

# SCHOOL'S OUT

a SÉBASTIEN MARNIER picture



**SPECIAL MENTION**  
**AUSTIN FANTASTIC FILM FESTIVAL**

A level of urgency and striking relevancy. Just like the singular way in which the director manages to dupe the audience, to make us open our eyes, to make us face the truth for once and for all, because it's about time!

**CINEUROPA**

Sébastien Marnier's second feature borrows stylistic devices from horror to create an atmosphere of suffocating paranoia.

**SCREENDAILY**

School's Out is a singular work. The mise-en-scene allows the viewer to dive into Pierre's nightmares and turn this drama into a true Kafkaesque fable.

**A VOIR A LIRE**

Unnerving, provocative, and fiercely contemporary, *School's Out* is a political and existential thriller that's journey is hypnotic, and that's final destination is perfectly terrifying.

**PAJIBA**

Director Sébastien Marnier has directed a genuinely frightening thriller, the scariest proposition of which is that the children who have been failed by generations past may not all go quietly into the environmental disaster we have built for them to call a future.

**SCREEN MAYHEM**

If there's one thing that *School's Out* does fantastically, it's keeping its audience intrigued at every turn. Red herrings and fever dreams abound as the film builds to its climax, seen through Romain Carcanade's brilliant cinematographic lens and soundtracked by Zombie Zombie's sparse, spine-tingling synths.

**THE PANOPTIC**



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## VENICE 2018 Sconfini

# Review: *School's Out*

by Bénédicte Prot

04/09/2018 - VENICE 2018: French director Sébastien Marnier gives an apocalyptic tone to a disturbing conundrum involving school kids



Laurent Lafitte and the young actors in *L'Heure de la sortie*

The first scene sets the tone – an odd combination of the banal and the powerfully tragic, continuity and interruption. The film begins in a silent classroom, where students are taking a test. Paper rustles. A teacher sits at the back of a room, watching their tilted heads as they concentrate, before suddenly throwing himself out of the window. We will never get an answer to this final gesture shown at the beginning of the film, but the mystery surrounding it will perpetuate the entire film, shifting from one oddity to the next, wiping away all suspense from the entire plot. In his second feature film *School's Out* [+] – selected at Venice in the eclectic Sconfini section – **Sébastien Marnier**, originally a novelist, concocts a very particular climate that plunges the audience into an interesting situation of worried searching, because beyond a few sharp salient peaks, the story offers no concrete points of reference: every new element evades us as soon as the next one comes along.

The film is also about the defenestrated substitute teacher Pierre's (**Laurent Lafitte**) own investigation, without really knowing what he's looking for. He begins to notice bizarre and violent behaviour in the class of gifted students, and starts to spy on them, allowing the audience to discover, along with Pierre, their inexplicable rituals (filmed from their laptops). And although in these moments, silence dominates, the awareness we have of the impermeability of the universe these school children belong to is shocking, because we experience it entirely subjectively, from Pierre's point of view, still a young man himself, in a sense (he is only forty years old, he is still doing his thesis and his tattoos make him seem fairly "cool"...) as if these scenes were the precise moment in which he measured the gap between himself and these young children, the future generation (which considers DVDs to be "vintage").

But Marnier doesn't stop there. He makes the audience feel this total separation and wall of misunderstanding between the generations in its entirety thanks to the young teacher's perspective, and he does so in order to tell us about this future generation, the adolescents of today, represented by these gifted pupils, who are, in fact, "different". They seem to know everything and hope for nothing. But how could they, when faced with all the videos of ecological disasters they have compiled, which, all things considered, leave no doubt in their minds about what's in store for their terrifying "era" (to use one of the student's own words) while the adults – who have passed down this world to them – tend to trivialise everything in order to better ignore it (the denial of the teachers and Pierre's boyfriend in relation to the abnormality of events is characteristic).

"It's too late, there's no future. You don't want to face the truth," says one student in the middle of the film, and the film's final design is already evident in this sentence: to transform anxiety into the fuzzy outlines it's been conveying since its electroshock beginning, with a level of urgency and striking relevancy. Just like the singular way in which the director manages to dupe the audience, to make us open our eyes, to make us face the truth for once and for all, because it's about time!

