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Cécile de France Thomas Doret

The Kid with a bike

A FILM BY

Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne



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OFFICIAL SELECTION
IN COMPETITION

LES FILMS DU FLEUVE and ARCHIPEL 35
Present

Cécile de France

Thomas Doret

The Kid with a bike

Written and Directed by Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne

French / Belgian / Italian Release date:

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Synopsis

Cyril, almost 12, has only one plan: to find the father who left him temporarily in a children's home.

By chance he meets Samantha, who runs a hairdressing salon and agrees to let him stay with her at weekends.

Cyril doesn't recognize the love Samantha feels for him, a love he desperately needs to calm his rage.

An interview with Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne

How did “The Kid with a Bike” come about?

Luc: We’d had the story in our heads for a long time: a woman who helps a boy emerge from the violence that holds him prisoner. The first image was this kid, this ball of nerves, pacified and soothed thanks to another human being.

Jean-Pierre: First we imagined Samantha as a doctor but we changed our minds and decided she was going to be a hairdresser, settled in her neighbourhood for a long time.

The film is very moving without ever falling into sentimentality.

Jean-Pierre: Thank goodness!

Luc: We were adamant that the audience would never find out why Samantha is drawn to Cyril. We didn’t want psychological explanations. We didn’t want the past to explain the present. We wanted the audience to think: “She is doing this!” Which is plenty already.

Cyril is always on the move. He’s restless.

Jean-Pierre: Yes, he’s often on his bike... This kid without any ties runs after love without knowing it.

Child-parent relationships often feature in your films: “The Promise”, “The Child”, “The Son”. Why?

Luc: We are all “sons of” and “daughters of”...

Jean-Pierre: Society makes stars of the individual. Perhaps it’s as a reaction to this that we keep coming back to the notion of a link. Even if it isn’t always biological, as with Samantha and Cyril...

Despite the violence of Cyril’s story the film has a bright side.

Jean-Pierre: Yes, we have tried to find some fluidity, something tangible in the direction. We filmed in the summer, which is a first for us.

Is kindness difficult to film?

Luc: On the face of it, evil is always more exciting (laughs). It was very important that we shouldn’t portray a clichéd kindness, of course, but that we stick as closely as possible to this feeling of openness and exchange.

Jean-Pierre: Filming a character who has someone else’s best interests at

heart hasn’t often happened to us. Shooting in the summer helped us give the film a certain brightness and softness. And Cécile de France conveys these qualities naturally.

It’s unusual for you to work with renowned actors.

Luc: Nothing was programmed. We never write with a specific actor in mind. As soon as we finished the screenplay we started to think about actresses and about Cécile first. With her we knew we’d avoid all psychology... that her body and her face were enough. We gave her the screenplay and she accepted right away. She asked us a few questions regarding the motivations of her character. We told her Samantha was there, end of story. She trusted us.

She seems to have rediscovered her Belgian accent...

Jean-Pierre: Yes! We were very careful with the accent. We didn’t want the “the French actress has arrived!” effect. Cécile is Belgian, let’s not forget that. She grew up not too far from where the film takes place, in the Meuse Valley, but her accent is slight and we didn’t want to overemphasize it.

How did you find Thomas Doret, the boy who plays Cyril and is almost always on screen?

Jean-Pierre: The usual way when you’re looking for actors of his age: we put an ad in the papers then held a casting of about a hundred kids. Thomas came on the first day, he was the fifth one we saw and it clicked right away.

Luc: Right from the start we were struck by the expression in his eyes, his stubborn air, his look of concentration...

Jean-Pierre: He also had an astonishing ability to learn his lines... and he had a lot of them. From the first tests - which in fact are the opening scene of the film - we felt that he was the character. He had an intuitive understanding of his part. Something immediately accurate and poignant, without ever snivelling.

Luc: He was the only one who was there consistently during the six weeks of rehearsal. He found himself in the position of leader! He already knew all the scenes by heart even though we hadn’t yet asked him at that stage. And when he got it wrong, he’d get really mad. Thomas is a brown belt in karate! It helps him with his concentration and his memory.

Two of your regulars also make an appearance: Olivier Gourmet, and Jérémie Renier, in the difficult role of the father.

Luc: Olivier just pops in, we had to find something for him to do! (laughs) We proposed him three options and he chose to play the cafe owner who serves the beers. It's only a small scene but it's important to us that he's there.

Jean-Pierre: Jérémie's part is meatier. Once he finished reading the screenplay and discovered his character he immediately told us that we'd found yet another lovely part for him to play! (laughs) But he plays the nice guys in other people's films so...

How did you write the screenplay? How long did it take?

Jean-Pierre: One year in all, with a few breaks. But we had discussed it at length beforehand.

Luc: We start with one character, one situation, and we make notes on everything that we find interesting. Then comes the structure, then a first draft, then another, then another... It takes us months.

And the shoot?

