



# stella

A film by Sylvie Verheyde



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Bruno Berthemy presents

# stella

A film by Sylvie Verheyde

2008 • 1.85 - 35 mm • Dolby SRD • 103 minutes

## PRESS

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# Synopsis

**1977.** Stella, 11, begins her first year  
in a prestigious Parisian secondary school.  
Stella has come out into the world...

A new world,  
far from the one she knows.  
Almost a miracle.

She lives in a café,  
a working-class café, on the edge of Paris.

This new school year will change her life.



# Interview with Sylvie Verheyde

## **Where did the idea of «Stella» come from?**

Stella is based on my childhood memories and in particular, on my first year of secondary school in 1977. I'd wanted to make a film about it for a long time. But it was when my son began secondary school four years ago that I began writing it.

At that time, there was a lot of heated discussion on schools: on authority, coeducation, the veil, school as a means of upward social mobility, etc. All that made me look at my own vision of school and secondary school. A secondary school that I clung to despite my parents' many moves. It was my only reference point, my only anchor during my adolescence. I wanted to talk about the opportunity that I had been given.

## **Is «Stella» autobiographical?**

Yes. Like Stella, I grew up in a working-class café, a world that was tough, violent, far from the world of childhood.

Like her, I was catapulted into a famous Parisian secondary school. And like her, I arrived there alone with my soccer ball under my arm. Like her, I spit on a boy on the playground and went home with a black eye on the first evening!

## **«Stella» is also Léora Barbara. How did you choose her?**

I wanted to go beyond a journalistic account and move into the fictional realm, from the point of view of a young girl. I was looking for a heroine. I met Léora during the first week of casting. When she arrived, she was determined, fragile and mysterious.

She had never made a film. I trusted her. On the set, we didn't speak much. I gave her very little direction. We understood each other. She put her entire self into it, which was necessary, as the shoot wasn't easy. She helped me a lot and the more that I filmed her, the more the story became hers

## **Is the voice off that accompanies Stella your voice?**

Yes. In the beginning it was an adult voice written in the past tense: my voice. It helped in writing the script. It was a way for me to keep my distance and add humor... It structured the narrative so we didn't have to have a strict chronology. It let events come crashing in, in a chaotic way, the way a child would live them. It also let us go straight to the heart of the matter. I ended up using the present tense and it became Stella's voice.



## **Your film confronts two very different worlds, the café and school. How did you approach these two universes?**

The scenes in the café were my main worry. When you've grown up in a café, every café is in some ways your home. You know every odor and every sound. That's why in a film, nothing exasperates me more than the café scene that doesn't work.

Above all, life in the café is the lives of Sergio and Rosy, Stella's parents, and their customers, especially the regulars.

The mother is Karole Rocher. « Stella » is our third film together. We both come from the same background. Like me, she was a waitress and knows well the gestures and the intonations...

The father is Benjamin Biolay. At the beginning, the idea seemed a bit strange, especially for my producer. But I was sure of myself. We'd just done a fiction film for ARTE together and he had really impressed me.

They form an attractive couple, « stars » in their world.

As for the regulars, the customers, the friends, we had to recreate a group, a mix of very different people, actors and non-actors, who could get along and on whom I could count to make the café live. As we didn't have a lot of money, this let me shoot freely, without rehearsing, with a hand-held camera.

For the school, on the other hand, the camera didn't move much. It's a world with rules, but it's also open to the outside world, with medium long shots that were set up.

As I was worried that I'd be bored at the school, I worked with actors who could surprise me. There were also non-actors, a real teacher, a real headmistress...

I didn't want to make any mistakes.

## **In essence, Stella is as out of place in the café as she is at school...**

Yes. What's certain is that she doesn't possess the codes to the world of school. For a long time, I wondered how to show her lack of culture. It seems to me that with her remark on the camps, this is clear.

As for the café, even if it is her home, it really isn't the right place for a young girl. It's a place where there is no room to be a child. To the point that sometimes the roles are reversed. When Stella comes back from school, the adults have a water fight, like children. It's the same when Stella goes to her grandmother's house in the North. Even if she's spent every vacation there and her only friend is there, she isn't integrated. She is «the Parisian». If at school, she's the poor girl, in the North, she's the rich one.

Little by little, she finds her place when someone starts to listen to her: Gladys.

With Gladys, Stella discovers another world, which finally isn't that far from her home. A world she didn't have access to, which she never even dreamed existed. Above all, she will discover words. The words that she was missing. First of all, those of others: literature, beautiful images that help you to live, words that express feelings.

And then, little by little, her own words.



