

JOYEUX NOËL

(Merry Christmas)

A Sony Pictures Classics Release

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Synopsis

This movie is inspired by a true story, which occurred in the trenches of the World War I battlefield on Christmas Eve in 1914.

When war breaks out in the lull of summer 1914, it surprises and pulls millions of men in its wake. Christmas arrives, with its snow and multitude of family and army presents. But the surprise won't come from inside the generous parcels which lie in the French, Scottish, and German trenches. That night, a momentous event will turn the destinies of four characters : an Anglican priest, a French lieutenant, an exceptional German tenor and the one he loves, a soprano and singing partner. During this Christmas Eve, the unthinkable happens : soldiers come out of their trenches, leaving their rifles behind to shake hands with the enemy.

Yes, Fraternizing definitely took place during the Great War By Marc Ferro

We fought for four years from 1914 to 1918. The debate about that war still rages on eighty years later...

First we tried to justify that the enemy was responsible, and then to foist the shame on the political leaders. Or perhaps the butchery happened because of incompetent and glory-seeking military leaders.

Then there was the tragedy of the soldiers who lived through the horror. They were victims of history. On the eve, hadn't they declared war on the war? But that didn't stop them from participating and killing in large numbers. How does one choose between enthusiasm, consent, and coercion? Let's review the events. In 1914, after several months of marching and counter-marching, the soldiers found themselves brusquely and cruelly immobilized in make-shift trenches. Suddenly the enemy took on form. He had a face, and sometimes a first name. The enemy trenches were often very close, sometimes as close as four meters. These enemies were men, like you and I. Whenever there was the smallest break, they would sing, drink, and laugh. During these moments, they would send each other chocolates and cigarettes. Yes, fraternizing happened on Christmas of 1914 and Easter of 1915. It was the first stirrings, a way to take advantage of the lull in combat. A muffled cry for peace, perhaps.

Years passed, hearts and bodies harden. And when there was more fraternizing, specifically when with the Russians after the fall of the Czar in February 1917, this time it wasn't merely a call for peace, but a call for Revolution.

Marc Ferro is a co-director of the Annales, director of research at l'Ehess (School of Higher Studies for the Social Sciences), a specialist in World War I, the Russian Revolution, and the history of cinema. He has also directed and hosted Histoires parallèles, a program for the television channel Arte. Recognized the world over, he came to public attention with his major biographies of Nicholas II and Pétain, his studies on the Russian Revolution, and of course his reflections and writings on history and colonization.

Director's Note
By Christian Carion

Originally from the North of France, I grew up in one of the ten French territorial departments that for four years, between 1914 and 1918, was under German occupation. Naturally, this important period in History left its mark on the population and the region. I grew up with the memory of the Great War. It was something omnipresent, not merely honored on those inescapable celebrations of Armistice, every November 11. Son of a farmer, I remember as a child how I would carry a shell that had come uncovered in our fields while we were plowing the land. Even today, papers, various objects and rusted missiles become unearthed from time to time. These objects had belonged to soldiers who were wounded and sometimes buried on the spot.

In 1993, guided by some unseen force of chance, I discovered a book: *Battles of Flanders and Artois 1914-1918*, by Yves Buffetaut. As I was reading it, I came upon an extraordinary passage entitled "The Incredible Winter of 1914." The author wrote about the fraternizing between the enemies, the episode of the German tenor applauded by the French soldiers, a soccer match, the exchange of letters, the Christmas trees, visiting each other's trenches... It really bowled me over. I called my future producer, Christophe Rossignon, to talk to him about it, and I sent him a synopsis. He found the subject magnificent. However, aware of its scope, Christophe advised me to arm myself: I hadn't even made a short film yet!

