

Easy Metaphors for WWII in ‘War of the Buttons’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on October 21, 2012 - 11:19pm

- [Clément Godefroy](#) [2]
- [Guillaume Canet](#) [3]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [4]
- [Ilona Bachelier](#) [5]
- [Jean Texler](#) [6]
- [Laetitia Casta](#) [7]
- [Movie Review](#) [8]
- [Patrick McDonald](#) [9]
- [The Weinstein Company](#) [10]
- [Théophile Baquet](#) [11]
- [War of the Buttons](#) [12]



Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – World War II, also known as “The Good War,” had more than its share of darkness and sorrow. As the conflict winds down for a French town in the new film “War of the Buttons,” young love and rival town kid gangs create metaphors for the context of the war in its time and place.

This is a sweet movie, more than a bit twee, but containing a sentiment that is life affirming, even up to its “The Sound of Music” type ending. The child and teen actors actually carry the film, which is the third remake of the novel “La Guerre des boutons” by anti-war French writer Louis Pergaud. This also contains metaphors for war and its futilities, as exemplified by the rival kid gangs in the French townships. It also throws in a youthful romance, between a tough kid leader and a Anne Frank-like Jewish girl hiding in the town. All of this somehow works, and has an almost live action Disney movie feel, for the dialogue is cutesy and the endings are happy.

In 1944 small town France, the war is winding down. The townspeople are counting down the days, and keep themselves apart from the Nazi occupiers, including their own traitorous fellow townsmen. The children are aware of the adventure of war, and start a rivalry with a nearby town where mock battles are staged, and the spoils of victory are the buttons on the rival’s clothing. The teenage boy Lébrac (Jean Texler) is the leader of the main town’s battles, and begins to take it a bit too seriously.



Young Lovers: Violette (Ilona Bachelier) and Lébrac (Jean Texler) in ‘War of the Buttons’
Photo credit: The Weinstein Company

A major change occurs with the arrival of Violette (Ilona Bachelier), the niece of Simone (Laetitia Casta), the beautiful shopkeeper in the town. Violette has her charms, and turns Lébrac’s head. The schoolteacher (Guillaume Canet) tries to keep order, but the pressure of the Nazi

occupiers and his former relationship with Simone seek to undermine him. As the kid gangs get rougher in their button war, and Violette is revealed as a Jewish refugee, the tension of the worldwide conflict is about to come home.

The absurdity of the button collecting is the main anti-war metaphor, and is the centerpiece of the town's collective mood in wartime. The mock proclamations of the kids, and their intensity in following their leader Lébrac into "battle" is the emblematic caution with that leads to wasteful destruction and double crossing, just like their adult counterparts. The metaphor is fairly soft, probably harsher in the source novel, but as a theme it is the heart and mind of the narrative.

French actress Laetitia Casta, as Simone the shopkeeper, is achingly beautiful – she also appeared recently in the American film "Arbitrage" – and steals the film in the scenes she appears. The actress portraying her niece Violette, Ilona Bachelier, would be a shoo-in playing the diarist Anne Frank if a community theater production of that story were to break out, for she has the same airy qualities and look. The teacher, portrayed by Guillaume Canet, has a gravitas authority that makes him an eventual town leader, both heroically and morally.

One of the nice subplots involve Lébrac and his father. The boy thinks the old man is a coward for sitting out the war. This turns around with a revelation regarding the papa that secretly changes the boy's attitude towards him. The first morning that Lébrac shows off his newfound respect is touching and comic, and emblematic of many father/son relationships in adolescence.



Older Lovers: The Teacher (Guillaume Canet) and Simone (Laetitia Casta) in 'War of the Buttons'
Photo credit: The Weinstein Company

There is a gooey mush to the proceedings that does drag the film down a bit, but nothing so fatal as to not make it enjoyable. The rewriting of World War II will continue forever, as long as the golden glow hangs over the result. The Nazis will become more hapless, the heroic allies more valiant and romantic. History, and in this case the movies, are written by the winners.

In researching the origin of the story, it was found that the author of the source novel, Louis Pergaud, was an avowed anti-war pacifist. Yet when World War I came along, he was drafted and served with the French army, and was killed in action. That seems the most telling metaphor of any war.

"War of the Buttons" continues its limited release in Chicago on October 19th. See local listings for theaters and show times. Featuring J Jean Texler, Laetitia Casta, Clément Godefroy, Théophile Baquet, Guillaume Canet and Ilona Bachelier. Screenplay by Christophe Barratier, Stéphane Keller and Thomas Langmann. Directed by Christophe Barratier. Rated "PG-13"



[13]

By [PATRICK McDONALD](#) [14]
Senior Staff Writer
HollywoodChicago.com
pat@hollywoodchicago.com [13]

© 2012 Patrick McDonald, HollywoodChicago.com

Source URL (retrieved on **Apr 19 2024 - 3:58am**):

<http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/20363/easy-metaphors-for-wwii-in-war-of-the-buttons>

Links:

[1] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/users/hankq>
[2] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/cl-ment-godefroy>
[3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/guillaume-canet>
[4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/hollywoodchicagocom-content>
[5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/ilona-bachelier>
[6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/jean-texler>
[7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/laetitia-casta>
[8] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/labels/review.html>
[9] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/patrick-mcdonald>
[10] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/the-weinstein-company>
[11] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/th-ophile-baquet>
[12] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/war-of-the-buttons>
[13] <mailto:pat@hollywoodchicago.com>
[14] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/about#PAT>