Luc: 55 days. With short nights. But we never worked after 1:30am... maybe once. We were filming with a 13-year-old boy. We were very prepared. We've never rehearsed so much before a shoot.

In “The Kid with a Bike” there's a city but also the forest that borders it...

Luc: We imagined a geographical triangle for this film: the city, the forest and the gas station. The forest is a place of dangerous attractions for Cyril, the place where he can learn how to become a crook. The city embodies the past with his father, and the present with Samantha. The gas station is a place of transition, where the plot takes numerous new turns.

Jean-Pierre: We wanted to construct the film as a kind of fairy tale, with baddies who make the boy lose his illusions, and Samantha, who appears as a kind of fairy. For a short while we even thought of calling the film “A Fairytale For Our Times”.

For once you use music, even though sparingly...

Luc: It's very rare in our films and we hesitated for a long time. In a fairytale

there has to be a development, with emotions and new beginnings. It seemed to us that music, at certain points, could act like a calming caress for Cyril.

You're back in Cannes again, where you have already won two Palmes d'Or (“ for Rosetta” in 1999 and “The Child” in 2005). What does the festival mean to you?

Jean-Pierre: It's very important that we show our films here. It's lovely to come back each time. We love the adrenalin rush that you only get in Cannes.

Luc: Our cinema owes a lot to this festival. Our story continues here, a happy one so far...

Interview with Cécile de France

What was your first reaction once you finished reading the screenplay of “The Kid with a Bike”?

The Dardennes write so well that I immediately saw the film... The power of simplicity is what best defines their work. This story of a young boy who wants to find his father needs no demonstrative effect. The intensity is subterranean; it rests on suggestion. The cinema of the two brothers doesn't give lessons, it refuses black and white interpretation and emotional blackmail. The screenplay was proof of that. And I just loved it.

How did the brothers present Samantha to you?

They don't like psychological explanations. Samantha is benevolent, radiant, but the Dardennes immediately made it clear to me that I should never overdo it in the sweetness department! They told me this film was a kind of modern fairy tale and that my job was to represent a woman who is a mixture of kindness and strength and whose motivations remain unknown. At first Cyril isn't so much attracted by Samantha as by the possibility she offers of finding his father. Cyril is the central character. Samantha is at his service. And I had to serve the story.

Frustrating?

Absolutely not! I like to be of service! And I really liked the fact that I had to forget certain actors' habits. I had to put my ego aside. With the Dardennes anyway, you have to put aside all forms of nonsense. Forget all about an “actor's performance”! Belgians have a “No to glamour!” attitude. “No to the star system!”, “All for the story!”. That's fine by me.

Have you wanted to work with them for a long time?

Yes. I love the way they show real life and our society. The Dardenne Brothers are Belgium! They film our country with such subtlety. I was truly honoured that they invited me into their world. The more singular the directors' world is, the more it enriches me.

Did you get much from the month of preparation before shooting?

A huge amount! Actors always want to fight for their character, to make the most of them. I would have tended to make Samantha sweeter. The rehearsals allowed the brothers to help me play down the maternal side. It was all about developing neutrality... a lot of work. We rehearsed for over a month,

on the actual sets, in costume. No comparison with the handful of read-throughs I'm used to. The brothers enjoy searching and like to take their time. And I liked that too.

How did you find working with your co-star Thomas Doret, who is only 13?

The Dardenne brothers are really good at making everyone feel equal. I never felt like the “experienced actor”. Thomas spent even more time than me rehearsing so in fact he was ahead of the game. His being new at acting gave him some advantages. He was able to find the spontaneity of his character much quicker than I. He didn't have to erase his previous experiences.

Has this experience changed the way you look at cinema?

Restraint is much more a part of my range now. I want to continue to create and invent but learning how not to do so was such a rich experience.

Here you are in competition in Cannes again...

The first time was in 2006 for “The Singer” by Xavier Giannoli. I have such fond memory of that giant screen, the atmosphere... I'm particularly proud to come back to Cannes for “The Kid with a Bike” which is part of a cinema genre I love most of all. A film that helps us understand the world we live in does us good.

Cécile de France

THE KID WITH A BIKE - Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne
A BUTTERFLY KISS - Karine Silla
HEREAFTER - Clint Eastwood
GARDIENS DE L'ORDRE - Nicolas Boukhrief
SOEUR SOURIRE - Stijn Coninx
MESRINE: KILLER INSTINCT - Jean-François Richet
OÙ EST LA MAIN DE L'HOMME SANS TÊTE - Guillaume and Stéphane Malandrin
THE COLONEL - Laurent Herbiet
GONE FOR A DANCE - Alain Berliner
UN SECRET - Claude Miller
ORCHESTRA SEATS - Danièle Thompson
THE SINGER - Xavier Giannoli
BAD FAITH - Roschdy Zem
RUSSIAN DOLLS - CÉDRIC KLAPISCH
AROUND THE WORLD IN EIGHTY DAYS - Franck Coraci
I, CESAR - Richard Berry
LA CONFIANCE RÈGNE - Etienne Chatiliez
SWITCHBLADE ROMANCE - Alexandre Aja
POT LUCK - Cédric Klapisch
A + POLLUX - Luc Pagès
IRENE - Ivan Calbérac
L'ART (DÉLICAT) DE LA SÉDUCTION - Richard Berry
REGARDE-MOI (EN FACE) - Marco Nicoletti
TOUTES LES NUITS - Eugène Green

Thomas Doret

Born December 1996, **THE KID WITH A BIKE** is his first screen appearance.

