

Papillon (1973 film)

Papillon is a 1973 historical period drama prison film directed by Franklin J. Schaffner. The screenplay by Dalton Trumbo and Lorenzo Semple Jr. was based on the 1969 autobiography by the French convict Henri Charrière. The film stars Steve McQueen as Henri Charrière ("Papillon") and Dustin Hoffman as Louis Dega. Because it was filmed at remote locations, the film was quite expensive for the time (\$12 million), but it earned more than twice that in its first year of release.^[4] The film's title is French for "Butterfly," referring to Charrière's tattoo and nickname.

Contents

- Plot**
- Cast**
- Production**
- Soundtrack**
- Box office**
- Critical reception**
 - Awards and honors
- In popular culture**
- Remake**
- See also**
- References**
- External links**

Plot

Henri Charrière (Steve McQueen), a safecracker nicknamed *Papillon* because of the butterfly tattoo on his chest, is wrongly convicted of murdering a pimp. In 1933 he is sentenced to life imprisonment within the penal system in French Guiana. En route, he meets a fellow convict, Louis Dega (Dustin Hoffman), a forger and embezzler who is convinced that his wife will secure his release. Papillon offers to protect Dega if he will underwrite the former's escape once they reach French Guiana. Enduring the horrors of life in a jungle labor camp, the two eventually develop a friendship.

One day, Papillon defends Dega from a sadistic guard and escapes into the jungle, but is captured and sentenced to solitary confinement. In gratitude, Dega has extra food smuggled to Papillon. When the smuggling is discovered, the warden screens Papillon's cell in darkness for six months and cuts his rations in half, believing that it will force him to reveal his benefactor. Though emaciated and half-insane, and reduced to eating insects to survive, Papillon refuses to give up Dega.

After two years he is released and sent to the infirmary in St-Laurent-du-Maroni to recover. Papillon sees Dega again and asks him to help arrange for another escape attempt. Dega arranges for him to meet an inmate doctor, who offers to secure them a boat on the outside with the help of a man named Pascal. Fellow prisoner Clusiot (Woodrow Parfrey), and a homosexual orderly named André Maturette (Robert Deman) join the escape plot.

During the escape, Clusiot is knocked unconscious by a guard. Forced to subdue the guard, Dega reluctantly joins Papillon and Maturette, and the three climb the walls to the outside. Dega fractures his ankle in the fall. The trio meet Pascal and the men escape into the night. In the jungle the next day, Pascal delivers the prisoners to their boat. After he leaves they discover that it is a fake. They encounter a local trapper (John Quade), who reveals that he had killed the bounty hunters that were waiting for them, and guides the three to a nearby leper colony, where they obtain supplies and a seaworthy boat.

The trio eventually land in Honduras, and are accosted by a group of soldiers, who open fire and wound Maturette. He is captured along with Dega, still crippled by his broken ankle, while Papillon evades the soldiers and lives for a long period with a native tribe; he awakens one morning to find them gone, leaving him with a small sack of pearls. Papillon travels to a police checkpoint and pays a nun to take him to her convent. There he asks the Mother Superior for refuge, but she instead turns him over to the authorities.

Papillon is brought back to French Guiana and sentenced to another five years of solitary confinement. He emerges a graying old man along with Maturette, whom he sees just before he dies. Papillon is then moved to the remote Devil's Island, where he reunites with Dega, who has long given up all hope of being released. From a high cliff, Papillon observes a small cove where he discovers that the waves are powerful enough to carry a man out to sea and to the nearby mainland.

Papillon urges Dega to join him in another escape, and the men make two floats out of bagged up coconuts. As they stand on the cliff side, Dega decides not to escape and begs Papillon not to either. Papillon embraces Dega a final time, and then leaps from the cliff. Grasping his float, he is successfully carried out to sea.

A narrator states that Papillon made it to freedom, and lived the rest of his life a free man. Footage of the real prison plays over the end credits, which is shown to be abandoned and covered in jungle growth.

Cast

- Steve McQueen as Henri Charrière aka Papillon
- Dustin Hoffman as Louis Dega
- Victor Jory as Indian chief
- Don Gordon as Julot
- Anthony Zerbe as Toussaint, leper colony chief
- Robert Deman as André Maturette
- Woodrow Parfrey as Clusiot
- Bill Mumy as Lariot
- Richard Angarola as Commandant
- George Coulouris as Dr. Chatal
- Ratna Assan as Zoraima
- William Smithers as Warden Barrot
- Val Avery as Pascal
- Gregory Sierra as Antonio
- Vic Tayback as Sergeant
- John Quade as Masked Breton
- Mills Watson as Guard
- Fred Sadoff as Deputy Warden

Production

Papillon was filmed at various locations in Spain and Jamaica, with the cave scenes filmed beneath what is now the Xtabi hotel on the cliffs of Negril. The town scenes near the beginning of the film were shot in Hondarribia in Spain.^[5] The penal colony scenes were filmed in Falmouth, Jamaica, and the swamp scenes were shot near Ferris Cross. But Steve McQueen's famous cliff-jumping scene near the end of the film took place from the cliffs in Maui, Hawaii.^[6] McQueen insisted on performing the cliff-jumping stunt himself. He later said that it was "one of the most exhilarating experiences of my life." McQueen was paid \$2 million for his services in the film along with the contractual stipulation that he receive first billing over Dustin Hoffman.^[7] In addition, author Henri Charrière himself acted as consultant on location: he let the makers of the film know of the things he encountered during his years of imprisonment.

