

UGC presents

# SILENCE OF LOVE

A film written and directed by  
Philippe Claudel

With  
**Stefano Accorsi,**  
**Neri Marcore, Clotilde Courau and Lisa Cipriani**  
**With the participation of Anouk Aimée**

Screenplay, adaptation and dialogue by Philippe Claudel

Produced by Yves Marmion for UGC

Running time: 105'

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## Synopsis

Italian-born Alessandro teaches baroque music in Strasbourg, where he lives with Irina, his 15-year-old daughter in adolescent angst, and his brother Crampone, a kindhearted, nutty anarchist who has been trying to obtain the status of political refugee ever since Berlusconi came into power.

Sometimes Alessandro feels like he has two adolescents to take care of, but he fails to notice how helpless he himself is when faced with life's challenges. Striving to be the perfect father, he has completely forgotten to rebuild his love life, which is easily eclipsed by his burlesque gang of fun-loving friends who keep him from feeling alone.

But his daughter begins to discover what love is, and before he knows what hits him, Alessandro's world is turned upside-down.

# Interview with Philippe Claudel

**Your first film, I'VE LOVED YOU SO LONG, was a great success. What was on your mind when you began to work on a second feature film?**

It was unbelievable to have reached such a large audience for that type of film, so firmly anchored in a provincial setting, so intimate and full of unique emotions. It was well received in France, and even more surprisingly, on an international level, in countries as diverse as Japan or South America. Beginning a film career with a success like that gives you the opportunity to shoot a second film in good conditions. After I'VE LOVED YOU FOR SO LONG, I had several ideas in mind, but my need to change and desire to do a comedy became obvious to me pretty fast. Even if certain themes remain similar to the first, this time they are treated with a lighter touch and a quicker pace, a different style of directing. Also, though it's oversimplifying things a bit, I went from a women's film to a men's film.

**The opening shots remind us of Nanni Moretti's DEAR DIARY. But instead of a Vespa, Alessandro is riding a Solex through the streets of Strasbourg. Is that a wink at Italian filmmaking, which seems to have been an inspiration to you?**

Yes and no, actually. The film has quite a few cinematic tributes in it, intentional and unintentional. You see what you want to see. It was out of the question for me to weigh down the premise with that kind of game. For the opening scenes, my idea was above all to introduce Alessandro in a slightly ridiculous, but very endearing sort of way. I wanted him to ride a Solex instead of a Vespa, and wear a helmet a bit out of date, but have the kind of face that makes you like him right away. He rides through the streets of Strasbourg to that music that has such a strong presence, right from the very first image: the Tarantella.

**Music is a character in its own right in the film. What can you tell us about the Tarantella, which isn't all that well known outside of Italy?**

It's folk music from the south of Italy, which is supposed to cure tarantula stings and give energy back to those weakened by venom poisoning, which attempts to extract melancholy out of grieving souls and calm the feverish and possessed. The subject of the film came from a gift some friends gave me a few years ago, the Arpeggiata. There is something so magic about that music – it has such a carnal, sensitive and human feeling to it. Tarantellas encompass all the emotions: joy, sorrow, serenity and delight... That music soon gave me the inspiration to create the character of a baroque music professor who lives in Strasbourg.

**Why did you choose Strasbourg?**

I like the way the city looks, and the different atmospheres it has from one district to the next. I also like the way it sounds. You can hear all the languages of Europe there. In the street, people speak Spanish, German, Portuguese and Italian, like Alessandro, who doesn't really realize that the music he teaches echoes a kind of mourning that has lingered on long since the sudden death of his wife. Time has passed, the loss isn't painful anymore, and he has even created an illusion of happiness for himself, but he is still missing one essential thing: the feeling of love.

