

= Jaco Van Dormael =

Jaco Van Dormael (born 9 February 1957) is a Belgian film director , screenwriter and playwright . His complex and critically acclaimed films are especially noted for their respectful and sympathetic portrayal of people with mental and physical disabilities .

Van Dormael spent his childhood travelling around Europe , before going on to study filmmaking at the INSAS in Brussels , where he wrote and directed his first short film , *Maedeli la brèche* (1981) , which received the Honorary Foreign Film Award at the Student Academy Awards . Van Dormael 's feature debut , *Toto le héros* (1991) , was an immediate hit and won the *Caméra d 'Or* at the Cannes Film Festival .

Five years later Van Dormael was among the prizes again at Cannes with *Le huitième jour* (1996) , when his two leading actors , Daniel Auteuil and Pascal Duquenne , were jointly awarded the prize for Best Actor . His third feature film , *Mr. Nobody* (2009) , received further critical acclaim and many accolades , winning six Magritte Awards , including Best Film and Best Director .

= = Early life = =

Jaco Van Dormael was born in Ixelles . Belgium , on 9 February 1957 to a Belgian couple . Van Dormael was raised in Germany until age seven , when his family returned to Belgium . At his birth , he had nearly been strangled by the umbilical cord and received an insufficient supply of oxygen . It was feared that he may end up mentally impaired . This trauma accounts for the recurring themes in his films , which explore the worlds of people with mental and physical disabilities .

He delighted in working with children and for a while pursued a career as a circus clown . He became a producer of children 's entertainment with the Theatre de Galafronie , Theatre Isocele and Theatre de la Guimbarde . After developing an interest in filmmaking , he enrolled at the INSAS in Brussels and later the Louis Lumière College in Paris . As a children 's entertainer , childhood and innocence would become strong themes throughout his work .

= = Career = =

= = = Early work = = =

In the 1980s , Van Dormael produced a number of short films that aroused considerable critical interest . While he was a student at the INSAS , he wrote and directed the children 's story *Maedeli la brèche* . The short film was praised by critics and received the Honorary Foreign Film Award at the 1981 Student Academy Awards presented by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences . The following year Van Dormael directed *Stade 81* , a documentary short film about the Paralympic Games . He later directed the award @-@ winning short films *Les voisins* (1981) , *L 'imitateur* (1982) , *Sortie de secours* (1983) , and *De boot* (1985) . His most famous short of the period is *È pericoloso sporgersi* (1984) which won the Grand Prix in international competition at the Clermont @-@ Ferrand International Short Film Festival .

= = = Mainstream breakthrough = = =

Van Dormael made his feature @-@ length debut in 1991 with *Toto le héros* (*Toto the hero*) , a tale about a man who believes his life was " stolen " from him when he was switched at birth , told in a complex mosaic of flashbacks and dream sequences , sometimes with almost a stream of consciousness effect . *Toto le héros* was ten years in the making as Van Dormael rewrote the script at least eight times . In 1985 , two Belgian producers read a version of the script , and over the next five years they raised about \$ 3 @.@ 5 million , a huge amount for a Belgian production , all in public money from Belgium , the European Community and state television in France and Germany . Van Dormael premiered *Toto le héros* at the 1991 Cannes Film Festival , where it won the *Camera d*

'Or . The film was released to the public later that year to critical acclaim and was a financial success . It won five Joseph Plateau Awards , the César Award for Best Foreign Film , four European Film Awards , the André Cavens Award , and received a BAFTA nomination . Pierre Van Dormael 's soundtrack for the film was also well @-@ regarded , and since their first collaboration in 1980 , he has composed the music to every film of his brother . Toto le héros propelled Van Dormael into the international spotlight as both a writer and director .

In the wake of this success , Van Dormael participated in the 1995 critically acclaimed project *Lumière et compagnie* (*Lumière and Company*) . This work is actually an anthology of very short works (on average 50 ? 60 seconds) contributed by international film directors in which each used the original Auguste and Louis Lumière 's motion picture camera to make his film . The Kiss is the 52 @-@ second film made by director Jaco Van Dormael featuring actor Pascal Duquenne . At the same time , Van Dormael was at work writing his next major work .

