

THE SCHOOL OF LIFE (l'École Buissonnière)

France 2017 116 minutes

Director: Nicolas Vanier

Cast: Jean Scandel (Paul), Francois Cluzet (Totoche),
Valérie Karsenti (Célestine), Eric Elmosnino (Borel),
Francois Berléand (Count de la Fresnaye)



Screening 6 March 2019 at Swindon Arts Centre

Synopsis

Following the deaths of his father in the Great War and of his mother in childbirth, Paul is consigned to a bleak orphanage in Paris. Unexpectedly, he is taken away from this institution by Celestine who tells him that, as a distant relative, she is taking him to live with her over the summer. They travel to the Solange area near Orleans where Celestine and her gamekeeper husband, Borel, work on the Count de la Fresnaye's country estate. As he roams around its land, Paul encounters the local poacher, Totoche, who is Borel's obvious adversary. Sensing a connection between Totoche and Célestine, Paul persuades him to become his apprentice to learn about the natural world and to reveal some clues about Paul's own heritage.

Reviews



"... Directed by Nicolas Vanier along with his directors of photography, Eric Guichard and Laurent Charbonnier, Vanier guides the camera contemplatively across the natural terrain of the country estate in Solange where orphan Paul (Jean Scandel) has found himself ... (Scandel) is good in the role, bringing a blend of steel and vulnerability that captures the character's journey from orphan to learning how to operate within a family unit ...

... The film uses nature as a way in which to develop the narrative and reinforce the central premise of bonds being renewed, broken and renewed once more. The film starts at the beginning of the summer and works its way through winter until spring is nearly upon the characters and you do feel as if you have been on a journey with them ..."

Jim Mackney, www.thelondoneconomic.com

"Unabashedly old-fashioned, Nicolas Vanier's heartfelt period feature *School of Life* fondly references a gentler time, before World War II reshaped the landscape of Europe and the trajectory of French society. ... [it] warmly celebrates the invigorating virtues of the French countryside, ... centred on the Loire Valley.

This assuredly crafted exploration of the intricacies of early 20th-century social stratification, which was released in France in October, soars on the strengths of sympathetic scripting and striking wildlands cinematography ...

... with *The School of Life*, Vanier succeeds in crafting an admirably original film that unaffectedly draws upon his boyhood growing up in the Sologne, as well as his numerous nature documentaries and adventure narratives exploring the relationships between humans and wild places.

Gorgeous woodland scenery and spectacular wildlife photography cast a magical spell under Vanier's skillful direction, capably supported by ... cinematographer Eric Guichard and an ace team of animal wranglers."

Darren Hardy, Hollywood Reporter

Film Facts

- Director Nicolas Vanier also made the acclaimed *Belle and Sebastian* in 2013.
- This is Jean Scandel's first film performance.