*School's Out* was produced by Avenue B Productions. Celluloid Dreams is handling the film's international sales.

<http://www.cineuropa.org/en/newsdetail/359677>

## REVIEWS

### 'School's Out': Venice Review

BY WENDY IDE

31 AUGUST 2018

**A supply teacher becomes obsessed with a group of creepy teens in Sébastien Marnier's second feature**

Dir. Sébastien Marnier. France. 2018. 104 mins



The unbridgeable divide between two generations – a group of elite teenagers at a private school and the 40-year-old substitute teacher who becomes fixated on them – is a breeding ground for fear and suspicion. Sébastien Marnier's second feature, loosely based on a 2002 novel by Christophe Dufossé, borrows stylistic devices from horror to create an atmosphere of suffocating paranoia. Although a sweatily effective mood piece, the film's plotting stumbles slightly towards the end of the third act.

### **Haneke's *The White Ribbon* is a dramatic touchstone**

With its teen nihilism and oppressive aesthetic of long, airless summer days, the picture has some kinship with Eva Husson's *Bang Gang: A Modern Love Story*, although not the same sexual shock value. The film's slippery refusal to fit neatly into any one particular genre makes it not quite a psychological horror film, although it obliquely references the oeuvre of John Carpenter. It also has a heady sense of heightened and twisted reality which distances it from conventional thrillers. The film is likely to play best with audiences open to slickly crafted pictures which don't quite adhere to genre conventions. Pierre (Laurent Lafitte, Elle) brings an outsider's eye to the dynamics of St Joseph, a school with "an excellent reputation", the headmaster is at pains to stress. Drafted in as a supply teacher, he expects to find children traumatised by the attempted suicide of his predecessor, who jumped from a window

in front of them. Instead, he is troubled by the inscrutable and unnerving Children Of The Corn-style assurance of the kids, all selected for their exceptional intellectual abilities. In particular, there is a closed-circle clique of six teenagers, who set Pierre's nerves on edge with their secrecy and air of matter-of-fact superiority. There's an ambiguity to the way the kids are depicted which brings with it a hint of real threat: Haneke's *The White Ribbon* is a dramatic touchstone.

Pierre starts to stalk them, witnessing a ritualistic series of tests and ordeals that they stoically endure. And he stumbles on a collection of DVDs which edit together footage of atrocities and end-of-days imagery, with warnings of society's collective suicide. Meanwhile, his fellow teachers are disengaged and more interested in beers and dancing on a Friday night than the aloof, self-radicalised kids in their care. Rattled by the teens, Pierre starts to feel personally persecuted by them.

A retro-electronic score is the most obvious nod to 1980s horror movies in a film which also uses anamorphic lenses to distort and bend the interiors, and a recurring motif of beads of anxious sweat. As Pierre becomes increasingly troubled, his own personal space seems to rebel against him. Tap water is tainted brown, his electricity supply falters and cockroaches invade his apartment (it's no coincidence that the dissertation he is currently labouring over is about Franz Kafka).

The clammily hallucinatory qualities make the picture so distinctive. Also effective is a chilling coda, in which the generational schism is finally overcome in the face of a unifying tragedy.

<https://www.screendaily.com/reviews/schools-out-venice-review/5131983.article>



## Les risques du métier

Le 12 septembre 2018

**Un mélange de genres qui tient debout parce qu'il invoque Kafka et surtout qu'il fait de son ambiance cauchemardesque le support d'un véritable discours politique.**

5 671 abonnés



- **Réalisateur** : Sébastien Marnier
- **Acteurs** : Pascal Greggory, Laurent Lafitte, Emmanuelle Bercot, Grégory Montel, Gringe
- **Genre** : Thriller
- **Nationalité** : Français
- **Distributeur** : Haut et Court
- **Date de sortie** : 9 janvier 2019
- **Durée** : 1h34mn
- **Festival** : L'Étrange festival 2018

**L'argument** : Lorsque Pierre Hoffman intègre le prestigieux collège de Saint Joseph il décèle, chez les 3e 1, une hostilité diffuse et une violence sourde. Est-ce parce que leur professeur de français vient de se jeter par la fenêtre en plein cours ? Parce qu'ils sont une classe pilote d'enfants surdoués ? Parce qu'ils semblent terrifiés par la menace écologique et avoir perdu tout espoir en l'avenir ? De la curiosité à l'obsession, Pierre va tenter de percer leur secret...



