

NORD-OUEST PRESENTS

Vincent  
LACOSTE

Stacy  
MARTIN

INTRODUCING  
Isaure  
MULTRIER

# AMANDA

A FILM BY  
MIKHAËL HERS



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films

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A FILM BY **MIKHAËL HERS**

2018 – FRANCE – DRAMA – FRENCH – 106'

## SYNOPSIS

David, who gets by doing odd jobs, meets Lena, who has just moved up to Paris, and falls in love. But soon after, his life is brutally interrupted by the sudden death of his sister. Beyond the shock, and the pain, David now finds himself alone with his young niece Amanda to care for.

## INTERVIEW WITH MIKHAËL HERS

**The theme of mourning, which featured in *This Summer Feeling*, plays a more central role in *Amanda*, with David taking on responsibility for his niece after her mother's death.**

In my earlier films, the inspiration came from a more melancholy or retrospective angle that allowed me to revisit a period or places. For *Amanda*, the starting point was the compulsion to film Paris today and capture something of the fragility and violence of our times. In that respect, *Amanda* is indeed more entrenched in the present and in daily life than my previous films.

**The film opens with the little girl waiting alone outside school because her uncle is running late. That moment of absence prefigures a more fundamental absence.**

It also allowed me to place the relationship between Amanda and David for the viewer, a man who can't get to school on time to pick her up but then finds himself in sole charge of the young girl. It's the beginning of a long journey. David is an overgrown child that seems bereft of regard to this little girl, who may be better equipped to help him rather than the other way round. The duo they form moved me because it is a way of talking about fatherhood; accidental fatherhood, a kind of inheritance.

**Without reneging on the melancholy of your earlier films, you establish a more melodramatic tone.**

The film is more head-on in terms of emotion. There is this prism of a tragedy that is both personal and collective. I wanted to make a film that is restrained while also taking risks and trying to make it as shareable as possible, which results in this tone on the cusp of melodrama.

Similarly, I was guided by my characters and the dramatic moments they experience that I couldn't brush over, in particular the moment when David informs Amanda of her mother's death. It seemed to me that it would have been false sensitivity or vain discretion to do so. *Amanda* is the story of two people who accompany each other through the void that disrupts the story—in other words, Sandrine's death. It was impossible for the audience not to see him tell her.

I was also greatly encouraged by the generosity and trust of my actors. At no point did I feel awkward when Vincent Lacoste or Isaure Multrier were crying. The way they did so felt right every time.

**Also because you integrate their emotions into the fabric of daily life.**

I like to ground my films as much as possible in life's twists and turns, and allow them to break free from their "subject." I always try to stick close to daily life and to what I can feel, to trust in the situation, and ask myself very sincerely, with all my subjectivity, how it would play out in real life.

I wanted to film people struck through by emotions, not stuck in the shell of people in mourning, with the conventional feelings that go with it. I see a person in mourning experiencing a range of emotions and I wanted to get across that complexity, oscillating between major and minor moments of sadness, and major and minor moments of happiness inside.

**In that respect, the scene at the train station stands out. David breaks down, but in the next scene we see him back at work.**

At that moment, David is a sad, devastated figure in the middle of a teeming train station. The scene wasn't in the script—it's one of the very few we shot on the fly. I wanted to capture the distress that suddenly overwhelms David, amid this crowd that just keeps going, keeps catching trains. Truffaut said that the cinema—film—is life without traffic jams. I love Truffaut but my first reaction to that is, 'On the contrary...' Cinema must appropriate the traffic jams, find a way to include them, make them beautiful or touching maybe. I have a sense of getting closer to truth through lulls and digressions than through the eye of the storm.

**Did taking a head-on approach to events and emotions modify your aesthetic approach?**

I felt that it brought me much closer to the characters, especially in the blocking. There are more close shots on faces and maybe less tracking shots in various locations. In formal terms, I wanted the film to be as pure and simple as possible.

**In your film, Paris is very luminous but never touristy...**

That was important to me. I wanted to avoid any neighborhood too closely associated with a particular social group. I wanted to film cross-cultural Paris, regular Paris, daily Paris—a city everyone can relate to. It's fabulous to weave fictional characters into the fabric of reality, to immerse that tiny bubble of fiction in an environment that just gets on with daily life. I would have liked to go even further but, unfortunately, it's increasingly difficult to film in Paris and blend in with the crowd.