### **You take a tender, but hard look at your adult characters.**

Except for the character of Bubu, that's probably true. If life is tough, it's not only tough for Stella. In this sense, all the adults in the film have excuses and want to do better, even if most of them aren't able to. Stella's parents, for example, are not monsters. They have flaws, weaknesses and shortcomings, but they are struggling with life.

Most of all, the film is the vision of a child who is full of hope. And then, all of the characters, except for Bubu once again, are still alive.

### **Music plays an important role in the film. Notably, hits from the 70s. What decided their use and your choices?**

Popular music isn't only there to tell us what epoch it is. It also defines a social class. At Gladys', bookshelves are in the living room. At Stella's, there's a jukebox in her living room. I used the music literally. Feelings and Stella's voice are reflected in the lyrics of songs by Sheila, Daniel Guichard and Gérard Lenormand, or in the lyrics of Bernard Lavilliers.

The music follows Stella's evolution. The more the film advances, the more she is in touch with her feelings and the more the original music becomes important. And finally, the song in the final credits. They are her words: «I'm going far... I am far... I want to continue on ». But it's my voice.



# Léora Barbara

« Very quickly, I knew that Léora would be « Stella ». It was something she had, the way she didn't try to please others or do the right thing. I recognized it immediately.

There was a familiarity between us.

I'd seen other children, of course, but I always came back to Léora. We did tests where I read with her. Tests with Karole also. And then I had to convince her mother who had some doubts about what the script would involve.

I never regretted my choice. On the set, Léora became a person I knew I could count on, despite shooting conditions that weren't always easy. Very quickly, she was respected by everyone, in her own way, a way that could be, at times, intimidating for the crew. The trust between us, her intelligence and the way that she made the role hers, created a very exclusive relationship which I can now see helped the film.

We didn't have to speak.

She knew...»

*Léora Barbara is 11.*

*She started acting in « Etat de grâce », a TV film by Pascal Chaumeil.*

*« Stella » is her first feature film.*

# Mélissa Rodrigues

« It was François Guignard, the Casting Director, who discovered Melissa on a playground in Pantin. She was « the brat » there. François thought that she would make a believable « Stella ». But as I was set on Léora, I saw in Melissa a potential « Gladys ». I absolutely didn't want a girlfriend who was there to make Stella look good and Melissa seemed to have enough spirit to avoid this trap. The clear differences between the two girls were interesting. Melissa started working with real determination. She wasn't immediately believable as the « top of the class ». We worked together. And as she is gifted, she imposed herself with her own mix of gentleness and violence.

Her meeting with Léora finally convinced me. The way that they joined together, while each remained wary. This corresponded perfectly to the characters. »

*« Stella » is Melissa Rodrigues' first appearance on the screen*

# Karole Rocher

« In my mind, Karole was always « Stella's mother ». From the writing of the screenplay. In fact, as soon as I chose Léora, I had to see her with Karole. As Karole is a very good actress and talented at improvising, I knew that if Léora held her own, that would be a good sign.

I knew from the beginning that I could count on Karole, on her talent and her energy. For the film, I needed this ally.

And I knew that she was the only one who would be able to portray correctly her character's mix of brutality, severity and of extreme weakness.»

*Karole Rocher began her career in 1995 in Olivier Dahan's video-clip for Princesses Erika: "Faut qu'je travaille". She then appeared with Emma de Caunes in « Brother » by Sylvie Verheyde. She worked with Christian Vincent in « Save Me », and then worked again in 2001 with Sylvie Verheyde for « Princesses ». We have also seen her in « Osmosis » by Raphaël Fetjo and in « Scorpion » by Julien Séri.*

# Benjamin Biolay

« For the role of Stella's father, mine, I needed an actor who could play a man on the decline with elegance.

We had just done « Sang Froid » together where he had the main role and I knew that he had the depth and sensitivity to play my father.

He knew how to make a character that doesn't have a lot going for him - a cuckolded alcoholic, who's lost - dignified, likeable, even sexy.

We had to be able to share in the love with which Stella looked at her father. Benjamin, with the tenderness and the generosity that he gave off, enabled this. »

*Singer and composer, Benjamin Biolay has made 5 albums since 2001:*

*« Rose Kennedy », « Négatif », « Home », « A l'origine » and « Trash Ye-Ye ».*

*His screen acting debut was in 2006 with Géraldine Pailhas in « Didine » by Vincent Dietschy and in « Sang froid » by Sylvie Verheyde, a fiction film shot for Arte. He appeared in it with Laura Smet. Since then, Benjamin Biolay has been in a short film by Katia Lewkowicz, « C'est pour quand », shown on Canal +.*

# Guillaume Depardieu

«I had initially thought of Guillaume for the role of Stella's father, but when I met him, I immediately saw that he should be Alain Bernard, the film's positive character.