**What has kept Alessandro from getting emotionally involved again? Is it possible that he is a one-woman man?**

Stefano and I talked a lot about that. Maybe he did actually convince himself that he wasn't really capable of loving another woman. Of course, getting involved in a new relationship can be scary. Time passes and you start telling yourself that you won't know the right things

to do or say. Opening up to love is no simple matter. The scene where Alessandro leaves that nice, aimless message for Agathe's daughter Florence is a pretty good example of his fear. It's a funny scene, but above all it shows how difficult it is to simply say what you feel. He is not the only one in the film to have a hard time meeting someone: his brother Crampon finally experiences a relationship by proxy when the university's department director gets herself hooked up to the Internet. There's nothing simple about meeting other people, whether you are looking for someone, or playing matchmaker like his daughter Irina.

**Is Alessandro a willing victim of passing time, of the comfort that comes from a well-oiled day-to-day existence?**

Life goes by so fast for every one of us. For Alessandro, time's high-speed passage is accentuated by the fact that he has taken on heavy responsibilities, especially regarding his daughter. "*She has no mother, I at least want her to have a father,*" he says. His behavior corresponds to a pretty common reality. I have often seen people around me who, after a death or a divorce, feel guilty and set aside the reconstruction of their love life for the benefit of raising their children. With Alessandro, there is not only a strong focus on his daughter, who is also in a certain way the incarnation and extension of the wife he loved and lost, there is also the slightly ridiculous "fathering" of his brother Crampon, the immature anarchist. Between a girl who has become an adolescent and an adult who has never grown up, he has managed to strike a balance. The family functions like a real household, and a pretty harmonious one at that.

**The unusual arrangement could have troubled Irina.**

I was categorical about wanting Irina to be happy. The little girl could have been troubled in the long term by the death of her mother and the presence of an uncle who is completely crazy. Some of her friends, in fact, wonder more and more if the two brothers are actually homosexuals... But for her, everything is fine. Love is there. Like I'VE LOVED YOU FOR SO LONG, this film expresses how important other people are. The characters manage to achieve a certain happiness because other people help them. They comfort them and help them see their options. In the same way Juliette (played by Kristin Scott-Thomas) was brought back to life by her sister Lea, Alessandro gets woken up by his daughter, his brother, Agathe and his friends.

**For your second film, you are still quite attached to a provincial setting and characters close to home. Was it for simplicity's sake that you made Alessandro a professor like yourself?**

In my novels, my imagination leads me more towards worlds unlike my own, sometimes even futuristic ones. In film, for the moment at least, I prefer to stick with the provincial worlds I know well, and which we actually see very little of in film, if only as the butt of bitter mockery like in Claude Chabrol's work. To tell the truth, I can't see myself shooting in Paris. People there live differently than in the provinces; the way they relate to time and to other people isn't quite the same. It's the same thing for the professors: it's not an obsession, but Alessandro has a profound generosity that is inherent to his profession. You have to have a desire to give, a pleasure in handing down knowledge. The scene where he gets up on his desk to dance is an example of that; the one where he is tricked by that crafty female student was inspired by a personal memory. All a girl had to do was look at me and cry to get me to raise her grade point average. Alessandro is a friendly guy who, whether his reasons for doing so are good or bad, needs to contribute to other people. It is no accident that he is also involved in a reading association that does work in hospitals.

**Being a generous and considerate man didn't keep him from failing to see his daughter grow up. How do you explain that lack of lucidity?**

My daughter is going to turn 13 in March, and like Alessandro, I don't see her changing. The scene with the psychologist reflects that gap between a father's perception and reality. What can you do? She's still my little baby, yet she's not my little baby anymore... to top it off, Irina ends up being the most mature member of the trio. She is the one who, when she begins to discover feelings of love, shocks her father awake by making him realize he is missing out on life.

**You didn't give in to the temptation to "starify" the cast. Why?**

It's a little egotistical, but one of the things I like about seeing movies is to discover unknown faces. If I had cast well-known actors, the film wouldn't have the same effect at all. Which doesn't keep me from really wanting to work with certain actors like Daniel Auteuil, whose talent fascinates me, or Gérard Depardieu, for whom I dream of coming up with a role that he might like, that he would totally get into.

