

FINAL Charlotte Schioler Interview

VC; Hello, I'm Vanessa Corwin

Kk; And, I'm Kathleen Kaan

VC: With us today is indie filmmaker Charlotte Schioler, whose first feature, "Maoussi", is screening in NYC at the Winter Film Awards on Friday, February 23. We've just learned that the film was named Best Film at London Cineverse Festival! Congratulations, and welcome to our podcast.

CS: Thank you very much. Yes, the London Cineverse was an online festival because it was really the Melech Tel Aviv International Film Festival but because of the war they couldn't have the festival and it got on London Cineverse online instead.

VC: Excellent. Well, congratulations again. So, let's start with your background. Now, you started as a dancer. In fact, you play one in your movie. So, tell us about your background as a dancer and how that led to filmmaking.

CS: Actually, I started as an actress. And I trained at London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art in London and they did a lot of body work. However, I had, before going to LAMDA had lived in Paris because I sort of ran away from home when I was in high school because I got some bad mark in French (laughter) and so I hitchhiked to France.

KK: Great reason to go to Paris.

CS: Yes! Actually, I ended up taking my high school exam in France and after that I wanted to study acting, and it became apparent to me that the best acting schools were in London, so I moved to London. But I missed Paris very much. So, once I had finished my training at LAMDA I trained at the Conservatoire Nationale Superieur d'Art Dramatique which is the national school of dramatic art in Paris. And there I was very, very frustrated because coming from LAMDA where they have a lot of body work, a lot of physical work for actors, the French Conservatoire Superieur was more rigid and I was so frustrated that there wasn't any more movement. So, I heard about a choreographer who had worked a lot with theater directors like Bob Wilson, Peter Stein, Patrice Chereau, and I found her, she was giving classes in Paris. And after dancing for a couple of years with her I joined her company as

a solo dancer and performed with her for many years. And she is the person who choreographed the dance scenes in Maoussi and she happens also to be an actress. She was at the Cannes film festival, where she played in competition in the title role of Magda, in the film Magda, in 2022. She also plays the role of Nora in Maoussi.

KK: We know that Paris is your home base, but you told me that you lived in New York City. Tell us about that experience. Did you dance here, did you write here, did you act?

CS: Yeah, I did a lot of different things. I danced with a Danish choreographer called Christina XXX and I also played Titania in Midsummer Night's Dream but that was down in the South. I auditioned in New York City and then went down to Memphis to perform for some months at PS 122. And I performed in a number of different shows at Galapagos Art Space in Brooklyn That was really a lot of fun.

KK: Did you write the film Maoussi, part of it in New York City? I know you shot it in Paris. But where did you start to write this?

CS: I started writing it because I thought that for a feature film it would be great. My previous film was a short and so I thought that it would be a good idea to take some screenwriting classes at NYU and my instructor, Jason Grey who is part of the Sundance Institute invited me to join a writer's group in New York and that's when I started writing. I wrote Maoussi in New York City. So, I wrote it in English... it came to me in French, it was a French story but I had to write it in English to get his feedback and feedback from the group but then I eventually felt it was really a Parisian story, also because I know everything about the refugee situation about people coming from Africa to France much better than I know it in New York, it's not the same.

VC: Exactly. Tell us what this movie is about. You wrote it, you directed it, and you starred in it. So, tell us what it's about.

CS: It's about two strangers. Ido, who is from the Congo and Babette, who is from Denmark who are thrust into the confines of a Parisian apartment without knowing each other. She's supposed to be putting him up because he's come for a gig and they're really not on the same wave length in the beginning but with the appearance of an escaped lab mouse in the apartment they have to decide what to do with it. She wants to put traps up everywhere and he wants to save it. That's sort of what

the film is about and how then, as you can imagine, they fall in love, they end up falling in love and Maoussi becomes like their surrogate child, bearing witness to their different perspectives on life. I think what really made me want to write this story is that it's based on a personal experience. It doesn't mean that it isn't fictionalized. So that's when they sort of where they fail each other, because he's all about survival, whereas she's all about relationship and love.

KK: Tell us where Maoussi comes in to this love affair.

