 THE BAIT

Dany Boon – Filmography

2005 MERRY CHRISTMAS

Kristin Scott-Thomas – Filmography

1997 THE HORSE WHISPERER
1995 THE ENGLISH PATIENT
1995 MISSION IMPOSSIBLE
1993 FOUR WEDDINGS AND A FUNERAL

Virginie Ledoyen – Filmography

2001 8 WOMEN
1999 THE BEACH

CAST LIST

Francois Pignon - Gad Elmaleh
Elena – Alice Taglioni
Levasseur – Daniel Auteuil
Christine – Kristin Scott Thomas
Mr Foix (Legal Adviser) – Richard Berry
Emile - Virginie Ledoyen
Richard – Dany Boon
Andre - Michel Jonasz
The Doctor – Michel Aumont
Paul - Laurent Gamelon
Pascal – Patrick Mille
Loiuse – Michele Garcia
Berman – Philippe Magnan
Herve – Jean Yves Chilot
Marie - Irina Ninova
Maitre D’Hotel - Philippe Beglia
Karine - Noemie Lenoir
Levasseur’s Secretary - Sandra Moreno
Mauricet – Jean Pol Brissart
Mr Herve – Philippe Brigaud
Ken – Alexandre Brik
Paparazzo – Thierry Humbert
Richard’s Mother – Paulette Frantz
Perrache Thierry

CREW LIST

Written and Directed by Francis Veber
Produced for Gaumont by Patrice Ledoux
Original Music Alexandre - Desplat
Director of Photography - Robert Fraise
Camera Operator – Yves Agostini
Production Design Dominique Andre
Editing - Georges Klotz
Sound – Bernard Bats, Thomas Desjonqueres, Gerard Lamps
Costumes – Jacqueline Bouchard
Assistant Director Alain Olivier
Casting Fraçoise Menidrey
Production Managers – Philippe Desmoulins
Bernard Seitz