**Nonetheless, after the attacks, there are a few picture-postcard shots of Paris, the Seine riverboats and tourists blithely doing their thing.**

It's the sense that even when you experience absolute tragedy, the world keeps spinning, life goes on around you. David and Amanda are confronted by tourists waving to them from a

boat going under a bridge. It's brutal and beautiful. It's life with its weird moments and incongruities. The very next shot, we are in an empty Paris, as it was the day after the November 13 attacks.

### **Is the urge to capture something of the violence of our times rooted in the 2015 attacks?**

It comes partly from the attacks, which lit the fuse for today's violence. By extension, the attacks now fit into a much bigger picture of a period when people are tormented by a lack of points of reference and the awareness of our fragility. I had several things in mind: bearing witness to the Paris of today; an overgrown child and a small child helping each other along; the November 13 attacks... A film is made up of elements that fit together rather mysteriously until an architecture emerges, and a story becomes necessary, impossible to circumvent.

### **Why did you choose to create a terrorist attack in Vincennes Park?**

I would have found it indecent to create a fictional victim of a real-life tragedy that cut so many lives short and has taken its place in the collective imagination. Unfortunately, it is plausible for such an attack to occur at a picnic in the woods. At the same time, the park is less easily identifiable than various major traffic arteries in Paris, or the Louvre, for example.

### **Why choose to put a picture to the attack?**

I don't think the film could avoid doing so. It would have been an affectation. *Amanda* is about neither the attacks, nor Islamic terrorism, but choosing not to film them, or identify them (in the café scene with Raja) was inconceivable. It was about finding the right way and right time.

After November 13, we were drowning in images, always the same images on a loop; news images that create a void rather than help our imagination to envision what happened. At my humble level, the film had to take charge of that.

### **Paradoxically, a strong sense of unreality emanates from the scene.**

Yes, most likely due to the very singular late-afternoon light and the fact that we see everything from David's POV as he glides into the quiet of the woods after leaving the hectic streets of Paris. It's like an airlock that takes us to the attacks, as if the world already knows what has happened, but he doesn't.

### **You film a lot of bicycle rides and journeys. After the attacks, there is the sense of an attempt to reclaim places under new rules, with increased security.**

The attacks had a powerful impact on people's way of occupying their daily space. Unconsciously but indisputably, with all the security measures, there's the fear of a shooting whenever you hear a loud bang; there's a tremor of insecurity, however hazy, when you're on a café terrace or in a crowded public place. Sure, there's as great a chance as ever of dying in a road accident, but a new feature of daily life, regrettably, is the risk of being hit by a bullet, in Paris, in France or anywhere else. Choosing to tell this story situates the film in that daily reality. I didn't want to make a societal movie about the attacks but I needed to film that threat in a movie that sets out to testify to present-day realities.

**Your staging of daily life is very precise but avoids taking a realistic or documentary approach.**

That's my aim—capturing trivial, everyday things and lending them beauty, lyricism and poetry. For example, at his sister's, David doesn't sleep in her room but on a fold-out sofa bed. Even though he's living there, it's impossible for David to take her bed, out of consideration for her daughter especially. He is in transit and showing him folding out the sofa in the living room was important to me. That kind of slice of life speaks to everyone. Just like Sandrine's toothbrush, which he throws away, then digs out of the trash.

**How did you pick Vincent Lacoste to play David?**

In my first draft, the character was older, but talking it over with my producer Pierre Guyard, we decided the truth of the character resided in that exact age, his early twenties, a very young adult. Among that age group, Vincent Lacoste was the obvious call—his face, way of speaking, gentle manner, gracefulness, and slightly awkward, infinitely moving beauty... It was an immense pleasure to work with him. He is breathtaking and brought a great work ethic and his attention to detail to the project.

**And Isaure Multrier, who plays Amanda?**

Isaure had never acted in her life. Our casting director spotted her in the street. I dreamed of finding a very youthful, baby-faced little girl with something adult about her. To mirror events in the film, obviously, but also because I find that children who grew up with a single parent possess a particular maturity. So I pictured Amanda as having skills of self-expression and elocution that were perhaps above-average for a seven-year-old.

