

The Marching Band [15]

France 2024 103 mins

UK released **15 May 2025**

Director **Emmanuel Courco**

Screenplay **Emmanuel Courcol ; Irène Muscari ; Oriane Bonduel ; Marianne Tomersy**

Cinematography **Maxence Lemonnier**

Music **Michel Petrossian**

Cast **Benjamin Lavernhe** (Thibaut Desormeaux) ; **Pierre Lottin** (Jimmy Lecocq) ; **Sarah Suco** (Sabrina) ; **Jacques Bonnaffé** (Gilbert Woszniak) ; **Ludmila Mikaël** (Madame Desormeaux)

It is always unsettling to watch an orchestra practice. It takes the sheen off. And here, in the opening sequences of Emmanuel Courcol's *The Marching Band*, wherein we see superstar conductor Thibaut (Benjamin Lavernhe de la Comédie-Française) marshal his ensemble, we are privy to the unglamorous quotidian of hard work, sweat and stress in a stark corrective to the escapist bliss of honed performance. Then, in a loaded crosscut from Thibaut's practice room, the narrative transitions to a canteen kitchen where we see Jimmy (Gallic bad boy Pierre Lottin) at work where he chastises a co-worker for licking the very spoon about to be used to serve up pie.

It's an instructive lead into *The Marching Band*, a film which is interested in exploring both aspects of life which are necessarily unseen, and also the dimensions of narratives which are often left unexplored. Slight spoilers follow... It transpires that Thibaut has leukaemia, with a million to one chance of survival IF he can find a suitable bone marrow donor. The plot immediately intensifies when it turns out that Thibaut's willing sister is not actually his biological relation and that he was adopted. Yet hope manifests in the rugged form of Jimmy, a potential benefactor whom Thibaut has tracked down as his blood brother, separated at birth.

What is intriguing about *The Marching Band* is how the plot points are all resolved within the first 10 minutes or so: Thibaut's run of shocking discoveries, the urgency of locating Jimmy, the latter's potential refusal.

After initial reluctance Jimmy duly steps up, What Courcol and co are interested in is what happens after Cinderella marries Prince Charming: the variable aftermath of such life altering paradigms.

In a Willy Russell dynamic, Jimmy and Thibaut have been nurtured via different environments. Precious and privileged, Thibaut lives an international life of fame and linen suits, while denimed Jimmy is ouvrier and lives in a province besieged by industrial action. But just as in Blood Brothers, the two men share a mutual nature with Jimmy playing in the titular consortium and possessing perfect pitch. The Marching Band suggests that while Thibaut no doubt worked hard for his, Jimmy is the more naturally gifted sibling, with fate failing to provide the same opportunities as Thibaut enjoyed. What follows in The Marching Band is a poignant examination of class, community and male pride.

Thibaut owes Jimmy his continuing existence and wants to show his gratitude, but what if Jimmy feels that his new-found brother's patronage is emasculating? Jimmy is looked up to within his close-knit community (the depiction of le village life, and the rat-tag band, is a sweet pleasure), but Thibaut's gratitude, usually demonstrated in the form of remuneration, highlights Jimmy's inability to make a real difference to the ailing community. Courcol makes clear that, albeit favouring those that can afford the time and space for dedicated practice, this world operates within a meritocracy: one of The Marching Band's many hard, realistic truths. The Cinderella allusion of earlier becomes brutally apposite as The Marching Band moves at glissando pace towards an ending which is anything but fairy tale.

Benjamin Poole, *The Movie Waffler*, (abridged)

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