CS: I've had many stories with mice. And I think they're very delightful little things, little small, cute animals and I thought to have such a small fragile one animal, because they don't live so long, they live two or three years, such a small animal be the bond between them, something fragile that creates a bond, a fragile bond. And the idea where mice really came from, also, when I moved to New York I got to live in an apartment which was full of roaches and mice and rats. And I had to (laughter) take my landlord to court and my building into court by myself and by trying to build this case I had to figure everything out how to do that. So, I had to take pictures and call the inspectors and I tried to take photographs of the mice but they were too fast. I was frustrated.

VC: Maoussi is a very specific kind of mouse. She's a little white mouse—well, talk about what she is, and how you kind of got her to do what you wanted her to do.

CS: I wanted the mouse to be a white mouse because I thought it looked so much better together with Mustafa's – Mustafa is the name of the actor who plays Edo, a brown skin and then I had to find a white mouse that didn't have red eyes, and that turned out to be difficult. We had an animal handler to train the mouse and to find the mice. She said to me that's no problem, we can find white mouse with black eyes but then it turned out to be difficult but eventually she found a litter of white mice with black eyes. It turned out to become very difficult because it's actually a degenerate, I don't know if it's created in a lab, but it's just a genetic mistake. They're very sweet but they're not very easy to teach anything. So luckily there were nine of them because they each had—so Maoussi, the main mouse, had eight doubles (laughter). They had to learn to perform different tasks because one had to learn to run between two beeps because when it runs across Paris at night, it's something that's very difficult to teach a mouse to do is to learn to run in the middle of the street. They can run along houses, walls. That's what they do but they rarely run in the middle. So, we had to have two beeping sounds so it learned to run between the beeping sounds. And another one learned to run down the staircase.

Another one learned to run on the record player and so on, they all had different tasks and different things they were good at.

KK: The ones that ran across the street, did they disappear or did they run back?

CS: No, no, no, you would think it might just disappear, no, no, no, but it was very well trained, it did not disappear, we could not afford to lose any of our mice, no, no, it went perfectly well. We had a bit of a difficult night because it was the last night of the shooting so everybody was leaving on holiday. It was just before the summer holiday and so we're shooting at night and suddenly the beeper system, the speakers, stopped working and somebody had to run home and get some other speakers in the middle of the night and we got it all done so it was OK.

KK: I was just going to ask, how long did it take you to shoot from top to bottom, the film?

CS: 52 days which was, the mice would often delay us... they also get nervous when there's a lot going on around them. The mouse handler was very good at what she was doing. Sometimes they just don't run where you want them to run.

KK: Was it difficult wearing all the hats—writing, directing, you starred in it. It had to be a lot of pressure for you. What was it like?

CS: It was a lot of pressure. The hardest thing is to be both the producer and the director. Because really, you're supposed to, the producer's supposed to be able to say okay, you don't need to shoot at night inside the apartment every night, you can have a black drop, and have the curtains drawn at some nights, because it's so much more expensive to shoot at night and it's also difficult to plan. So, the producer should be able to make those decisions but the director, who speaks to the director of photography, who of course would have all the good arguments to shoot at real night because that's optimal for him. The director wants to listen to the director of photography. The director always wants the best for the movie and the director doesn't care about the money.

KK: It sounds like you were fighting with yourself a great deal.

CS: Yes, I was. I had to, you know, because ... it would have been probably nicer to put that in the hands of somebody else. If you have a good team around you, it's not a problem to wear many hats. I

hired a line producer to take care of the day-to-day production and preparation and everything because I could not possibly have overseen the financial stuff.

VC: So, speaking of money, you shot this film in Paris, so how was this project funded? Did you have any support from the French government? Do they support their filmmakers?

CS: Yeah, they do. It can, however, be very difficult to get the money and what I got was a little funding that they gave me and then a huge tax credit which you can get if you shoot in France and that counts for a lot, actually. And then I had private investors and money from the French film institute.

VC: Excellent. That's great. So, film festivals, you know, there's so many of them out there. Did you have a strategy for your submissions to festivals?

CS: Yes, I do have a strategy. I of course would have liked it to go to Cannes or to Toronto or Venice or Berlin, or – there's one more—Sundance. It came very, very close to getting into Sundance, I got this terrific letter from the head programmer writing how close it had been and how hard it had been not to include it in the end.

KK: That was incredible, that he took the time to do that.