**It's the first time a child plays such a central role in one of your films. What was that experience like for you?**

Only being allowed to shoot three-four hours a day with the child has a peculiar impact on the dynamic of the shoot. Besides that, it's the same as with an adult. And it was important for that

to be the case. I certainly did not want to obtain a performance from Isaure by manipulating her. I wanted her laughter or tears to be the result of a process, a journey, not the result of applying psychological pressure before shooting the scene. Isaure had read the script. She was perfectly aware of the subject matter. She had a very serious, conscientious approach to the film. The concentration and trust she showed were infinitely touching.

### **And casting your actresses?**

To choose Stacy Martin, who plays Léna, I had to resolve to leave a kind of comfort zone because her diction and technique were, initially at least, less familiar to me. But I wanted to confront myself with another musicality, another approach to dialogue. Stacy has a very singular speaking voice, and I really like what it brings to the film.

For Ophelia Kolb, who plays Sandrine, it felt more natural. I feel closer to her music and method. I immediately sensed we were talking the same language. She brings impressive vibrancy, which the film absolutely needed.

With regard to the Aunt, she was perhaps a bit too fanciful in the screenplay. Marianne Basler turns the character's eccentricity into something simpler and more human.

As for Allison, David and Sandrine's mother, we were looking for an English-speaking actress who could also converse in French. Like Marianne, Greta Scacchi possesses something very real and touching that transcends the cliché of the exuberant, unsettled mother, despite her choice to live apart from her children. And she is an icon of 1990s movies that I grew up with.

### **The film ends in the London park where David's reunion with his mother took place, but it could just as well be another park, someplace else...**

Yes, because the light is so much brighter than during their reunion. Also, Amanda, David and his mother are not in shot. I felt it was important, after the image of carnage that disrupts and diverts the film at its beginning, to end on glimpses of ordinary lives and luminous moments in a park.

## INTERVIEW WITH VINCENT LACOSTE

### **What was your reaction when you read the screenplay of *Amanda*?**

Pitch-perfect scripts are few and far between. Mikhaël brings a very subtle approach to the wrench of losing a loved one while continuing to live with that person's memory. The devil is in the detail—like when Amanda refuses to let David throw away her mother's toothbrush. Mikhaël achieves a finely balanced portrayal of both characters' feelings. He doesn't treat Amanda as a little girl; he depicts her as a human being. He radiates a sense of worldliness, of being able to put himself in everyone's shoes, of perfect awareness of human feelings. Having read his magnificent script, I watched *This Summer Feeling* and his other movies, which convinced me to jump aboard.

### **The melancholy of his previous film is twinned here with the weight of the present, with the little girl that David must look after on a daily basis.**

And that's what I loved about the script. This young guy has to deal with grieving for his sister while taking on something that feels totally out of his depth—looking after a little girl, pretty much being a dad. Suddenly, David faces overwhelming responsibilities that he had never planned for. The film speaks not only of his loss, but also how it impacts on his whole life.

The opening is very upbeat, with nothing to indicate the direction the movie will take. The terrorist attack brutally re-routes the story. *Amanda* is also about the world we live in, where it is suddenly possible you'll get shot at in the street or in a park.

### **You have been quoted as saying James Stewart is a reference for you as an actor and, for each new role, you choose one of his films as an inspiration. For *Amanda*, which one was it?**

I often think of James Stewart movies, but to tell the truth, for *Amanda*, I had very few references in mind, just the feeling that to get the emotional scenes right without stressing out, I shouldn't over-prepare. Everything was so clear-cut and powerful in the script that I didn't have to picture anything, just act out the situation and try to live the scene in the moment. It's a fabulous feeling to be able to let a part carry you along, especially when sharing scenes with a child like Isaure, who is totally spontaneous.

### **What was your process with Isaure Multrier?**

We met a few times before the shoot but it was on set that we really got to know each other. Like my character, I had no idea how to handle her at first. I don't have nieces or any young children among my family and friends. I kept wondering how to talk to her, what she was thinking, what her take was on what we were shooting. So I tried just to be kind and gentle

with her, to make the whole experience as pleasant as possible, so she sees the business for what it is.

Children are instinctive actors. You must be able to listen to them. That's always been my way of working anyhow. I never went to drama school and when I act I'm only ever reacting to my scene partners.

**The David-Amanda duo is at once poetic, touching and funny. It's not always easy to say which one of them is the adult.**

Yes, the film is a constant back-and-forth between them, at once funny and moving. At age seven, Amanda is clearly more vulnerable and David has to take charge of all the adult issues. As for issues irrespective of age, such as grief and the disorienting effect of losing a loved one, they are at the same level and, at various points, it feels like Amanda is stronger than David and pulls him up rather than the other way round. Beyond their loss, the film is luminous because it shows the solidarity of two characters fighting to overcome an ordeal together.

