

*À la votre*

January 2007

French portion of Luc Besson interview; English Translation  
Transcribed and translated by Julia Rhineland

[The French part of the show starts around 12:45]

Besson: Hello?

Santucci: Hello.

Besson: Yes.

Santucci: Hello

Besson: Hello.

Santucci: Jacques Santucci and Mrc Beltrante at WMPG in Portland, Maine.

Beltrante: Nice to meet you! I'm Jacques Chirac, the president.

[*laughter*]

Santucci: Congratulations!

[*more laughter*]

Santucci: I didn't think that that would be something that interested you.

Besson: No, no I'm joking.

Santucci (**13:00**): Alright. Maybe you can -- first question, would you like to conduct the interview in French or English?

Besson: Well, whatever you'd like. I would prefer French.

Santucci: Us too. That works. Could you introduce yourself for our listeners?

Besson: Yes.

Santucci: So, hello, Luc.

Besson: Hello.

Santucci: You're Luc Besson --

Besson: Oh yes, so a real introduction like in school?

Santucci: Just quickly.

Besson: Yeah, I have trouble with that.

Santucci: Ah, OK, I'll do the introduction.

Besson: Oh great.

Santucci **(13:30)**: So, you are Luc Besson and you're with us on WMPG to talk about your next film that comes out on January 12th, 2007, so next week in the United States, that's called *Arthur and the Invisibles*.

Besson: Yes.

Santucci: And in French it's *Arthur* --

Beltrante: -- *et les Minimoys*.

Santucci: -- *et les Minimoys*.

Besson: Yes, exactly.

Santucci: How long have you been thinking about doing an animation?

Besson **(14:00 - 14:30)**: Well, listen, I started when it was 5 years old. So it's really -- I don't remember the start anymore. [*He chuckles*] Really, it was a long time ago. I think that I was at the screening of *Joan of Arc*, my last film, and I have a friend named Patrice Garcia who was one of principal designers on *The Fifth Element*, who had come to see me in the theatre with a small drawing. It was a "*minimoy*" about 2 millimeters high smiling on the page. I fell completely in love with this little character. And he

wanted to make a short television series. I said, "Listen, I think that there's something here for a full-length movie." So, we got to work, the both of us. And then, five years later, we gave life to this handsome Arthur that Americans will be able to discover in a few days.

Beltrante: Awesome.

Santucci: The story takes place in the United States and I believe I read in the press release that it was actually filmed in Normandy. Why not also have the story take place in France?

Besson (**15:00 - 16:00**): Well, you know that science-fiction movies that take place on Mars are generally filmed in the studio, right? [*Everyone laughs*] So even *Kill Bill* wasn't necessarily filmed in Japan and really I would say that's the magic of cinema: you can film anywhere. The countryside that we chose is a little like Connecticut, and it's true that there many European countries that are just about the same latitude that are, um -- that have pretty much the same appearance. The principal action that takes place outdoors is pretty short, because it's around 15 minutes, right? It starts like a normal film. It started with the grandmother and little Arthur has followed the story of his grandfather who left it in a spell book, and he will shrink to no more than 2 millimeters. So after he finds himself in a marvelous world, half of which is in 3D, and after that we are really more on the computer than in the studio. After that, if you like, it's only the first 15 minutes. It's principally a large house at the edge of the woods, so really it's not worth it to go to Connecticut or the large Canadian forests --

Santucci: Yes.

Besson: -- to film that. We were able to film it -- we could have filmed it anywhere, really, so I filmed it in my yard.

Santucci: Oh, nice.

Besson: It made a lot more sense.

Santucci: And it's especially more economical.

Besson (**16:30**): No, not really. It would have worked all the same, but it made more sense because that way I could just go home on foot.

Santucci: Yes.

Besson: And in particular it was much more pleasant because Mia Farrow came to film with her children. There was Freddie Highmore and his family, so it's true, that provided a very pleasant and familial side to the film, but which was also quite agreeable.

Santucci: Nice.

Beltrante: Hello, Luc.

Besson: Hello.

Beltrante: Marc Beltrante.

Besson: Nice to meet you.

Beltrante **(17:00)**: I saw the film when I was in France for the Christmas holiday and I loved it.

Besson: Thank you.

