

La Classe de Neige

(lit: "Snow School"; UK (bizarrely) = "Class Trip")

France : 1998 : dir. Claude Miller :

Films de la Boissiere / P.E.C.F. / France 3 / Rhones-Alpes : c95 min

prod: Anne Miller : scr: Claude Miller & Emmanuel Carrere : dir.ph.: Guillaume Schiffman

Clement Van den Bergh; Lokman Nalcacan; Tom Jacon †

Francois Ray; Yves Verhoeven; Emmanuelle Bercot; Tina Sportolard; Yves Jacques;

Chantal Banlier; Benoit Herlin; Julien Le Mouel; Loic Pichon; Thierry Redler; Alain Payen

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω	□	≠	Z	⚡	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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† full list of the children who play the classmates below

TV Times review:

"Nicolas (Clement Van Den Bergh) goes on a class skiing trip to the Alps but finds that it's not a simple holiday. His father (François Roy) is there on the trip too¹, and his grim view of life is beginning to colour his son's. This disturbing French film takes the awkwardness of growing up and makes it frightening, slowly revealing the nasty truth behind Nicolas' childhood. Widescreen. *** "

"French psychological thriller. While on a school ski trip, a shy friendless boy, struggling to cope with inner demons, learns about life's dreadful truths when he becomes fascinated by the disappearance of a local boy. Subtitled. *** "

[no listing in "Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001"]

¹ No he isn't

By a good margin the most interesting new film I've seen in a year, this is one of those easily missed titles that make working on the archive rewarding. It won the 1998 Prix du Jury at Cannes, but had a mixed reception from the critics. Rated "15", one reviewer suggested this was as much a caution to adults as to children. It is the sort of film crass papers would describe as "controversial" – full of dark and provocative imagery and insinuating any number of uncomfortable conclusions without spelling any of them out in black and white. Quintessentially continental in its sensibilities, it is almost inconceivable that any British or American film-maker (perhaps Andrew Birkin) could or would have tackled it. Director Miller co-scripted it with Emmanuel Carrere, who wrote the original novel.

Stop me if you've heard this one: Nicolas is warned by his father that he must be on guard against men who hang around fairgrounds, school gates and cinemas in order to spirit kids away and do unspeakable things to them. But wait, the "unspeakable things" in this case involve the surgical removal of fresh young kidneys and livers. They are traffickers in human organs, and their victims usually turn up later, alive but unconscious, with telltale sutures.

As the film starts we join Nicolas being driven to a winter ski school by his father, who refuses to let him travel by coach with the rest of his classmates following a recent accident involving a similar school coach trip. On the long drive Nicolas toys with an anatomical model of the human body, and traffic slows to a crawl as they pass the scene of a fresh road accident. The boy is anxious about his bedwetting problem becoming general knowledge, but dad has packed a spare pair of pyjamas and a protective undersheet in his case. Nicolas is delivered to the school, but his father has driven off before the boy remembers he has not removed his case from the boot. Next day the school attempts to trace his father without success.

The class hard-case, an arab boy by the name of Hodkann, lends Nicolas some pyjamas, and although Nicolas is very quiet and unresponsive, seems intrigued by the loner. An affable, perceptive teacher at the school, Patrick (Yves Verhoeven) takes the monosyllabic boy under his wing and drives him out to buy all the clothes he will need for the week, including ski-wear even though no snow has fallen yet. Patrick gains the boy's confidence sufficiently to ask about his interests. Nicolas chiefly likes reading fairy tales, and describes to him the story of "The Little Mermaid", who asks a witch to turn her into a real woman, but the witch takes her tongue in payment. "You're a dreamer" the teacher observes, without a hint of criticism.

At night, under prompting from Hodkann, Nicolas tells him his father is a travelling salesman in prosthetic limbs, but whether this is true or false we must guess for ourselves. For Nicolas is prone to mingle reality and fantasy, as much in his waking life as asleep.

~ ~ ~ to be completed

See subject index under **DEATH / DYING CHILDREN, CIRCUS / FAIRGROUNDS, RECOMMENDED TITLES, SEX & SEXUALITY, SUMMER CAMP / SUMMER SCHOOL.**