**Notre avis :** S'il est un métier propice à une observation de cet élément symptomatique de l'époque que sont les troubles de la jeunesse, c'est assurément celui de professeur. Ici, le prof de français remplaçant s'appelle Pierre et on le retrouve sous les traits de Laurent Lafitte, décidément jamais là où on l'attend. Mais ce qui rend cette Heure de la Sortie si singulière, ce n'est pas tant cet enseignant mais davantage ses élèves qui ont la particularité d'appartenir à une classe de surdoués. Une particularité que le réalisateur exploite comme une source d'aggravation des habituelles frictions intergénérationnelles. Mais, davantage que de jouer avec les malentendus qui peuvent naître entre un adulte et des adolescents pour en faire en une comédie telle qu'on en a déjà vu des dizaines, Sébastien Marnier a jugé bon de les faire figurer via une ambiance oppressante, allant jusqu'à faire jongler son film avec les codes du fantastique. Maintenant que le succès de Grave a prouvé que le public français était prêt à accueillir des productions qui soient à mi-chemin entre le cinéma d'auteur et un cinéma de genre, Marnier n'a eu aucun scrupule à illustrer la paranoïa de son personnage principal avec l'appui d'un habillage sonore particulièrement anxiogène. En plus de cette musique signée par Zombie Zombie, quelques effets de mise en scène nous plongent même dans les cauchemars de Pierre et transforment alors ce drame social en véritable fable kafkaïenne. La présence récurrente de cafards, évoquant La Métamorphose, est l'un des éléments les plus caractéristiques qui imposent la comparaison à « l'auteur pragoï » sur qui ce professeur est justement en train de rédiger une thèse.



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Au-delà de la mise en images de la peur du personnage principal, que viennent alimenter des coups de fil anonymes, ainsi que son sentiment d'impuissance face aux violences qu'il constate parmi ses élèves, le scénario se caractérise avant tout par l'attitude de ces troisièmes surdoués, différents de ceux du roman du l'histoire est pourtant adapté. Or, c'est justement leur comportement inextricablement hostile et l'enquête que leur nouveau prof va mener sur leurs activités extrascolaires qui vont décaler le cœur du sujet depuis la peinture d'une institution scolaire loin d'être aussi

exemplaire qu'il y paraît à un véritable conte écologique.

Parce qu'ils sont soi-disant surdoués, on a forcément du mal à donner tort à ces gamins quand ils évoquent une prochaine fin du monde. Et leur fatalisme, Pierre ne devrait pas non plus pouvoir le nier, lui qui observe au quotidien son électricité vaciller et son eau du robinet pourrir. Dès lors que la dramaturgie met toutes les cartes sur la table – ce qui arrive après un développement assez long car chargé en rabâchages, mais c'est exactement ce que l'on attend d'un prof –, et que l'enjeu dépasse le seul cadre scolaire, le film se transforme donc bel et bien dans ses dernières minutes un véritable thriller. C'est cette façon de sauter d'un genre à l'autre, sans pour autant faire vaciller la cohérence globale, qui rend ce film si atypique dans le paysage français. Pourtant, le fait que les relations entre les personnages (qu'il s'agisse des profs ou des élèves) soient aussi convenues rend le résultat peu surprenant. Le discours sociologique qui décrit cette jeunesse dorée se considérant comme une génération sacrifiée et le plan de fin qui annonce qu'il vaut mieux être ensemble pour faire face au drame écologique, restent deux piliers qui font que ce mélange de genres globalement maîtrisé reste avant tout un véritable film d'auteur, qui a ses chances de trouver son public.