After the success of my first feature-length film, *THE GIRL FROM PARIS*, Christophe encouraged me to focus on this project: *JOYEUX NOËL* (Merry Christmas). In 2002, I began with the most difficult task: writing about this incredible, but true story. My first undertaking was to research and find as much information as possible on the fraternizing, and to understand concretely what had happened. I came across a series of astounding news events in the British archives, for the most part, and later on in the French and German archives as well. Mostly professional historians frequent such places. With the help of Yves Buffetaut, I was able to access these documents. In France, the army is in charge of these files. And though they do not stop one from consulting them, they certainly don't advertise them either. This state of mind seemed like a direct link to the mentality that reigned during the war: during that period, photos taken of the soldiers fraternizing made front-page news in the English press while in France the pictures were requisitioned and destroyed! As for the German

archives, it was not difficult to consult them as many are still held in France. This is a result of World War II. We should consider returning them one of these days.

It was really intimidating to write the story based on these facts. The events inspired characters who truly existed, as well as fictitious people I had to invent. For example there was Ponchel, the aide-de-camp. He was a Chtimi (patois for a person from Northern France), like me. He was the evocation of the French soldier whose house was located behind the German lines. Every evening he had to cross that zone through a breach so he could sleep with his wife and children before he went back to the French trenches early the next morning to fight the war! There was also the German tenor who genuinely sang for the French soldiers one Christmas evening. This character was important to me because 90% of the fraternizing happened when people sang. Others listened, responded, applauded. I love the idea that culture, popular songs and music silenced the cannons.

Obviously when one reads these stories, they really seem unbelievable. However, thousands of Christmas trees were sent to the German Front that Christmas of 1914. It was supposed to be the soldiers' "only one spent on the front," and Kaiser William II felt that "even in times of war, values should be maintained!" The tricky part of writing the script was how to make the viewer believe that these incredible events were true. I also had to find a natural sequence that could lead to fraternizing that went on.

That said, sometimes the harsh reality was too much, or too absurd. This was the case with the story of the cat who roamed from one trench to the other and in the film ended up being imprisoned. In reality, the tom cat was accused of spying and was arrested by the French army and then shot according to regulations! I wanted to show this in JOYEUX NOËL (Merry Christmas) and filmed the cruel execution scene.

Many of the extras refused to be part of the crowd. Though I explained to them that this really happened during the war (and that they would only be shooting blanks), they would not give in. Their retort was, "People were crazy back then!" Finally, during the final cut, I decided not to show the execution scene. It was too much. The audience would have lost interest, never believing that such a thing happened. At the risk of repeating myself, this really did happen!

In August 2004, after having encountered some difficulties with the financing (that Christopher Rossignon was able to resolve), the shoot for JOYEUX NOËL

(Merry Christmas) began. First I filmed the war scene, camp by camp. This way the actors didn't encounter each other or they encountered each other in the fray. It was very stupid and in the canteen it was every trench to themselves. It was more of a habit rather than mean spiritedness. And then, very quickly, we got to the fraternizing scenes. That's when things really became interesting because between takes the German, Scottish and French actors were mixed up. That continued after the shoot. A family bond on the set was very much there after that.

When things started to get rough, like when the shoot was postponed for several months because the French army refused authorization for us to create a no-man's land on the field, the actors showed their attachment to the project. But on the set their commitment was above and beyond the call of duty. Like me, they wanted to recreate what had happened to these men as realistically as possible. It was a way of honoring those soldiers' memory. In fact Gary Lewis and Dany Boon had relatives who had fought in the War of 1914. I am really proud to have brought them together with Guillaume Canet, Daniel Brühl, Diane Krüger, Alex Ferns and Benno Fürmann. They also acted in their native tongue. I wanted to make sure that all their characters were likeable whatever their nationality. I felt that the success of this film really depended on that aspect. In reality the border of no-man's land was not between the camps, it was between those who fought the war and those who wanted the war to happen. That's why the film has more than a European dimension for me. It has a humanistic dimension. In my opinion, anyone on the planet would be touched by the fraternizing that went on, not just the German, English and French. That's why I'd like to show the film in a country that is at war.

All of us who made JOYEUX NOËL (Merry Christmas) were thinking about the soldiers who courageously fraternized. At the time, they were considered cowards. For me, they were neither heroes or cowards. They were merely men who accomplished something incredibly human. If JOYEUX NOËL (Merry Christmas) is a success, which I hope is the case, and it pays homage to the memory of these soldiers, that will be my greatest reward.

The Music of the Film

Most of the fraternizing that took place in 1914 came about through music and song.