**After the "Franglais" of Kristin Scott-Thomas, you offered Italo-French Stefano Accorsi his first major role in France. Was it an easy choice?**

It wasn't easy, because when I was writing, I had started out with a character about 55 years old. Then when I thought about it, I convinced myself that the age gap with a 15-year-old girl wouldn't serve the story. So I lowered the father's age, but Stefano, whose talent I was well aware of, was still too young. We met and I asked him to let his beard grow and try a few different kinds of glasses, and one month later we did screen tests. It was fantastic! I love working with foreign actors and mixing up roots. It was an enriching experience to round up in Strasbourg, to the sound of Tarantellas, a mix of two Italian actors, Stefano and Neri, an actress who is the emblem of the historical marriage between French and Italian film, Anouk Aimée, and Clotilde Courau, whose links to Italy are well known... not to mention all the extremely talented actors in Strasbourg.

**We discover Neri Marcoré for the first time in a French film, in a burlesque role that is especially well done. What a revelation!**

Famous in Italy, Neri works as a film actor, with Pupi Avati for example, and as a TV actor as well. He is a well-rounded artist: he sings, he is host of a literary show... he is an impressionist who does imitations of politicians on Rai 3. Again, the very first screen tests, which were immediately convincing, showed his incredible comic potential and his obvious sensitivity. I wrote his character with the spirit of Fellini's *Vitelloni* in mind.

**How much did Italian comedies inspire you?**

From the end of the 1950's to the middle of the 1970's, there was a magical period of Italian comedy, with stories that spoke about people, but also about social relations, often with a quite caustic analysis of society. That wasn't just making fun for fun's sake. The directors managed to make a perfect mix of delirious burlesque, lightness, emotion and the darkest of tragedy. I could obviously talk to you about PERSONS UNKNOWN, THE EASY LIFE, SIGNORE & SIGNORI, and DIVORCE: ITALIAN STYLE... But all those masterpieces I saw when I was a teenager are a bit crushing as far as references go. I am not trying to even reach the ankle of Dino Risi, Marion Monicelli or Pietro Germi. Just attempting, trying to be in that spirit by passing from laughter to emotion, and sometimes attempting to make big leaps, which we tend to see less in French cinema.

**Like in Italian comedies, we find a lot of lively, well-written dialogue. Did you give special priority to the writing?**

My first film was more about silence. This one, I have declared a talkative film. There is hardly a single scene where no one is talking. I had so much fun working on that sort of exteriorization through speech it was crazy. We had to find the right rhythm, the right word. Perfecting things with the actors during readings, during the shoot, and even fine-tuning them in the editing. It is a feature that I have cut up enormously, especially to find the right rhythm.

**Was keeping in the use of both French and Italian a logical choice?**

Yes, maybe it was even a statement. For a film about voices and languages like SILENCE OF LOVE, it seemed obvious to me that we had to keep the French and Italian. If people who never go see films in their original language enjoy hearing other sounds and rhythms, I'll be satisfied. Same for the baroque music, which is not very well known. If hearing it makes them want to buy a CD of Tarantellas when they get out, that's great.

**Crapone, who is hard-core anti-Berlusconi, is asking the French government for political asylum. Does the character's burlesque side hide a more serious message?**

He is a back-room revolutionary, an inactive activist, in a perverse sort of way in fact, because it is mostly other people he gets to take action: the young girl he sends off to demonstrate for Tibet, the postal worker he encourages to damage the system. Ordinary demonstrations or strikes don't work anymore. You have to find other ways to sabotage the system and allow those who don't exist to exist. Without sinking into heavy political lessons, I wanted the film to have little caustic pinpricks and simple messages that could actually be pretty effective if you listen to them.

**How did you find Lisa Cipriani, the young lady who plays Alessandro's daughter?**

Her role was essential. I sent out a casting call in Paris and Strasbourg, hoping to find the actress I needed in the provinces. In Paris, there were young girls with potential, but they seemed to come out of the same mould that theater classes can form. Besides, I found them all quite similar physically. Then Lisa came along. That young girl from a little town between Lyon and Grenoble had more straightforward innocence and was more natural than the others. She is really someone amazing, who understands everything right away and is comfortable with everyone. The power she gained during the preparation work and shooting was spectacular. Beyond the fact that she is very pretty, very photogenic, she has real acting talent and a real presence. It was only her second film, but she should be able to continue working in the industry. All she has to do is learn to choose her roles and not just do anything that comes her way on the pretext of wanting to work in film.