**L'HEURE DE LA SORTIE - Bande annonce**

**Julien Dugois**

<https://www.avoir-alire.com/l-etrange-festival-l-heure-de-la-sortie-la-critique-du-film>

## Fantastic Fest Review: 'School's Out' Is An Existential Thriller Alive With Dread And Dark Humor

By [Kristy Puchko](#) | [Film](#) | September 27, 2018 | [5 Comments](#)

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Imagine a cruel and contemporary flip of *Dead Poets Society*, and you'll start scratching at the dark heart of the French thriller *School's Out*. Its story centers on Pierre (Laurence Lafitte), a dashing and caring substitute teacher whose tasked with ushering a class of highly intelligent teens through the trauma of witnessing their former teacher's in-class suicide attempt. But this is no melodrama with tearful confessions and "O Captain! My Captain!" exaltations. The chillingly stoic students aren't interested in Pierre's concerns, even when he tries to rescue them from violent outbursts by their peers. Confounded, compelled, and a bit freaked out, this suspicious substitute begins to stalk the class's central clique, and slowly uncovers these teens' disturbing secrets.

Directed by Sébastien Marnier, *School's Out* is one part mystery, one part dark comedy. As Pierre follows Apolline (Luàna Bajrami) and her little cult of anarchist friends, he's disturbed by their fascination in devastation, pollution, and violence. He begins to suspect that their teacher's suicide attempt wasn't so random, and that these teens have something heinous planned for the fast-

approaching graduation weekend. But when he tries to share his concerns, his fellow teachers think he's paranoid, bored, and looking for something exciting. Even the movie mocks his fear, giving Apolline and her crew sneering remarks that spark barks of audience laughter at our terrorized hero's expense. But something's going on here. What's with the phone calls in the middle of the night? Why is Brice often covered in bruises? What's with the DVDs the kids have buried in an abandoned lot?

The blend of suspense and spiked humor is slippery and strange. You're never quite sure where to plant your feet in this twisted thriller. Yet for all its surprises, *School's Out's* most haunting moments are the ones based in a quiet, all-too-common reality. A screeching alarm rips through the classroom's stillness. Pierre looks—well—alarmed. He asks if it's a fire drill. His class can barely hold their frustration with his ignorance. It's an active shooter drill. Dispassionately, they all gather their things and file to the wall closest to the classroom door, folding their knees up to their chests. They block the door with their bodies, and stare blankly as the alarm blares. Unprepared, Pierre joins them, only to be chastised. He needs to clear away his things so the terrorist would assume the classroom is empty if they looked through the door's window. And put your cellphone on airplane mode. You wouldn't want an ill-timed ring to signal your location to a merciless mass shooter.

This is the crux of *School's Out*, a generational divide between those who grew up with the blissful ignorance of life-shattering trauma that could come strolling into your classroom with an automatic weapon, and Generation Z, the Stoneman Douglas generation who have to face this horrible uncertainty school day after school day, all too aware of how useless their guardians are in protecting them. Pierre's class believes he's already failed them. And their cold stares send chills that'll follow you out of the theater.

Unnerving, provocative, and fiercely contemporary, *School's Out* is a political and existential thriller that's journey is hypnotic, and that's final destination is perfectly terrifying.

[http://www.pajiba.com/film\\_reviews/review-schools-out-is-an-existential-thriller-alive-with-dread-and-dark-humor-.php](http://www.pajiba.com/film_reviews/review-schools-out-is-an-existential-thriller-alive-with-dread-and-dark-humor-.php)



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## London Film Festival 2018: School's Out

Sébastien Marnier's latest offering may wear its influences on its sleeve – but as the saying goes, good artists borrow while great artists steal, and *School's Out* is nothing less than great.

The first thing we see in *School's Out* is a long, drawn out medium shot as the camera stares directly into the sun. It is only an image on a screen, accompanied by a mildly unsettling, high-pitched hum. It should not blind anyone. But the shot persists; the camera continues zooming ever so slowly and imperceptibly in on the sun. I start to think that maybe I *should* feel blinded; I *should* have a headache. And then, I do.