Naturally music plays a key role in the film with Nikolaus and Anna singing. But also the soldiers sing their popular songs. The bagpipe and the harmonica meld nicely on the soundtrack with the London Symphony Orchestra's instrumentals directed by the composer Philippe Rombi.

PHILIPPE ROMBI, COMPOSITEUR/COMPOSER

(Selected Filmography)

- 2004 MENSONGES ET TRAHISONS
LOOK AT ME
LE RÔLE DE SA VIE
- 2003 LOVE ME IF YOU DARE
LE COÛT DE LA VIE
- 2002 UNE EMPLOYÉE MODÈLE
SWIMMING POOL
- 2001 THE GIRL FROM PARIS
OUI, MAIS
- 2000 PARIS DEAUVILLE
UNDER THE SAND
- 1999 CRIMINAL LOVERS

NATALIE DESSAY is France's leading international soprano. A great favorite in her native country, she is equally acclaimed in Vienna, New York, London and Japan. Renowned not only for her astonishing high coloratura voice but for her exceptional gifts as an actress, her unique combination of talents makes her one of opera's leading ambassadors. Natalie Dessay is an exclusive Virgin Classics artist.

ROLANDO VILLAZON is the rising star of the opera world. Wherever he sings, the beauty and warmth of his voice and his striking engagement in his roles combine with his natural charisma to overwhelm his audience. Paris, London, New York, Vienna and Berlin have acclaimed him in some of the greatest tenor roles as he follows in the footsteps of his mentor Placido Domingo. Rolando Villazon is an exclusive Virgin Classics artist.

Alfred Anderson, 109, Last Man From 'Christmas Truce' of 1914, Dies

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Published: November 22, 2005

LONDON, Nov. 21 (AP) - Alfred Anderson, the last surviving soldier to have been present when the guns fell silent along the Western Front in the spontaneous "Christmas Truce" of World War I, died Monday in Newtyle, Scotland. He was 109.

He died in his sleep at his nursing home, said his parish priest, the Rev. Neil Gardner.

More than 80 years after the war, Mr. Anderson recalled the "eerie sound of silence" as shooting stopped and soldiers clambered from trenches to greet one another Dec. 25, 1914.

Born June 25, 1896, he was an 18-year-old soldier in the Black Watch regiment when British and German troops cautiously emerged from the trenches that Christmas Day in 1914. The enemies swapped cigarettes and tunic buttons, sang carols and even played soccer amid the mud, barbed wire and shell holes of no man's land.

The informal truce spread along much of the 500-mile Western Front, in some cases lasting for days - alarming army commanders who feared fraternization would sap the troops' will to fight. The next year vast battles of attrition began, which claimed 10 million lives, and the Christmas truce was never repeated.

"I remember the silence, the eerie sound of silence," Mr. Anderson told The Observer last year.

"All I'd heard for two months in the trenches was the hissing, cracking and whining of bullets in flight, machine-gun fire and distant German voices," said Mr. Anderson, who was billeted in a French farmhouse behind the front lines.

"But there was a dead silence that morning, right across the land as far as you could see," he said. "We shouted 'Merry Christmas,' even though nobody felt merry. The silence ended early in the afternoon and the killing started again. It was a short peace in a terrible war."

During the war, Mr. Anderson served briefly as a batman - or valet - to Capt. Fergus Bowes-Lyon, brother of Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother. Captain Bowes-Lyon was killed at the Battle of Loos in 1915.

Mr. Anderson fought in France until 1916, when he was wounded by shrapnel from a shell. In 1998, he was awarded France's Legion of Honor for his war service.

He is survived by 4 children, 10 grandchildren, 18 great-grandchildren and 2 great-great-grandchildren.