**From the actors to the sets, your films are always driven by the necessity for truth and realism. Are you wary of artifice?**

It is always a paradox to make films and have the ambition of showing real life. Bringing up the subject of Irina's adolescence actually only corresponds to a codified representation of the way I see adolescence. That representation is not more or less real in my film than it is in LOL or in certain films by Gus Van Sant, for example. Being conscious of that doesn't keep me from trying to stay as close as I can to people and capture them in all their depth and humanity, without the gloss. Cinema encompasses all the other arts: writing, photography, sound, comedy, architecture... It can all be used to express something. Bringing back a good part of the team from my first film allowed me to do the preparation work fairly quickly. Set

Director Samuel Deshors and I had fun creating different looks, places and atmospheres. It's as if he was in my brain: the apartment looks exactly like I had imagined it. Set decoration on a contemporary film is often more difficult than creating picturesque sets for a historical film. There was nothing easy about creating Irina's bedroom, for example. It had to express a period of transition between childhood and rebellious adolescence. Hence the posters of Tiananmen and the big pink stuffed animals, side-by-side. Denis Lenoir's cinematography, which I felt a real and immediate attachment to, reinforced that warm and human touch I wanted throughout the film, without being excessive.

**You gave the same attention and care to the actors' clothes.**

Costumes require the same subtlety. Martine Rapin, who I met on *Le Paquet*, a play we put on with Gérard Jugnot, understood exactly what I wanted. Stefano, who dresses very elegantly in real life, was clothed in H&M from beginning to end. That was a perfect match for the character of Alessandro, who could care less how he looks in his clothes. Same thing for his brother: finding that bathrobe, which is like an external representation of his personality, required a full-on casting call!

**With SILENCE OF LOVE, family ties are at the heart of the story again. An inexhaustible subject?**

For me, stories about family and secrets, the unsaid and the difficulty of communication remain a permanent subject of interest. Nothing is ever simple. The relationship between brothers is built through a dynamic of arguments and conflict, but in the rare moments of pause, we realize they adore each other. The scene where Cramponne finds his brother watching a video of his wife touches me deeply. When he is in the church is also a moment of great intensity. There is also the outline of a mother-daughter relationship between the characters played by Anouk Aimée and Clotilde Courau. Why aren't they talking to each other anymore? We meet two women who are intelligent, levelheaded and sensitive, yet who can't communicate with one another.

**How did you convince Anouk Aimée to be in the film?**

She said yes right away. Anouk is so beautiful. On screen and in life, she is a woman of great elegance, naturally classy, a rare human being. I also want to say, because I find it extraordinary, Anouk has a natural face, and that changes everything. I loved filming her, doing her justice. And what talent! Her character, Agathe, is going to die, but I didn't want it to be morbid. We are in a terminal care unit, but for her, it's like preparing to take a trip, and for Alessandro, it's probably a place of absolution. What is he trying to erase? We don't really know. His father-in-law seems to be mad at him. Maybe he resents him? Was he responsible for the car accident that killed his young wife? I like it when some questions remain unanswered, when possibilities are merely sketched out. It's up to the viewers to flesh them out, if they feel the need.

**Knowing your taste for foreign literature, it seems obvious that the books Alessandro reads weren't picked out at random. Why did you choose Ismail Kadaré, for example?**

Kadaré wrote books that have meant a lot to me, especially *Doruntine*. It is the Albanian legend of a young woman who got married far away and returns one night with a horseman. Both are covered in mud. They are dead. They are ghosts. SILENCE OF LOVE is a film of ghosts, inhabited by presences, which is why there is that scene where Irina goes to a movie I love by Henry Hathaway, PETER IBBETSON, with Gary Cooper, based on a beautiful novel by Georges du Maurier, who the Surrealists loved so much. Which is why there is that reference to the legend of Orpheus and Eurydice, when Alessandro reads to a little girl in the

hospital. Which is why there is that final scene at the church, surrounded by its little cemetery, with the appearance of Anouk's character and the dead young wife.