Stella's Prince Charming.

He has everything to attract her. Depth, kindness, sadness and a face that can't hide its feelings.

Guillaume brought me his talent, his way of being totally present. For the film, he created, with much delicacy, a special relationship with Léora.

As Prince Charming, I couldn't have dreamt of anyone better. »

*Guillaume Depardieu began his career in 1991 in «All the Mornings of the World» by Alain Corneau. He then worked with Pierre Salvadori in « Wild Target », 1992, « Les apprentis », 1994, «White Lies», 1997. He worked with Leos Carax « Pola X », 1998, Serge Bozon « La France », 2007 and Jacques Rivette « The Duchess of Langeais », 2007.*

*We can also see him in «Versailles» by Pierre Schoeller, « On War » by Bertrand Bonello, before appearing in «Au voleur» by Sarah Petit and«Circuit fermé»by Christine Dory.*

*« Stella » is his first collaboration with Sylvie Verheyde.*

# Sylvie Verheyde

Having gained notoriety with her short films: Entre chiens et loups [Canal + Prize at the Clermont-Ferrand Festival in 1992] and La Maison verte [Jury Prize in Nancy in 1993], Sylvie Verheyde then wrote and directed her feature film, Brother, which was selected by the 50th Cannes Film Festival in the section « Cinemas in France ». It won the Cyril Collard Prize in 1998 and Emma de Caunes was awarded the Cesar Award for the Most Promising Actress in 1998.

In 2000, she directed her second feature film, Princesses, with Emma de Caunes and Jean-Hugues Anglade.

For television, she wrote and directed in 2001, A Woman's Love, for M6 for the series « Combat de femmes » and in 2007, Sang Froid, a fiction film for ARTE with Benjamin Biolay and Laura Smet [Best Directing Prize at the La Rochelle Film Festival in 2007].

Stella is her third feature film.



# Cast

STELLA

**Léora BARBARA**

STELLA'S MOTHER

**Karole ROCHER**

STELLA'S FATHER

**Benjamin BIOLAY**

GLADYS

**Melissa RODRIGUES**

GENEVIÈVE

**Laëtitia GUERARD**

ALAIN-BERNARD

**Guillaume DEPARDIEU**

LOÏC

**Johan LIBEREAU**

BUBU

**Jeannick GRAVELINES**

YVON

**Thierry NEUVIC**

Mrs TILLIER DUMAS

**Valérie STROH**

Mrs DOUCHEWSKY

**Anne BENOIT**

Mr LARPIN

**Christophe BOURSEILLER**

# Technical Credits

A film written and directed by

**Sylvie Verheyde**

The screenplay was awarded the «Arlequin Prize»,  
the Grand Prize for the Best Screenwriter 2006

Produced by

**Bruno Berthemy**

cinematography

**Nicolas Gaurin**

film editing

**Christel Dewynter**

sound

**Dimitri Haulet**

**Sylvain Malbrant**

**Roland Duboué**

**Olivier Do Huu**

original music

**NousDeux the band**

set decoration

**Thomas Grézaud**

costume design

**Gigi Lepage**

first assistant director

**Valérie Roucher**

production manager

**Karim Canama**

casting director

**François Guignard**

a production  
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and  
**WDR / ARTE**

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**CINECINEMA**

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# Music

## **La chanson de Stella**

written by NousDeux The Band and performed by Sylvie Verheyde

## **Love me baby**

Performed by Sheila and B. Devotion

## **Ne fais pas tanguer le bateau**

Performed by Sheila

## **El Bimbo**

Composed and written by: Claude Morgani

## **Couleur menthe à l'eau**

[Moine / Papadiamandis] - Performed by Eddy Mitchell

## **Je vous dérange ?**

[Moine / Papadiamandis] - Performed by Eddy Mitchell

## **Il ne rentre pas ce soir**

[Moine / Papadiamandis] - Performed by Eddy Mitchell

## **Michèle**

Performed by Gérard Lenorman

## **15ème round**

Lyrics and Music by Bernard Lavilliers

## **Brand new cadillac**

Lyrics and music by Vince Taylor

## **La tendresse**

Lyrics by Daniel Guichard and Jacques Ferrière, Music by Patricia Carli

## **Les femmes**

C. Charbonneau - C. Carrère - J. Schmitt

## **Ou sont les femmes**

Performed by Patrick Juvet

## **Ti Amo**

Composed and written by: Giancarlo Bigazzi / Umberto Tozzi

## **Tu es le soleil**

Performed by Sheila