Beltrante: Great. I would like to ask a question. How did you choose the voices. Why Bashung, Marc Lavoine, Mylène Farmer?

Besson **(17:30)**: In fact, at the start, I asked myself the question of how to look for actors, and then very, very quickly, actors who had all done horses, penguins, fishes, squirrels -- they'd all done cartoons, and it's true that I wanted newness. I asked myself, "OK, how should we move forward because we hear pretty much the same voices --

Beltrante: It's true.

Besson: And then I had this idea that came to me with the English version with Snoop Dogg, because I had asked him to voice the role of Max in English.

Beltrante: Yes.

Besson **(18:00 - 18:30)**: And then David Bowie, because he has an extraordinary voice and his interpretation of Maltazard is really rich. And then I remembered that I had two

singers, so I said to myself, “Look, it’s funny. What would happen if we asked singers to play these roles?” So, I simply -- almost from the beginning, as a joke, I asked myself, “What would happen?” And in France we told ourselves, well, the princess -- really there is only Mylène Farmer. And then, what can David Bowie do in French? Alain Bashung? And that’s how we contacted each one and what was funny was the fact that it worked! It worked really well because we even were able to get French rappers, people like that and it was pretty amusing. What’s neat is that a singer can effectively place his voice impeccably.

Beltrante: Yes.

Besson **(19:00)**: To work with a singer on a cartoon is really a treat because he is always on tempo, on the beat always, he keeps his voice how we want it, he can go faster, he can be younger or older. He can really give all these layers and colors and it was a real pleasure to work with them.

Beltrante: That went well then. And --

Besson: That was the idea --

Beltrante: [*laughing*] Yes of course. And is it a coincidence that the princess looks a bit like Mylène Farmer?

Besson: Well, yes, a little in fact.

Beltrante: Yes.

Besson: Because those who designed her --

Beltrante: The voice was --

Besson **(19:30)**: In fact, I wonder if in fact, once we created Sélénia, that the drawing -- once you get to know Sélénia a little, it’s true that you think of Mylène, so I think it’s the representation of Sélénia that maybe guided me towards Mylène.

Beltrante: OK.

Besson **(20:00)**: But in any case, at the beginning, that wasn’t the case with the writing. And you know that there are three steps. The first is in 2D, which had a team of 6 people

who worked on the 2D drawings, so they were the ones who invented all the characters, one after the other. And then after that was the 3D production. So that goes to our team. There are only 6 people on the first team; the second team is 250 people and they take the drawings in 2D and then they put them on what we call little spinners, which enables us to see the characters from all angles, all the seams, all the syllables and consonants on their mouths. And it's true that pretty quickly you see a little bit of Mylène.

Beltrante: So the film comes out --

Besson: It might be what drew Mylène to the role, actually.

Beltrante **(20:30)**: Yes. The film comes out in the United States on Friday, January 12th.

Besson: Yes.

Beltrante: So, we just discussed the French voices. What about the American voices? Like Madonna?

Besson **(21:00 - 21:30)**: Now here I admit that I had a lot of luck because when I arrived here a few days ago and saw the American poster I hadn't realized the number of actors, in fact, that there were in the film, because I recorded the first ones three years ago! So, it's true that Madonna, Snoop Dogg, David Bowie, these are people that I recorded three years ago. And then after two months, there was one who came to join the adventure one day: Robert Deniro. It was really great to work with him. And then after that came Harvey Keitel, then Jimmy Fallon, then Emilio Estevez, then Chazz Palminteri. So, it's true that at the end of the day -- Jimmy Fallon, who arrived 2 or 3 months after -- and it's true that at the end of the day it's an incredible cast and I am the first person to be surprised, the first person to thank them because really they saw a few images and liked them right away. We did not have any trouble convincing them. They all came along for the ride, so --

Beltrante: So, in fact it's a French film with a very international cast. Does that mean that Besson Animation will follow Pixar Dreamworks?