*School's Out* is a movie that hinges almost entirely on this psychosomatically-induced state of dread. While I wouldn't go as far as to say that it is not an easy watch, it is certainly a film that succeeds in becoming exponentially more unsettling as its slow-burn story unfolds. It is what viewers will certainly feel as soon as the title appears onscreen in no-nonsense, default Microsoft Office font Cambria, right after the movie's (literally) explosive ending. It is also the feeling that protagonist Pierre Hoffman constantly finds himself returning to when he accepts a post as a substitute teacher at a prestigious academy in an idyllic French suburb. Summer is in full swing, exams are fast-approaching, and Hoffman's predecessor has just thrown himself out of a second-storey window.

Hoffman, played by the excellent Laurent Lafitte, is out of his depth and it shows. Before this job he was nothing but an unemployed academic; smoking joints with his tattoo artist neighbour and working on a thesis about Kafka that he had no real intention of finishing due to his fear of committing to "the real world". "I'm more ADHD than IPC," he tells the headmaster, clearly discomfited at the thought of teaching so-called 'Intellectually Precocious Children' – intelligent teenagers who are the cream of the crop at their already illustrious college. Hoffman is a perfectly flawed protagonist – at forty years old he is single, a substitute teacher, and nowhere near as close to figuring out his own life as his own students are for themselves.

These flaws are also what makes Hoffman appear infinitely exploitable to his students – in particular a group of six sullen teenagers who deplore the rest of their "mediocre" schoolmates and who watched on with straight faces as their previous teacher lay broken and bleeding below their classroom window. Helmed by ringleaders (and class monitors) Dimitri and Apolline, Hoffman is slowly but surely drawn to investigate their strange behaviour, even as he is mocked, questioned, and belittled by them at every turn. What he finds is hardly child's play. There are near-death situations voluntarily entered by the teenagers to "ensure they don't feel pain". There are secret videotapes with sickening footage of the planet's environmental decline, cut and pasted together over a cheery EDM soundtrack. And then there are the phone calls that Hoffman keeps getting from an unknown number, featuring the soft sobs of an unknown woman.

If there's one thing that *School's Out* does fantastically, it's keeping its audience intrigued at every turn, even in spite of the glacial pace of its plot – which in itself has been snatched straight from both Sion Sono's *Suicide Club* and Paul Schrader's *First Reformed*. Red herrings and fever dreams abound as the film builds to its climax, seen through Romain Carcanade's brilliant cinematographic lens and soundtracked by Zombie Zombie's sparse, spine-tingling synths. Marnier also manages to turn *School's Out* into a nuanced study of voyeurism – is Hoffman's obsession intrusive simply by virtue of him being an older man spying on his teenage students? Is it justified if the children are more dangerous than they let on? Or is it justified because the kids clearly *want* to be watched?

With such stellar influences, it's no surprise that *School's Out* ends up shining on its own too, especially when backed up by a brilliant cast. Luana Bajrami is particularly menacing as the verbose and morose Apolline – a worthy adversary for Lafitte's own compelling performance as Hoffman, who convincingly veers closer and closer to total mental collapse with every passing minute. Bajrami and Lafitte easily carry the film together; their restrained aggression towards each other so palpable that you could cut it with a knife. While the rest of the creepy children perhaps don't get as much screen time as they should, they nonetheless heighten the film's undercurrent of unease as Apolline's willing stooges; so pliant to her strength of will that they would even risk drowning one of their own for her.

There are a few loose ends that *School's Out* fails to tie up at the risk of appearing completely gratuitous – namely, the hints at the burgeoning political upheaval in France, the anti-Semitic undercurrent amongst the college students and teachers, and the homoerotic attraction between Hoffman and a fellow teacher, Steve. But relatively speaking, these feel more like small, overlooked details washed away by the relentless tide of the film's main narrative. Loaded with enough intrigue and suspense to make viewers think themselves into a corner, *School's Out* is a film that, when watched, feels like staring into an image of the sun. It won't blind you, but it will make you think you're going blind. And sometimes, that's all that's needed.

<https://thepanoptic.co.uk/2018/09/27/london-film-festival-2018-schools-out/>