**How did you build the character played by Clotilde Courau, who shows up in the last third of the film?**

Clotilde has an important role in the film's dramatic development. Her character embodies what her mother Agathe wanted to give Alessandro: she prepared him for an encounter. The kind of encounter that could open up to the possibility of love. I didn't want it to be love at first sight. We don't know if what will happen between them will end up being a great love story, or nothing at all, but all the elements are there. The last scene was composed like a mental vision, like the materialization of what's in Alessandro's brain. All the people who have meant something to him in his life, and those who may in the future, are there. On that note, the lyrics to the song "Silenzio d'amore" which we re-recorded with Stefano, are the perfect echo of what his character is feeling. When he is singing, "since the entire world is here in the country, you will be the Queen and I will be the King of Spain," he looks at Clotilde. It is a promise. Will it be kept, that's another story!

**The dead aren't left out. Why did you materialize their presence in the church?**

It is a sort of emotional high point, a reckoning that makes us ask ourselves the question: who makes us? Who are we really the result of? The dead also count. I am not a mystic, but I believe strongly in the presence of the departed; I feel them, I ask them questions and they help me in my life.

**That last, very moving scene is the perfect way to wrap up a comedy. Did you have a lot of fun shooting it?**

In the opinion of the crew, the actors, everyone... shooting this film was a real pleasure. There was a great feeling working on the set, very giving, very professional and efficient. I went to the shoot every morning happy as a child, not a bit of stress. Everyone put their hearts into the work. What a laugh we had, for example, when we shot the soap opera Crampon watches, *Amours Cliniques*, which I even wrote a theme song for, called *Love in Hospital*. We shot four hilarious scenes, which will be included in the DVD bonuses. Everyone who worked on this film was motivated by one great aspiration. That is the greatest gift they could ever give me, and I had to prove myself worthy of it.

**How would you like people to come out of the film?**

I'm no genius, and this film doesn't revolutionize comedy. I would just like people to be happy watching it and come out with a smile, having spent some time with men and women who have certain things in common with what they are living through and doing, who have made them feel good in a way that is a bit intelligent, sensitive and entertaining. My only ambition is to offer a palette of human emotions, and various ways to read the story so that we can all enjoy.



# Cast

Stefano Accorsi  
Neri Marcore  
Clotilde Courau  
Lisa Cipriani  
Anouk Aimée

Alessandro  
Luigi  
Florence  
Irina  
Agathe

# Crew

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|----------------------------------|---|
| Director                         | Philippe Claudel                          |
| Screenplay, Adaptation, Dialogue | Philippe Claudel                          |
| Director of Photography          | Denis Lenoir, AFC ASC                     |
| Editor                           | Virginie Bruant                           |
| Production Designer              | Samuel Deshors                            |
| Sound                            | Pierre Lenoir, Stéphane Brunclair         |
| Sound Mixer                      | Armelle Mahé                              |
| Costume Designer                 | Martine Rapin                             |
| Casting                          | Françoise Ménidrey, Christian Sonderegger |
| Production Manager               | Philippe Saal                             |
| Post-Production                  | Abraham Goldblat                          |
| 1st Assistant Director           | Dominique Delany                          |
| Artistic Consultant              | Dominique Kucharzewski                    |
| Set Photography                  | Thierry Valletoux, Luc Roux               |
| Trailer                          | Sonia Tout Court                          |
| Poster & Artwork                 | Rageman                                   |
| International Sales              | TF1 International                         |
| Video Rights                     | UGC Vidéo                                 |

Produced by Yves Marmion for UGC

In coproduction with TF1 Droits Audiovisuels, France 3 Cinéma and UGC Images

In association with SOFICA UGC 1, A PLUS IMAGE 2

With the participation of CANAL +, CINECINEMA, FRANCE TELEVISIONS

With the support of LA REGION ALSACE, LE CONSEIL REGIONAL DE LORRAINE,

LA COMMUNAUTE URBAINE DE STRASBOURG

In partnership with CNC, LA PROCIREP, L'ANGOIA