**And playing a tree trimmer?**

I didn't have a zillion scenes up in the trees because it would have involved doing a three-month course with the municipal authorities in Paris! But I had a scene, strapped in ten meters off the ground, so I took a lesson to check I didn't get vertigo. It was fun to play a tree climber, especially the afternoon I spent up there trimming away for a scene that didn't make the final cut.

**What was it like working with Mikhaël?**

A movie set always reflects the personality of the director. Mikhaël is extremely gentle and discreet. He gives little specific direction but creates an environment where you feel comfortable, with plenty of room to make suggestions. Whenever I felt stressed, he was a wonderful listener. His tact and finesse were very reassuring. He boosted my confidence simply by making me feel that he trusted me. And I needed that because the scenes of emotion were particularly scary. I wasn't used to that.

**Yes, it's the first time you've acted in such an emotional register.**

That was another reason for doing it. I had never done a film or a role like this. But it was also very scary. Before the shoot, I kept saying to Mikhaël, "I can't promise anything, I've never done anything like this!" And he laughed it off, "Don't worry, it's going to be fine. If ever you don't feel it, we'll take time out to talk it through and find the right emotion for the scene." It's reassuring to have a director tell you that we can take our time and that he's with you, not just behind his camera watching you. I felt Mikhaël supporting me every step of the way.

### **What was it like doing the scene where you cry at the train station?**

The previous day, Mikhaël told me, "In the station, you break down in tears." I felt a little nervous, especially as we were using a long lens, meaning that the camera would zoom in on me from a distance, so I found myself surrounded by people who had no idea we were shooting a movie. It was stressful but cool. As far as I remember, I think it was the only scene that Mikhaël came up with on the fly. I realized the character required me not to be scared of pushing the envelope even though, paradoxically, the film is very restrained.

### **At the start of the film, there is the airiness of the bicycle rides. The second part involves reclaiming places after the tragedy...**

*Amanda* is as much the story of the characters' places as that of the characters. I really love the way Mikhaël films the streets of Paris today. He wanted to shoot in the street, with very few extras, in a style verging on documentary at times. Like Rohmer, Mikhaël grounds his films in places and I really like that.

### **David must learn to look after the little girl and, at the same time, Léna asks him to take the opposite approach with her, to let her cope with her difficulties alone.**

It's perfectly comprehensible that Léna is no longer inclined to fall in love but it's beautiful that David refuses to completely accept what he considers to be a second injustice after that of losing his sister: their nascent love is brutally stopped in its tracks by the attack. It was only just beginning but it's a fair bet it would have followed a familiar path if the tragedy had not intervened.

Between Léna and David, many things are left unsaid; they are both caught up in their worries. When he visits her at her mother's house, however, he is there to speak from the heart, take things in hand and throw off the frustration.

## ABOUT AMANDA

Although victims of a terrorist attack are much more the focus of media attention than previously, very few of them know, and even less understand, how their lives will be affected after such an event. Yet, Mikhaël Hers' *Amanda* shows us what we don't know or don't want to know. Through David's story, a young man who finds himself taking charge of his young niece Amanda after his sister's death, the film accurately depicts the personal and social ordeal that this kind of attack constitutes. At the same time, with great finesse and delicacy, it paints the portrait of youth in Paris today—this elusive "Bataclan generation" that was the subject of so much debate after the attacks of November 13, 2015. Except that this is the whole point of Mikhaël Hers' film: it is not a film about November 13. Taking the opposite tack to film reenactments of this "French 9/11" and ducking the lure of voyeurism and melodrama, Mikhaël Hers has made a very singular film with universal appeal.

His film is not about one terrorist attack in particular, but about all terrorist attacks and the ordeal that an attack represents, for anyone, anywhere. The story of David and Amanda is set in Paris, but it could be London, Baghdad or Bombay. Terrorism creates orphans, shatters families, and damages lives everywhere. Ultimately, that's what makes this remarkably acted film so touching. Beyond the issue of terrorism, it deals with essential questions about our human existence: loss, grief, relationships, parenthood, and friendship. While the director captures the universality of the subject, his film remains faithful to a specifically French arthouse aesthetic. In that respect, *Amanda* will most likely set a marker for how French cinema responded to the attacks of November 13. Much more than a movie about November 13, it is a milestone in French cinema post-November 13.