He wanted to make a more linear film than *Toto le héros* , one which explored the world through the eyes of a man with Down syndrome . Van Dormael 's next film , *Le huitième jour* (*The Eighth Day*) , accomplishes this with the chance meeting and friendship between Georges , played by Pascal Duquenne , and Harry , an unhappy divorced businessman portrayed by Daniel Auteuil . Van Dormael 's interest in people with mental and physical disabilities stems from an interest in their " talent for life , for loving life , that we often lack . " He sought to explore the concept of two worlds (that of Georges and that of Harry) existing simultaneously and yet separately . *Le huitième jour* premiered at the 1996 Cannes Film Festival , where it was nominated for the Palme d 'Or . It did win the Best Actor award at the festival , which was given to both Pascal Duquenne and Daniel Auteuil . This was the first time in the festival 's history that two actors had shared the award . The film was acclaimed by film critics and received four Joseph Plateau Awards . It was also nominated for a César Award and the Golden Globe Award for Best Foreign Language Film . *Le huitième jour* grossed \$ 33 @,@ 031 @,@ 984 worldwide on a budget of \$ 5 million making it Van Dormael 's highest grossing film to that point .

In 1998 , Van Dormael participated in the project *Spotlights on a Massacre : 10 Films Against 100 Million Antipersonnel Land Mines* , a collection of short films that works as an anti @-@ land mine campaign . The same year he was also a member of the jury at the 51st Cannes Film Festival . In 1999 , *Toto le héros* received the Best Belgian Screenplay 1984 ? 1999 Award at the 13th Joseph Plateau Awards .

= = = Mr. Nobody and after = = =

Van Dormael began seeking to film *Mr. Nobody* in 2001 , an attempt that lasted six years before the director was able to make his English @-@ language feature debut in 2007 . This project differed from other Belgian productions in being filmed in English instead of in one of Belgium 's main languages . The director explained , " The story came to me in English . It 's a story set over very long distances and time frames . One of the strands of the plot is about a kid who must choose between living with his mother in Canada or his father in England . There are also some incredible English @-@ speaking actors I wanted to work with . " The production budget for *Mr. Nobody* was ? 37 million , ranking it the most expensive Belgian film to date . The budget was approved before casting was done , based on the prominence of the director 's name and the strength of his script . The film utilizes nonlinear narrative and the many @-@ worlds interpretation to tell the life story of the last mortal on Earth , *Nemo Nobody* , portrayed by Jared Leto .

Mr. Nobody had its world premiere at the 66th Venice International Film Festival on 12 September 2009 , where it won the Biografilm Award and the Golden Osella for Outstanding Technical Contribution . It has received high praise from film critics and was named by many one of the best films of that year . It received seven Magritte Award nominations , winning Best Film , Best Director , Best Screenplay , Best Cinematography , Best Original Score and Best Editing . It also won the André Cavens Award and the People 's Choice Award for Best European Film at the 23rd European Film Awards . Since its original release , *Mr. Nobody* has become a cult film , noted for its philosophy and soundtrack , personal characters and Christophe Beaucarne 's cinematography .

In August 2014 , Van Dormael began filming his fourth feature film , Le Tout Nouveau Testament (The Brand New Testament) , with Catherine Deneuve , Yolande Moreau and Benoît Poelvoorde , a comedy in which God (Poelvoorde) is alive and lives in Brussels with his daughter . It premiered at the 68th Cannes Film Festival on 17 May 2015 to critical acclaim .

= = Themes = =

Van Dormael 's films , while few , have strong common themes between them . They make distinctive use of naive voiceover and examine the world from an innocent perspective (the young Thomas in Toto le héros , the mentally handicapped protagonist of Le huitième jour , and the unborn child of Mr. Nobody) . These characters views are often colorful , imaginative , and somewhat removed from reality , with slight elements of surreal imagery used to illustrate their active imaginations .

His films also typically end with a death , which is portrayed not as a tragedy , but as a happy moving on where the deceased looks down happily at the world below . Between Heaven and Earth ends with a birth , but it is similarly handled the passing of a character into a new world . This pattern is continued in Mr. Nobody , where two deaths open the film and a unique twist on death at the end of the film conveys a wistful sense of happiness .

Van Dormael makes prominent use of nostalgic standards music , as well , featuring " Boum ! " by Charles Trenet in Toto le héros and " Mexico " by Luis Mariano in Le huitième jour as recurring themes . Mr. Nobody used " Mr. Sandman " as its recurring musical theme .

All of Van Dormael 's films contain surreal elements . In his first two films , these moments were few , like dancing flowers in Toto le héros or Georges flying around the room in Le huitième jour . Mr. Nobody makes much more extensive use of surreal imagery throughout the film .

Both Toto le héros and Le huitième jour prominently featured characters with Down Syndrome , and portrayed these characters lovingly , emphasizing their childlike characteristics .

= = Filmography = =

= = = Feature films = = =

= = = Short films = = =

Maedeli la brèche (1980)

Stade 81 (1981)

Les voisins (1981)

L 'imitateur (1982)

Sortie de secours (1983)

È pericoloso sporgersi (1984)

De boot (1985)

The Kiss (1995)

Eole (2010)