

# STAN AND ULYSSE - THE SPIRIT OF INVENTION

A DOCUMENTARY-WESTERN BENJAMIN HENNOT

## SHORT SYNOPSIS

### *INSIDE THE HEADS OF THE FREEDOM WARRIORS*

Brussels 1940. André, 16, joins forces with Marcel who is 18. The two of them became members of a very autonomous group of Resistance fighters, Group D of the Hotton Service. They changed their names to Stan and Ulysse.

In 1942, they set up an underground cell in the region of Chimay and Couvin. The population supported them, the occupying forces feared them. And with reason: the “*sabotage und widerstandgruppe Franckson*” carried out numerous daring feats.

Attacks on locomotives, fires in wood fuel depots, hold-ups, pistol duels, deadly ambushes, neutralisation of Rexist mayors, the severing of the Berlin-Paris cable, guns and explosives of all types: *Stan and Ulysse, the Spirit of Invention*, introduces a hitherto unknown sub-genre to the field of documentary: the *French-speaking Wallonia Western*, also known as *Documentary Western*, or *Apache Tutorial*.

André and Marcel tell us about an adventure that smells of gunpowder and plastique, where noble ethics mingle with mocking irony.



## RESISTANCE FIGHTER FANTASY

The story of their Resistance is presented in two parts that are very different stylistically, depending on the places where the action unfolds and the mood.

Firstly, Brussels, a sleepwalking tramway: a brief account of their initiation, which takes us through a dark capital, under the sinister shroud of the Occupation.

Next, the Resistance group in Thiérache is a ghost train. The aesthetic resembles that of a fairground attraction. The Resistance fighters, after all, had to knock up effective devices with whatever they could find. The film endeavours to reproduce their world using a heterogeneous range of materials: silent westerns, contemporary archives, regional found footage, snatches of propagandist programmes from *Radio-Bruxelles* and the Germanized press, photographs, acronyms and evocations of the Resistance, Ordnance Survey maps, guns and Sten Guns, steam locomotives. To the beat of Indian drums, scratchy guitars and

textured drones, all this material garnishes their cheerful memories of dynamite or, more modestly, of firecrackers.

## LONG SYNOPSIS

*Stan and Ulysse, the Spirit of Invention* displays the still glowing hostility that two resistance fighters have for the Occupier and their freedom-crushing regime. They are Belgian. They are over ninety. Their memories of the Resistance burn brightly. Stan was a student at Koekelberg secondary school, Ulysse was a medical student at the ULB (Brussels Free University). The two former resistance fighters relish remembering the mocking tricks they played on the Occupier and how they got away with it.

Stan and Ulysse are the grandfathers we all wish we had, to tell us about History. Their experiences in the Resistance inspire us with an imaginary world of combat and victory, and it feels good.

History on a human level. Here we see the best of mankind, in their highest inclinations, where courage is mixed with ruse, inventiveness rubs shoulders with intelligence and audacity, and cooperation strengthens the resolve not to give in.

Firstly in Brussels, we follow their steps towards the harsh apprenticeship of a life of clandestinity. These faltering steps are accompanied by a vagabond wandering through a capital frozen under occupation, with brief captions set to a sound track that portrays the climate of tension.

Then in Thiérache, in their resistance unit in the region of Couvin and Chimay. Here, they recount the joyful tales of their daring actions: attacks on locomotives, hold-ups, pistol duels, deadly ambushes, guns and gunpowder of all sorts. *Stan and Ulysse, the Spirit of Invention* introduces a hitherto unknown sub-genre to the field of documentary: the *French-speaking Wallonia Western*.

This self-organized war has made its protagonists rich in experience, rich in stories to tell. Their tales are not those of the grunts bossed around by some distant high command and obeying the orders of their officers: industrial war, the war of armies. These are the tales of men who came together freely to wage war on their own scale with their own means: artisanal war.

They were not soldiers but armed citizens. And the tone and form of the film strive to celebrate their spirit as freedom fighters. Though ravaging and perilous, their fight was nevertheless imbued with a double ethic: that of the partisan, who works towards the emancipation of his community, and that of the artisan, who strives for precision and quality. Group D? They were the kings of System D. They didn't invent gunpowder but they cleverly recycled it. Their creative make-do attitude, their effective do-it-yourself devices are portrayed in the film so as to respect not only the letter of their memories, but also the spirit of their youth.

## BENJAMIN HENNOT

Graduate in Romance Languages and Literature. Commentator on the works of Clément Pansaers and specialist on the influence of Taoism on the Dada movement.

2013: documentary *La jungle étroite*, 57'- Produced by Underworld and supported by the FDW. Broadcast on Arte Belgium in February 2013. The Workers' Brotherhoods in Mouscron or: the joyful combination of permaculture and popular education.

2015: documentary *La Bataille de l'Eau Noire*, 73', produced by YC Aligator Film, co-produced by Be-TV, RTBF, WIP, Atelier Graphoui and supported by the FWB. Demonstrators against the dam in Couvin in 1978 or: their prodigious anti-technocratic victory and the first free radio in Belgium.

2016: publication in number 21 of the DITS journal of the text: "L'apologie de la paresse de Clément Pansaers – "Un dada dans la zone interdite du zen"".

2018: *Stan & Ulysse, the Spirit of Invention* or: the most disruptive and offensive Resistance cell in Wallonia combatting the totalitarianism of its time. Supported by the FWB, co-produced by RTBF – WIP - -GSARA – SHELTER PROD.

2018: creation of a radio programme on Clément Pansaers: "Revival pansaerien" supported by the *Fonds d'aide à la création radiophonique* (FACR) and Gulliver.

Benjamin Hennot loves stories about the vanquished, especially when they triumph. His films tell the stories that he likes best: the History of popular movements.