CS: Yeah, because I don't know him at all, I've never met him so I thought that was very gracious of him. And after those ones, so they are spread over the year and they are exclusive so if you get, if you have been in any other festival, they won't take you. So, I started submitting to them while I was in post-production and I submitted a version that was not yet color corrected and totally mixed, which is fine for submission. And then once that didn't happen then I started submitting to other festivals. Sometimes it can be very difficult because I have a list of festivals that I have been recommended by people in the industry who have given me advice about which one is really worthwhile to submit to. There are so many festivals out there and sometimes something pops up because you start submitting and then artificial intelligence identifies that, you're looking at film festivals and suddenly you have festivals popping up left and right and you get tempted and you submit, you think, oh, this sounds great and so I've also withdrawn it from three festivals because it got in but then either they wanted me to pay for the nomination (VC & KK: No, no!). I want to have some ethics about me so I can't pay...

VC: That is an unethical film festival, that's pay for play, no, absolutely not.

KK: I sympathize with you regarding the festivals. I have a short and it's very tempting.

VC: I was going to say that sounds very familiar.

KK: And even though I was warned about it by the director I still went overboard because it's my first film. But you have to pick and choose.

VC: You have to have a strategy. And you did, you had a very specific—you wanted to hit those big festivals if you could, and then you kind of went to a wider range.

KK: I'm super interested to talk to you about the fact that you secured distribution for Maoussi. Is it a special market? How does that happen? How did you go about getting distributors?

CS: Usually how it works in Europe is that while you are in development... in the States I notice that when you say a distributor it also covers sales agent, and we have a distinction between those two. A distributor is local, that means that his, he will cover one country. So, as a sales agent they are in touch with all the different distributors in different territories. And it's very important to have a distributor in development because that is often a requirement for other people to, other entities to give you funding. So, I had a distributor, a French distributor, but unfortunately... and he was supposed to give a minimum guarantee that would cover the post-production. Unfortunately, he went bankrupt. (VC: Oh, no!) A lot of distributors went bankrupt during Covid because people didn't return to the theaters quick enough and things like that. So he went bankrupt and then it's been really hard to get the ear of French distributors because I call them up, I write to them, they say send the link and I call them back like two months later, I say did you see the movie, and they say oh, no, we haven't had time to look at it yet, can you send it again, and this has been going on for a year when they haven't had time to see it because I'm coming in like the back door, they were supposed to have been on board at the inception. However, one should think that product that's finished and has won so many awards by now, it should be less of a risk to distribute a film when they can see the finished product as to invest in one based on a screenplay. It's very, very hard so what I did was I thought, I can't get the ears of the French distributors so I'm wondering if I'm blacklisted like Justine Triet, the French filmmaker who won the Golden Palm (VC: The Palme d'Or) for Anatomy of a Fall. She went

up, when she got the prize, she, in her thank-you speech she spoke about some political issues in France and then following that there was a whole article, it was last week in Vanity, where they say what the heck are the French doing, or something like that, I don't remember the head title but because it's nominated in several categories for the Oscars, the academy awards, but France did not pick it. The people who are supposed to pick the film, it's a small committee, other directors and so on, they had all discussed it and decided it was the film they were going to, it sounded like everybody was going to vote for it, but then mysteriously it was not selected to represent France and probably because she said that during the award speech. And sometimes I wonder if I have also been on some list because I was arrested on the red carpet in Cannes some years ago with my short.

KK: Tell us, what did you do?

CS: My short film is about a woman who wears a full headscarf, the hijab, and it's a comedy.

VC: Is that By Any Means A-Veivable?

CS: Yes, absolutely, veivable, with veil...

KK: Oh, that's such a great title.

CS: So, when it became prohibited, I decided to make a film about somebody who wears a veil, a full head veil. And that was that film, and it was at the Cannes short film corner and I had asked the security at the Cannes Film Festival, is it okay to go up the red carpet with a hijab? I asked at two different occasions because I wanted to make sure that I didn't do something that was prohibited after all. And they said yes. And when I finally did it, when you go up the red carpet at Cannes you have to go through several control points before you get to the red carpet. They could have stopped me like three or four times but they chose to stop me in the middle of the red carpet and have the police escort me away. It was very embarrassing (laughter). And then Le Monde, which is a national paper in France wrote an article about it and defended me and the right to wear what you want to wear. People could wear masks for other reasons on the red carpet. So, I don't know what's going on with France. I love this country; I love to live here. So, what I did was I went to the Berlinale last year and I went around and spoke to all the international sales agents to see if I could get an international sales agent on board and I got interest from a couple of them, a few of them, and I signed with Coccinelle

International Film Sales which is a woman-run sales agent based in Rome and we signed in the autumn. (VC/KK: Great!) This year they will be representing Maoussi at the EFM in Berlin.