Jérémie Renier

THE KID WITH A BIKE - Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne
PHILIBERT - Sylvain Fusée
POSSESSIONS - Eric Guirado
POTICHE - François Ozon
PIÈCE MONTÉE - Denys Granier-Deferre
DEMAIN DÈS L'AUBE - Denis Dercourt
THE VINTNER'S LUCK - Niki Caro
LORNA'S SILENCE - Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne
SUMMER HOURS - Olivier Assayas
IN BRUGES - Martin McDonagh
COUPABLE - Lætitia Masson
ATONEMENT - Joe Wright
PRIVATE PROPERTY - Joachim Lafosse
PRESIDENT - Lionel Delplanque
DIKKENEK - Olivier van Hoofstadt
FAIR PLAY - Lionel Bailliu
THE CHILD - Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne
CAVALCADE - Steve Suissa
LE PONT DES ARTS - Eugène Green
SAN ANTONIO - Frédéric Auburtin
WORK HARD, PLAY HARD - Jean-Marc Moutout
EN TERRITOIRE INDIEN - Lionel Epp
LE TROISIÈME OEIL - Christophe Fraipont
THE WAR IN PARIS - Yolande Zauberman
THE PORNOGRAPHER - Bertrand Bonello
BROTHERHOOD OF THE WOLF - Christophe Gans
PRETEND I'M NOT HERE - Olivier Jahan
THE KING'S DAUGHTERS - Patricia Mazuy
CRIMINAL LOVERS - François Ozon
THE PROMISE - Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne

Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne

Jean-Pierre Dardenne was born in Engis, Belgium, April 1951.

Luc Dardenne was born in Awirs, Belgium, March 1954.

They have directed numerous documentaries.

In 1975, Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne created Dérives, the production company that has produced some sixty documentaries.

In 1994, they set up the production company Les Films du Fleuve.

Selected Filmography

1987 **FALSCH**
with Bruno Cremer

1992 **JE PENSE À VOUS**
with Fabienne Babe, Robin Renucci

1996 **THE PROMISE** with Jérémie Renier, Olivier Gourmet, Assita Ouédraogo

1999 **ROSETTA**
with Emilie Dequenne, Fabrizio Rongione, Anne Yernaux, Olivier Gourmet
Palme d'Or and Award for Best Actress for Emilie Dequenne
Cannes Film Festival 1999

2002 **THE SON**
with Olivier Gourmet, Morgan Marinnie, Isabella Soupart
Award for Best Actor for Olivier Gourmet
Cannes Film Festival 2002

2005 **THE CHILD**
with Jérémie Renier, Déborah François, Jérémie Ségard
Palme d'Or – Cannes Film Festival 2005

2008 **LORNA'S SILENCE**
with Arta Dobroshi, Jérémie Renier, Fabrizio Rongione
Award for Best Screenplay – Cannes Film Festival 2008
Lumiere Award for Best French Language Film 2009

Cast

SAMANTHA	Cécile de France
CYRIL	Thomas Doret
GUY CATOUL	Jérémie Renier
BOOKSELLER	Fabrizio Rongione
WES	Egon Di Mateo
SPECIAL GUEST APPEARANCE	Olivier Gourmet

Crew

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY	Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne
1ST ASSISTANT DIRECTOR	Caroline Tambour
DP	Alain Marcoen (s.b.c.)
CAMERA OPERATOR	Benoit Dervaux
FIRST ASSISTANT CAMERA	Amaury Duquenne
EDITOR	Marie-Hélène Dozo
SOUND ENGINEER	Jean-Pierre Duret
SOUND EDITOR	Benoit De Clerck
SOUND MIXER	Thomas Gauder
SET DESIGNER	Igor Gabriel
COSTUME DESIGNER	Maïra Ramedhan-Levi
MAKE UP	Natali Tabareau-Vieuille
LOCATION MANAGER	Philippe Groff
PRODUCTION MANAGER	Thomas Alfandari
STILLS PHOTOGRAPHER	Christine Plenus
PRODUCERS	Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne, Denis Freyd
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER	Delphine Tomson
COPRODUCER	Andrea Occhipinti
ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS	Arlette Zylberberg, Bernadette Meunier, André Michotte, Stefano Massenzi

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