

JUST VISITING

The American Adaptation

Making this American adaptation of "Les Visiteurs" added the obvious challenge to the French actors of having to perform in English. While Jean Reno has starred in several American films and both he and Christian Clavier speak conversational English, Clavier has never before performed in an English language production.

"Both Christian and Jean were very worried about how good their English was at the beginning of the movie," remembers producer Mestres. "I personally thought it was excellent. But as Frenchmen acting in an American movie, it must have been unnerving for them because they are going to be judged by English-speaking audiences. Today, I think American audiences are interested in different accents and their accents add to the authenticity of this particular story."

However, in order to be understood clearly by a world audience, both actors were tutored in pronunciation. During filming, Reno consulted with his long-time dialect coach Cameron Watson. Clavier also worked diligently on all his English language skills. Clavier began studying with acting coach Vernice Klier (who coached Juliette Binoche in her Oscar®-winning performance in "The English Patient") several months prior to the beginning of production.

During the preparation period, they also read poetry and saw American films before tackling the script. "We would see go see a film a second time so Christian could also develop his comprehension," says Klier. Clavier also learned to perform some Shakespearean monologues as an exercise and began reading English-language novels.

They continued to work on the set daily on pronunciation and correct intonation. Klier remarked "I watch the playback monitor to make sure his mouth is moving correctly and watch his body language.

"Christian is a great student. He works very hard everyday. On his days off and weekends too," beams Klier. "I make a lot of lists. We just finished a book and I've circled all the words he mispronounced and now he's writing a story using those words. Once he learns those words, it becomes a part of his life and he never forgets."

"It's very exciting yet difficult for me to play in English," relates Clavier. "I'm astonished when I make the American crew laugh in English. It's very helpful that Jean and I know these characters so well. This first English experience for me is possible because I've already played the character, even though he is changing in this film."

Christina Applegate experienced some of the Frenchmen's accent angst because she was required to perfect a royal English accent for her part as Princess Rosalind. Applegate worked with Barbara Berkery, who coached Gwyneth Paltrow's Oscar®-winning performance in "Shakespeare in Love."