Soundtrack

The score to *Papillon* was composed and conducted by Jerry Goldsmith. The film marked Goldsmith's fourth of seven collaborations with director Franklin J. Schaffner, following his Academy Award-nominated scores to *Planet of the Apes* (1968) and *Patton* (1970). Both the director and composer shared the belief that film music should be used economically; they wanted the music as commentary only in sequences where it can emphasize the psychological aspects of the film. In *Papillon*, the film is two and a half hours long, but has 40 minutes with music.

Goldsmith's compositions, characterized by a late romantic symphonic and impressionistic style suffused with a metered, exotic timbre (using instruments from Caribbean folk music), are distributed mainly in the second half of the film. They generally accompany scenes outside the prison, during the various escape attempts by the protagonist. He used a delicate melodic approach, dominated by a very catchy theme expressed as a waltz, which was often played by an accordion. This instrument was associated with the French origin of the protagonists. The theme became famous with the popularity of the film, and it was released in many performance variations by different record companies.

The score was partially produced on vinyl in 1973 and reissued over the years. In the 21st century, an edition was produced on CD by Universal Records France. For the first time, this has the complete version of music from the film (it includes about five minutes of previously unreleased tracks). The DVD version of the English-language version of the film includes an option to listen to Goldsmith's music as an isolated audio track.

Goldsmith had his sixth Academy Award nomination for Best Original Score for this soundtrack. It was one of the American Film Institute's 250 nominated soundtracks for the top 25 American film scores.^[8]

Box office

The film was a hit, earning North American theatrical rentals of \$21.3 million.^[9]

Critical reception

Roger Ebert's review at the time of the film's original release was two-of-four stars; he said that the main flaw was a failure to gain audience interest in McQueen's and Hoffman's characters: "You know something has gone wrong when you want the hero to escape simply so that the movie can be over."^[10]

Papillon currently holds an 82% rating on Rotten Tomatoes from a sample of 22 reviews.

Awards and honors

In 1974, the film was nominated for an Oscar for Best Music, Original Dramatic Score (Jerry Goldsmith) and a Golden Globe Award for Best Motion Picture Actor, Drama (Steve McQueen).

The film is recognized by American Film Institute in this list:

- 2005: AFI's 100 Years of Film Scores – Nominated^[11]

In popular culture

The song "Devil's Island" by the American heavy metal band Megadeth (written by lead singer Dave Mustaine) from their 1986 album *Peace Sells... but Who's Buying?* was inspired by this film. Dave mentions this before playing the song during the band's *Rude Awakening* live DVD.

The song "Human Insecticide" by the Canadian thrash metal band Annihilator from their 1989 album *Alice in Hell* was inspired by this film.

Remake

A remake of the film, also called *Papillon*, was released in 2017, directed by Danish director Michael Noer.^[12] Charlie Hunnam played the lead role of Henri Charrière, while Rami Malek played Louis Dega.^[13] The film premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival in September 2017.^[14]

See also

- List of American films of 1973

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External links

- Papillon* (https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0070511/) on IMDb
- Papillon* (http://www.afi.com/members/catalog/DetailView.aspx?s=&Movie=55041) at the American Film Institute Catalog
- Papillon* (https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/papillon/) at Rotten Tomatoes

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<i>Papillon</i>	
 <div>Theatrical release poster by Tom Jung</div>	
Directed by	Franklin J. Schaffner
Produced by	Robert Dorfmann <p>Franklin J. Schaffner</p> Ted Richmond (executive)
Screenplay by	Dalton Trumbo <p>Lorenzo Semple Jr.</p>
Based on	<i>Papillon</i> <p>by Henri Charrière</p>
Starring	Steve McQueen <p>Dustin Hoffman</p>
Music by	Jerry Goldsmith
Cinematography	Fred J. Koenekamp
Edited by	Robert Swink
Distributed by	Allied Artists (USA) <p>Columbia Pictures (Non-USA)</p>
Release date	December 16, 1973
Running time	150 minutes
Country	United States <p>France^[1]</p>
Language	English
Budget	\$13.5 million ^[2]
Box office	\$53,267,000 ^[3]