Gérôme Truc

Sociologist

Author of *Shell Shocked: the Social Response to Terrorist Attacks* (Polity Press, 2018)

## **DIRECTOR'S FILMOGRAPHY**

### **Amanda**

2018, Venice Orizzonti

### **This Summer Felling**

2016, Rotterdam Official Selection

### **Memory Lane**

2010, Locarno Official Selection

### **Montparnasse** (medium-length film)

2009, Cannes Directors' Fortnight, SFR Prize for Best French Short

### **Primrose Hill** (medium-length film)

2008, Cannes Critics' Week

### **Charell** (medium-length film)

2006, Cannes Critics' Week

## CAST

Vincent LACOSTE

David

Isaure MULTRIER

Amanda

Stacy MARTIN

Léna

Ophélie KOLB

Sandrine

Marianne BASLER

Maud

Jonathan COHEN

Axel

Greta SCACCHI

Alison

## VINCENT LACOSTE'S SELECTIVE FILMOGRAPHY

**Amanda** by Mikhaël HERS

2018

**Sorry Angel** by Christophe HONORÉ

2018

**In Bed with Victoria** by Justine TRIET

2016

**Saint Amour** by Benoît DELÉPINE, Gustave KERVERN

2016

**Diary of a Chambermaid** by Benoît JACQUOT

2015

**Lolo** by Julie DELPY

2015

**Parisienne** by Danielle ARBID

2015

**Eden** by Mia HANSEN-LØVE

2014

**Hippocrates: Diary of a French Doctor** by Thomas LILTI

2014

**The French Kissers** by Riad SATTOUF

2009, Lumiere Award for Most Promising Actor

## STACY MARTIN'S SELECTIVE FILMOGRAPHY

**Amanda** by Mikhaël HERS

2018

**Vox Lux** by Brady CORBET

2018

**Treat me like Fire** by Marie MONGE

2018

**All the Money in the World** by Ridley SCOTT

2017

**Godard Mon Amour** by Michel HAZANAVICIUS

2017

**High-Rise** by Ben WHEATLEY

2015

**The Lady in the Car with Glasses and a Gun** by Joann SFAR

2015

**Tale of Tales** by Matteo GARRONE

2015

**Taj Mahal** by Nicolas SAADA

2015

**Nymphomaniac - Volume 2** by Lars VON TRIER

2013

**Nymphomaniac - Volume 1** by Lars VON TRIER

2013

## CREW

|                           |   |
|---------------------------|---|
| A film by                 | Mikhaël HERS  |
| Produced by               | Pierre GUYARD   |
| Screenplay                | Mikhaël HERS, Maud AMELINE  |
| Associate Producers       | Christophe ROSSIGNON, Philip BOËFFARD   |
| Executive Producer        | Eve FRANÇOIS-MACHUEL  |
| DoP                       | Sébastien BUCHMANN (AFC)  |
| Editing                   | Marion MONNIER  |
| 1er Assist. Director      | Lucas LOUBARESSE  |
| Casting                   | Marion TOUITOU (ARDA)   |
| Set Design                | Charlotte DE CADEVILLE  |
| Original Soundtrack       | Anton SANKO   |
| Music                     | Matthieu SIBONY (Schmooze)  |
| Sound                     | Dimitri HAULET, Vincent VATOUX, Daniel SOBRINO  |
| Special Effects           | Alain CARSOUX   |
| Costume Design            | Caroline SPIETH   |
| Make-up                   | Tina ROVERE   |
| Continuity                | Anaïs SERGEANT  |
| Production Manager        | Pierre DELAUNAY   |
| Post-production Manager   | Clara VINCIENNE   |
| Co-production             | Nord-Ouest Films, Arte France Cinéma  |
| With the participation of | Canal +, Ciné +, Arte France and Centre National du Cinéma et de l'image animée                 |
| In association with       | La Banque Postale Image 11, Manon 8, Indéfilms 6, Pyramide, MK2 Films                           |
| With the support of       | La Région Nouvelle-Aquitaine, in partnership with CNC, and Conseil Départemental de la Dordogne |
| French Distribution       | Pyramide  |
| International Sales       | mk2 Films   |

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