



MICHEL PICCOLI: A FEARLESS TALENT

# Themroc

## Themroc

*Director:* Claude Faraldo  
*Production Companies:* Filmanthrope, FDL Productions  
*Executive Producer:* Hélène Vager  
*Production Manager:* Jean-Claude Bourlat  
*Assistant Director:* Robin Davis  
*Screenplay:* Claude Faraldo  
*Director of Photography:* Jean-Marc Ripert  
*Special Effects:* André Trielli  
*Demolitions:* Gérard Streiff  
*Editor:* Noun Serra  
*Art Director:* C. Lamarque  
*Sound:* Harald Maury  
*Cast:*  
Michel Piccoli (*Themroc*)  
Béatrice Romand (*sister*)  
Marilyn Tolo (*superior shapely secretary*)  
Francesca Romana Coluzzi (*female neighbour*)  
Madame Herviale (*mother*)  
Coluche  
Michel Fortin  
Jean Herbert  
Stéphane Bout  
Dominique Dorel  
François Joxe  
Marie Kerusoe  
François Dyrek  
Paul Barrault  
Roger Riffard  
Madeleine Damien  
Jean Aron  
M. Léon  
Romain Bouteille  
Jean-Michel Hass  
Patrick Dewaere  
Henri Guybet  
Catherine Mity  
Miou-Miou  
Sotha  
Philippe Manesse  
Ge-Ge  
France 1972  
109 mins

## BECOME A BFI MEMBER

Enjoy a great package of film benefits including priority booking at BFI Southbank and BFI Festivals. Join today at [bfi.org.uk/join](http://bfi.org.uk/join)

## SIGHT AND SOUND

Never miss an issue with **Sight and Sound**, the BFI's internationally renowned film magazine. Subscribe from just £25\*

\* Price based on a 6-month print subscription (UK only). More info: [sightandsoundsubs.bfi.org.uk](http://sightandsoundsubs.bfi.org.uk)

**SIGHT AND SOUND**

## Contemporary reviews

Michel Piccoli, red mane flowing and scruffy in his greasy vest, sits in a squalid kitchen making his 6 o'clock breakfast. Fury-like, his elderly mother shuffles in, points tetchily at the clock, and noisily uses the adjacent lavatory. Soon his nubile young sister (Béatrice Romand) enters, dressing gown awry; another roar from decrepit plumbing. Piccoli follows her to her tiny bedroom and savours her nude body, apparently asleep. A cuckoo clock abruptly trills, and Piccoli stomps off to work, his exit timed to the arrival of the dustmen. Piccoli is Themroc, middle-aged worker, and this is his usual start to the day: claustrophobic dreariness, repressed lust, the stern finger of authority and the glib tyranny of time. We follow him to work; mindless solidarity with a neighbour drone as they support each other on their bicycles; cattle-like crowds herding through the stockade of the Metro; the sullen time-clock.

Once inside the factory, this low-key comedy turns a sharp corner into pointed farce. After changing into factory uniform in a room where one side is used by those whose uniforms are white and the other by those who wear yellow – and the border is warily policed – the workers move on to their job, which is to paint the opposite sides of the factory fence. Discovered playing Peeping Tom on the boss and his secretary, Themroc is brought to justice by an obsessively pencil-sharpening official; whereupon he goes berserk, terrifying his guards, and stalks off home to make love to his willing sister, throw his consumer goods out of the flat, and barricade himself in after demolishing the exterior wall. With police and army apparently powerless to cope with this unfamiliar threat to orderliness, who seems impervious to bullets and tear-gas (indeed this 'proletarian hash' turns him on), Themroc is soon out hunting *flics* and carrying back his prey to cook them pig-like on a spit. Whether *pour encourager les autres* or not is never exactly clear, but other courtyard residents are soon joining him to make a caveman commune.

Claude Faraldo, the one-time worker who wrote and directed *Themroc*, disclaims any intentional cultural influences or references; but it's difficult not to see the film in the best tradition of farce, descended from the stock characters of the Commedia and with specific echoes of that monument to anti-authoritarianism, Jarry's *Ubu Roi*. Like the awful Père Ubu, Faraldo's authority figures – workers in company uniform, top bosses and policemen (two of them played by the same actor to give theatrical stress to the notion of conformity) – emote in a meaningless language, a kind of nonsense Esperanto. The walls of the factory are plastered with jabberwocky signs, all characterising the inhabitants as 'gentil'. Outside the system there is either wordlessness or a variety of primal scream. Themroc's industrial cough, which begins at breakfast, swells as he revolts into a roar, later inflected by grunts, growls and jabberings.

By eliminating language, Faraldo is apparently aiming to break down for the worker-viewer the social barriers imposed by it; there's no testing that, of course, but what the film does reveal is a potential for a new kind of nonverbal cinema. Here visual gags abound: an alarm clock, jettisoned with the other consumer durables, lands across the courtyard in the room of a sleeping man, where it goes off, springing him puppet-like into the day's routine; the Tati-like insouciance with which Themroc slings his downed policeman over his shoulder; the desperate floundering of the neighbour worker who suddenly discovers that he can't ride a bicycle unassisted. The courtyard itself, a far cry from the lyrical neighbourliness of *Le Jour se lève*, is alive with running gags. An obsessive car-polisher who keeps one hand on his car while the rest of him is all eyes and ears as he watches for new developments; or the stuffy policeman, busily seducing the women tenants.