Besson **(22:00)**: No, not at all. It's true that I made a science-fiction film a few years ago, but that doesn't mean that I'm going to make more science-fiction films. No, I think that I am -- I am above all an artist and so I've explored different areas. Here, I saw this

little character, Arthur, and was completely taken with him. I realized then that for several years I haven't done anything that concerns children, that concerns the protection of nature. There are plenty of things that I want to say and never had the occasion to through film, because it wasn't really a part of *The Fifth Element*. Nikita or Leon couldn't explain --

**(22:30)**[*Beltrante and Santucci laugh*]

Besson **(23:00 - 23:30)**: -- those things very well. So, that stayed in my head a bit, locked up in little corners. And when I saw that little fellow, Arthur, I felt that many doors had opened in my head and there was really a flow of images and sensations and emotions that came all at once, and I took much pleasure in investing myself in this story. It was a real pleasure. It's true that now I have children, five of them. So, I am perhaps a little bit closer -- I'm becoming closer to childhood. It's pretty funny, actually, I think, because one realizes that with time -- we spend the first 12 years of our lives with lots of children, because we have all our friends at school, our brothers and sisters. And then there's a long period where you have to actively live the life of an adult. And it's true as well that once you're married and have children, you return a little to that time. So it was with great happiness that I got so attached to this little guy.

[*Break*]

[*There is some English back-and-forth and then they launch back into the interview with Besson around 29:30*]

Beltrante: The young actor who plays -- Freddie Highmore?

Besson: Yes.

Beltrante: He is also pretty excellent. He was in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*.

Besson: Yes.

Beltrante: How did it happen that he decided to be in a Luc Besson film? Because he is too young to have seen your previous films?

Besson: Yes, he is younger. I think that his father had seen many of my films. And I think that it was the meeting that did it. When we met he had read the book very quickly. And it interested him a lot.

Beltrante: Yes.

Besson (**30:00 - 30:30**): And I have to say that I really got lucky because I met him before *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* came out. So he wasn't as well known. And we did the casting and knew within a minute that this guy, this young actor was very talented. And that's happened 2 times in my career. About 10 years ago I met Natalie Portman, who was 11 years old, and I was charmed by her within 2 minutes. This gave me the same shock. *Voilà*. Truly. And I think that we really came to depend on Freddie because he is not only a marvelous and intelligent young man, but he's also a great actor.

Santucci: After *Arthur and the Invisibles*, will there be another Besson film? I got the impression from a magazine about French cinema that this was the last film.

Besson (**31:00**): Well, guys, the film has yet to come out around the world.

Santucci: Yes, it's true.

Beltrante: Yeah, it will take a while.

Besson: It will still take a bit of time. And for the moment it's really going well. It opened in France and in about 10 other countries and it's going well everywhere, so I'm really happy. I am obviously a little anxious about the United States, because it's really the country of cinema. It's the biggest country of cinema, so I am always a little -- it's like we're a sportsman and [it's time to show what you've got?].

Santucci (**31:30**): Yes, yes.

Besson: There it is. So, I'm going to prepare myself [?]. I am a little bit nervous. But I was in -- there was a viewing last night. I slipped into the room and watched the faces of the kids for an hour and I got the impression that it's going to be fine because I saw that those little guys were charmed. So, that reassured me a little bit yesterday.

Santucci: Oh, in any case it's a film that revives you. And we'll be right behind you as support.

Besson (**32:00**): Well, that's nice. Thank you! [*He laughs*]. We need it, we need it, because you know, I remember when I arrived here people were talking about *The Fifth*

*Element*. I really thought it would become a cult film here. But I remember that when it came out, 7 or 8 years ago now, it wasn't as easy at the start. I think that it was a bit different that what people are used to in science-fiction --

Beltrante: It's true.

Besson **(32:30)**: That took a little time, so fortunately with the DVD, the TV, all that, the film had an incredible run. And yes, I think that *Arthur* also has that little difference. It's not the classic animated film that people are used to seeing, so I trust them because people are curious, and I think that they'll be charmed, but there is always still that little risk when you're different. At the same time we're playing with the length, but it's always a little hard at the beginning.

Beltrante: At any rate, the Luc Besson and Éric Serra duo has worked well for a while, for the music?

Besson **(33:00)**: Ah yes, Éric, he has --

Beltrante: You don't change a winning team.

Besson: I really have to tip my hat to him because I find that since *The Big Blue*, he hadn't ever written themes as beautiful as what he wrote for *Arthur*. He made magnificent music.

Beltrante: It's beautiful, yes.