VC: The short film, *By Any Means A-Veivable*, that was shown on HBO Europe and Canal Plus, how did that happen? With the short.

CS: That happened because I got a distributor on, I had sent it to a distributor and he was the one who was sending it out to sales agents, and he was the one selling it for me and he did a great job with it.

VC: Excellent, Yeah, apparently. And do you have for yourself, do you have for yourself any representation like a manager or an agent? Anything like that?

CS: I had an agent when I lived in New York City and I still have to renew my work permit so he can't send me out at the moment, I haven't had time to do it, it's on my to-do list. But I've been so busy finishing the project. So therefore, I can't say I have an agent in New York City because he can't send me out.

KK: Right, so the agent in New York is just for the acting, not the film?

CS: Ah, I haven't even tried to get an agent for my film career because I'm in France and because, and I don't even know if they can find work for directors. They can't for actors, they hardly ever do. I'm very sad to say that. If somebody can, call me! I'll probably try to get an agent in the US because I would like to work more on English language movies in the future.

VC: Well, it's not easy, it certainly isn't easy. As an indie filmmaker, what for you are the biggest rewards and the biggest challenges?

CS: The biggest challenge is definitely to get the financing. And the biggest rewards are to meet the audience. To be able to reach the audience, to be able to feel what the audience thinks, the Q and As, to be sitting discreetly in the back, just to feel how your film is received.

CS: Of course, what is rewarding, I love to direct, I love to write and I love to work with other human beings. That's very, very, very rewarding to me. The whole shoot is very rewarding. But ultimately you

make a film or a piece of art to communicate something so it's important to have an audience because otherwise your message is lost somewhere. I don't know where.

KK: : Do you have any new projects in the works?

Cs: I'm writing on several ones. I'm writing a series based on Maoussi where you would get like one episode with Edo and maybe go back to where he comes from and then another episode centered about Babette and another episode around the mouse and so on and then also some more layers in the stories, with their relationships with other people and so on so I'm writing on a series based on Maoussi. And then I am working on a road movie taking place with a woman who is hitchhiking. She comes from New York and she is hitchhiking in New Mexico and she gets picked up by a Native American and they have some accident on the road. And then I have a costume drama set in Japan, a historical drama that takes place in the 19th century based on the story of an English architect who happened to be my great great grandfather who in 1860 was invited to Japan to work as an architect and he married a Japanese woman. I'd like to tell that story. (KK: Sounds fascinating)

VC: Do you have any advice for other indie filmmakers out there?

CS: Yes, I do. Have one person you trust with your screenplay, one or two people, and when it's done, don't write no more unless you're paid for it because otherwise you can spend years trying to, some people will tell you, oh, some producers will tell you, I think it should be a little bit more like that, or I think it should be, or you will get a rejection for some funding and they'll say can you make it a little more dramatic, make it a little more fun, can you change the ending and you do all those acrobatics and it could take years and nothing comes of it. And if you can't get a producer, produce it yourself.

KK: So where ... that's great advice, it certainly hits home to me. Where can people find out more about you and your work, and how they can contact you?

CS: People can find out more about my work on my website which is [www. M for mouse, A for apple, O-U-SS-I -LE F-I-L-M dot com](http://www.Mformouse,Aforapple,O-U-SS-I-LE-F-I-L-Mdotcom), so [maoussilefilm dot com](http://maoussilefilm.com), and I can be reached at cs (for Charlotte Schioler) at [cseproductions with an S, dot fr](http://cseproductions.com) for France.

VC: So, thank you again, Charlotte. And if you are in New York City you can catch Maoussi on Friday, February 23rd, 8:30 PM at the Winter Film Awards International Film Festival at the Look Cinemas. For tickets, visit winterfilmawards.com.

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