*Themroc* wanders off at self-indulgent tangents, particularly in the scene where the hero strolls along the Metro tunnels, roaring at the trains, or when with a little help

## MICHEL PICCOLI: A FEARLESS TALENT

### **La Mort en ce jardin (Evil Eden)**

Thu 1 Jun 20:35; Tue 6 Jun 18:15

### **Le Mépris (Contempt)**

From Fri 2 Jun

### **The Diary of a Chambermaid**

### **(Le journal d'une femme de chambre)**

Fri 2 Jun 18:15; Fri 16 Jun 20:55

### **Belle de jour**

Fri 2 Jun 20:40; Sun 25 Jun 18:45

### **Les Choses de la vie (The Things of Life)**

Sat 3 Jun 12:30; Tue 13 Jun 20:45

### **Themroc**

Sat 3 Jun 15:00; Wed 14 Jun 18:15

### **La Grande Bouffe (Blow-Out)**

Sat 3 Jun 20:30; Mon 12 Jun 18:10

### **Ten Days' Wonder (La Décade prodigieuse)**

Sun 4 Jun 15:20; Sat 17 Jun 20:40

### **Vincent, François, Paul et les autres**

Sun 4 Jun 18:00; Sun 18 Jun 13:10

### **Beyond Good and Evil:**

### **The Discreet Charm of Michel Piccoli**

Mon 5 Jun 18:15

### **Passion**

Tue 6 Jun 21:00; Fri 16 Jun 18:20

### **Spoiled Children (Des enfants gâtés)**

Wed 7 Jun 18:10; Mon 12 Jun 20:40

### **Une chambre en ville (A Room in Town)**

Wed 14 Jun 20:45; Sat 24 Jun 13:00

### **Mauvais sang (The Night Is Young)**

Sat 17 Jun 15:15; Thu 22 Jun 20:40

### **Milou en mai (Milou in May)**

Sun 18 Jun 16:00; Mon 26 Jun 20:40

### **Belle toujours**

Wed 21 Jun 20:50; Sun 25 Jun 16:30

### **La Belle Noiseuse**

Sat 24 Jun 15:20; Wed 28 Jun 18:10

### **Habemus Papam – We Have a Pope**

Sun 25 Jun 14:00; Thu 29 Jun 20:45

### Promotional partner



lafromagerie.co.uk

### BFI PLAYER

We are always open online on BFI Player where you can watch the best new, cult & classic cinema on demand. Showcasing hand-picked landmark British and independent titles, films are available to watch in three distinct ways: Subscription, Rentals & Free to view.

See something different today on [player.bfi.org.uk](http://player.bfi.org.uk)

from his sister he lures a worker hired to wall him back inside the flat. The repetitions have point in the earlier scenes, where the same shots of workers on the march to work, cut in with Themroc's clock and his mother's warning finger, build to a powerful impression of an urban hell, echoed at the end by a despairing (or polemical?) montage of concrete prisons masquerading as homes. But repeated shots of Themroc's mother hiccupping away are merely tiresome, and even Themroc's anarchy runs out of potential when it is seen increasingly to be reaction rather than anything resembling action. Piccoli's playing is energetically and engagingly boorish (a side which exists by suggestion in his 'bourgeois' roles); but Béatrice Romand is severely restricted in a role which asks of her only to bare an occasional breast and look ecstatic. Breaking the incest taboo may have something to do with advocating sexual revolution as a prerequisite of political revolution; but once the point is made, Faraldo seems only to repeat it with stereotyped sexual fantasies. By the same token, for all its genial energy (and even mindless images of destruction are irresistible at times), the concept of an urban noble savage as an alternative to regimentation is one which might elsewhere be considered counter-revolutionary.

Victoria Radin, *Sight and Sound*, Summer 1973

By inventing a revolutionary form to match his emancipated ideas, Claude Faraldo manages in *Themroc* (his third film, but the first to be seen in this country) to imbue the often abstract idea of liberation with a sensual and persuasively joyful life. Convinced that it is not so much the struggle which matters as what lies beyond it, he refuses – like his hero – to take the opposition seriously, so that a whole gamut of authority figures in and out of uniform (parents, policemen, shop-stewards and self-important executives) fall victim to a satirical technique which combines the best of slapstick, surrealism and theatre of the absurd.

Communicating in an invented language – compounded of sniffs, coughs, whistles and nonsense words whose inflections make their meaning universally accessible – his characters are often choreographed in ways which (evoking the stylised ineptitudes of the Keystone cops) underline the robot aspect of their social functions: the two rival crews of workmen, dressed in different coloured work-clothes, assigned respectively to paint the inside and the outside of the factory railings; the assorted species of policemen, each busy passing responsibility and abuse on to another section of the force. Of course it would be a shade facile to suggest that tear-gas and bullets are ever going to become the opium of the people (though Faraldo believes that demonstrators are too inclined to mistake the apparatus of repression for repression itself); but in context the fantasy/absurdity of the later scenes appears entirely convincing, in part because they have been gradually developed, from a basis of detailed, realistic observation. Using two hand-held cameras (the film was originally shot on Super-16), Faraldo captures the nightmare of the early-morning rush-hour and the daily grind, and effects a gradual transition from *cinéma-vérité* (its home truths discreetly sharpened by sardonic editing and an insistent soundtrack) before bombarding us with his escalating assaults on such sacred cows as the dignity of labour and the sanctity of the family.

He is admirably assisted in his attack, not just by Michel Piccoli's uncouth, gentle, magnificently leonine performance, but also by the Café de la Gare troupe, whose appearance in a variety of roles helps underline the idea of an ubiquitous conformity. *Themroc* succeeds in being poetic without being arty and, by using laughter as a critical tactic, in suggesting that revolution in a puritanical society ought to take a hedonistic form. Hopefully, it also puts a final nail in the coffin of all those irrepressibly Gallic comedies involving colourful stereotypes in cobble-stoned courtyards. Though as the final shots suggest, an infinity of walls, old and new, are still standing solid.

Jan Dawson, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, June 1973