Besson: I think that people will buy his CD, I think it will become a great classic. There are some themes that are just marvelous. He did that with the London Philharmonic and it's really great music.

Beltrante **(33:30)**: We have a few minutes left in the interview. If we had an interview in English -- because after all the film comes out in the United States and we will continue the interview in English in a few seconds.

[*The interview continues in English, which is a recap of what was said in French for the most part, then picks back up in French around 47:00*]

Beltrante **(47:00)**: And we have the last question.

Santucci: OK, let's do it in French.

Beltrante: OK, in French.

Besson: In Bulgarian?

Santucci: In Bulgarian as well. I'll do it in Norwegian! [*He laughs*]. So, I've seen the film. There will be a sequel, yes? Because we're left in suspense at the end, because Arthur says -- oh I'll wait -- the princess says --

Beltrante **(47:30)**: Don't say anything, I haven't seen the movie.

Besson: No, let's say that -- at any rate, the adventure is over, but it's true -- I wrote 4 volumes -- I wrote 4 books. The film corresponds to books 1 and 2. So essentially the new one -- Arthur's other adventures are already written. There are essentially 700 technicians who are ready to start the next one.

Santucci: Yes.

Besson **(48:00)**: I'm the one who plays the bad guy because I've been telling them for the last few weeks, "No, no, we have to wait." We have to wait. A little humility is always necessary in these cases because we're making a film for people and you have to really be sure. We had our fun, but it's still 4 or 5 years of work every time, so we have to await the public. We have to wait -- they're the ones that give the green light. It's like the Roman Games, you know? You have to wait until the thumbs up or the thumbs down.

Santucci: Yes.

Besson **(48:30 - 49:00)**: And so I'm waiting with a little -- with patience, with humility. I'm waiting until the film comes out in the United States, in China, so in 2 or 3 major countries. For the moment I have to say that it's nice because the reception of the film in France is more than we ever expected. The film is #1 in many European countries where we just opened. I think also in Serbia, in Israel, in Hungary, so there are plenty of countries where the film is ahead and that gives me great, great pleasure. And then there are some really big countries, like Germany, Italy, Russia, Japan so we still have to wait a little bit, but in any case I would like to do another one. It's there for sure. And if it keeps going like it has for the last few weeks, I think we'll be ready for another round.

Santucci: At any rate, in France you know that you'll never be disappointed with a Luc Besson film.

Besson (**49:30 - 50:00**): Well, listen, it's nice to say that, but you know that I think you can never reassure the public that they'll like the film. It's impossible. The only thing we can reassure them of is that we gave it our all. That's a question of -- for me it's a question of politeness. And there you you, maybe that's the relationship that I'm lucky to have with the public, it's that -- well, they don't necessarily know if they'll love the film, but in any case they know that someone did his best to put everything he had into it and, at any rate, that's the case for me. So I'm rather a warrior and it's true that when I show up at the beginning of a run I always do my best to do everything to the maximum, because even if we lose, you need to know how to lose with dignity. There it is, so in any case I can reassure the public -- I can't do any better. I gave everything.

Beltrante: Well, it's a good result.

Santucci: Well, it's also our pleasure here at WMPG. We've been doing this show in French for 5 years with a bit of success and we weren't as [popular] last week.

Besson: Oh really!

Santucci (**50:30**): So, it's been a pleasure to speak with you, Luc Besson, and to see a French person already known for his science-fiction films make an animated film in the United States and who is considered on the same level as big international studios.

Besson: Well, listen, it's also my pleasure. It's not what one imagines at the beginning because your nose is to the grindstone and you really try to make the film possible. But it's true that at the end of 3 or 4 years, when you start to see the first images and you see that the team has worked really well, that it's something elevated, the same level as Pixar Dreamworks, that makes you really happy.

Santucci (**51:00**): Well, I think that your assistant told us that we had 15 minutes, but we have already passed 25 minutes.

Besson: OK.

Santucci: But thank you so much to have called.

Besson: Well, it's me that must thank you.

Santucci: And then --

Besson: Courage to you! Good luck!

Santucci: Thank you so much!

Beltrante: Thank you so much!

Santucci: Good continuation!

Besson: OK, bye bye!

Beltrante: Goodbye.

Santucci: Goodbye, Luc. That was Luc Besson on WMPG.