About the Filmmakers

Christian Carion (director/writer)

Filmography

2001 The Girl From Paris (Une Hirondelle a Fait le Printemps)

1998 Monsier Le Deputé

1997 Le Château D'Eau

1994 Doucement Les Violons!

Nord-Ouest (Production Company)

Christophe Rossignon has produced from 1990 to 1991 over ten short films, including those from Mathieu Kassovitz and Tran Anh Hung, before producing their first feature films, since 1992, (CAFÉ AU LAIT, THE HATE, ASSASSIN(S) and THE SCENT OF THE GREEN PAPAYA, CYCLO, THE VERTICAL RAY OF THE SUN) within the production company, Lazennec. Since the end of 1999, he produces within his own structure Nord-Ouest Production, several feature films (A GIRL FROM PARIS by Christian Carion, IRREVERSIBLE by Gaspar Noé, LOVE ME IF YOU DARE by Yann Samuell, A SIGHT FOR SORE EYES by Gilles Bourdos, THE LIGHT by Philippe Lioret)

Cast Selected Filmographies

Diane Kruger (Anna Sörenson)

Diane Kruger made her international screen debut in 2004 as the legendary 'Helen' in Wolfgang Petersen's highly anticipated epic "Troy." Starring alongside Brad Pitt and Orlando Bloom, Kruger plays the woman whose face launched a thousand ships in the decade-long war between the kingdoms of Greece and Troy. Eric Bana, Rose Byrne, Peter O' Toole and Julie Christie also star.

Kruger is currently in Paris filming "Les Brigades du Tigre," a French film that is set in 1912, and is about the exploits of France's first motorized police brigade.

She was recently in Eastern Europe filming "Copying Beethoven" with Ed Harris and director Agnieszka Holland. The story concerns the relationship that developed between Ludwig Von Beethoven (Harris) and his beautiful assistant (Kruger) as he was completing his Ninth Symphony.

"Frankie," the story of a catwalk model's decline and fall, will premiere at the Edinburgh Film Festival on August 20th, 2005. The film, directed by Fabienne Berthaud, stars Kruger as Frankie, the model who is trying to valiantly forestall the inevitable fall of her modeling career. Kruger also served as a co-producer on this French film.

Kruger was last seen starring with Nicolas Cage in the action adventure "National Treasure," directed by Jon Turteltaub for producer Jerry Bruckheimer. "National Treasure" is about an archaeologist (Cage) who enlists the help of a National Archives director (Kruger) to find hidden treasure from the 1700s, as secretly mapped out on the back of the Declaration of Independence. The film was released by Touchstone Pictures in November 2004. In September 2004, Kruger was seen opposite Josh Hartnett in the MGM/Lakeshore Entertainment thriller "Wicker Park," directed by Paul McGuigan.

Born and raised in Germany, Kruger first studied dance in London with the Royal Ballet. She then moved to Paris and became a European cover model. At the suggestion of filmmaker Luc Besson, Kruger began taking classes at the École Fleuron in Paris, eventually winning the school's Classe Libre award for Best Actor.

Kruger began her acting career appearing opposite Dennis Hopper and Christopher Lambert in the 2003 independent production "The Piano Player." She followed this with roles in the highly acclaimed French film "Mon Idole," which was nominated for a Cesar Award, and "Michel Vaillant."

Kruger was honored at the 2003 Cannes Film Festival with the Chopard Trophy for Female Revelation of the Year. Kruger currently resides in Paris.

Benno Fürmann (Nikolaus Sprink)

Benno Fürmann was born in Kreuzberg, Berlin in 1972 and worked as a waiter, doorman and scaffolder before he went to New York in 1992 to study at the Lee Strasberg School of Drama. He became well known in Germany in the RTL television series UND TSCHÜSS, in which he played the band leader Günni. Since then, he has portrayed various wild young marginals who fight their way through life on the edge of legality -- as a car thief in THE POLAR BEAR; as a pimp in ST. PAUL'S NIGHT; as an occasional blackmailer in A GOOD OPPORTUNITY; in the skin of the legendary boxer Bubi Scholz; and as an anatomy student in ANATOMIE, in which he also co-starred with Franka Potente.

Guillaume Canet (Audebert)

L'Enfer
Narco
Jeux D'Enfants (Love Me If You Dare)
Mon Idole (Whatever You Say)
The Day The Ponies Came Back
La Fidélité
La Plage (The Beach)

Gary Lewis (Palmer)

Cargo
Næsland
Gangs of New York
Billy Elliot
Orphans
My Name is Joe

Dany Boon (Ponchel)

La Boulette
Pédale Dure
Le Déménagement
Le Grand Blanc de Lambaréne

Daniel Brühl (Horstmayer)

Without a doubt, Daniel Brühl is a rising star among German actors. For his extraordinary performances in *Nichts Bereuen* (No Regrets), *Vaya con Dios*, and *Das weisse Rauschen* (The White Noise), he was awarded the 2001 German Film Award as Best Actor. Brühl found fame with *Schule* (No More School, 2000). He also acted in Züli Aladag's boxing drama *Elefantenerz* (2002), and the X Filme production *Die Liebe in Gedanken*, directed by Achim von Borries.

Daniel Brühl's first appeared in 1995 in *Der Pakt* (The Agreement); later roles include *Blutiger Ernst* (Bloody Serious, 1997), *Schlaraffenland* (1998), Vanessa Jopp's *Honolulu* and Shed Elwood's *Deeply* (1999). He has since been seen in *Good Bye Lenin* (2003), *Love in Thoughts* (2004), *The Edukators* (2004), and *Ladies in Lavender* (2004).

Lucas Belvaux (Gueusselin)

Un Couple Épatant (An Amazing Couple)
Cavale (On The Run)
Après La Vie
Madame Bovary
Poulet Au Vinaigre

Alex Ferns (Gordon)

Making Waves (TV)
Man Dancin'
The Ghost and the Darkness

Bernard Le Coq (The French General)

Caché (Hidden)
La Demoiselles D'Honneur
La Fleur du Mal (The Flower of Evil)
Au Plus Près du Paradis (Nearest to Heaven)

Steven Robertson (Jonathan)

Kingdom of Heaven
Inside I'm Dancing (Rony O'Shea Was Here)

Cast

Anna Sörensen	Diane Krüger
songs performed by	Nathalie Dessay
Nikolaus Sprink	Benno Fürmann
songs performed by	Rolando Villazon
Audebert	Guillaume Canet
Palmer	Gary Lewis
Ponchel	Danny Boon
Horstmayer	Daniel Brühl
Gordon	Alex Ferns
Jonathan	Steven Robertson
Gueusselin	Lucas Belvaux
The General	Bernard Le Coq
Bishop	Ian Richardson
Jörg	Frank Witter
Le Kronprinz	Thomas Schmauser
Zimmermann	Joachim Bissmeier
William	Robin Laing
La châtelaine	Suzanne Flon
Le châtelain	Michel Serrault
Original Music	Philippe Rombi

Crew

Director/Writer	Christian Carion
Producer	Christophe Rossignon
Associate Producer	Philip Boëffard
Coproduction	France/Germany/Britain/ Belgium/Romania Nord-Ouest Production Senator Film Produktion - The Bureau Artemis Productions - Media pro Pictures TF1 Films Production - Productions de La Guéville
with the participation of	Canal + - Ciné Cinéma - Sat.1 la Région Nord Pas de Calais - le C.R.R.A.V
with the support of	du Centre National de la Cinématographie - de Eurimages du FFA Filmförderungsanstalt du Medienboard Berlin- Brandenburg du Tax Shelter du gouvernement fédéral de Belgique.
and	
in association with	Soficinéma - Groupe Un - Uniétoile 2 Scope Invest - Cofinova 1 - Nippon Hérald - Cofimage 16 Cinéart - Sogécinéma 3 - Films Distribution
International Financement	Daniel Marquet
International Co-production - Producers	Christopher Borgmann Benjamin Herrmann Patrick Quinet Bertrand Faivre Kate Ogborn Sol Guatti-Pascual Andreï Boncea
Line Producer	Eve Machuel

Production Manager
Director assistant
Director of Photography
Production Designer
Costumes Designer
Editor
Sound Designer

Casting

Stills photographer

Stéphane Riga
Philippe Larue
Walther Vanden Ende
Jean-Michel Simonet
Alison Forbes-Meyler
Andrea Sedlackova
Pierre Mertens
Thomas Desjonquères
Dean Humphreys
Susie Figgis
Sabine Schroth
Jean-Claude Lothar