

BONNE PIOCHE & LA VOIE LACTÉE
present

TWISTING FATE

a film by Christophe LIOUD
with Noémie MERLANT



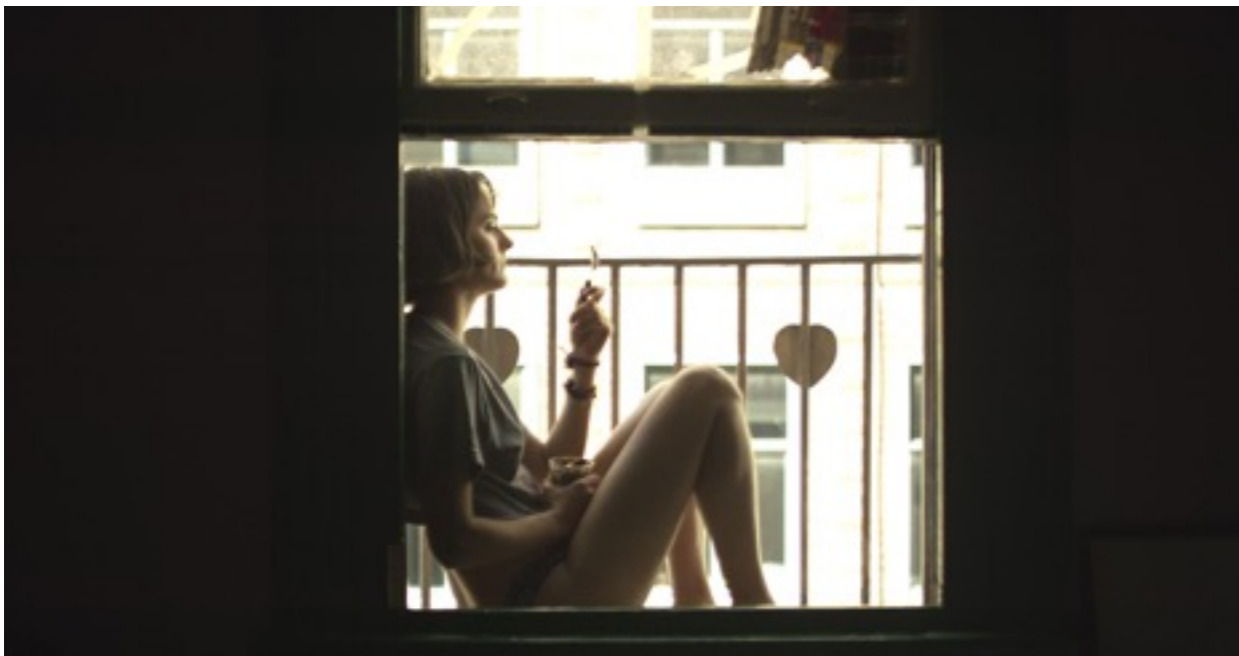


TWISTING FATE

a film by Christophe LIOUD

Adapted from the novel "Si par hasard" by Jean-Baptiste DESTREMAU

Produced by Yves DARONDEAU and Emmanuel PRIOU



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SYNOPSIS

Claire is 17. She is vacationing with her family in South Africa. While on an excursion, her parents and little brother die in an accident.

By a twist of fate, she escapes the tragedy.

Now all alone, lost and confused, she is far from home and isolated in this country that is like another world where everything is so intense.

Utterly distraught, convinced that she is responsible for her family's tragic end, and overcome with guilt, **she runs away and decides to let fate, which allowed her to survive, to guide her life from now on.** During the course of her adventures through vibrant and dazzling landscapes, carried

by the wind from one colorful encounter to another, through both happy and heart-rending moments, she barrels through different life stages to understand in the end that she has within her the power to create her own destiny.

Through this initiatory journey, which at times feels much like a road-movie, she will find the means to return home, face her loved ones and summon the courage to live her life, appeased and serene. An optimistic drama freely adapted from Jean-Baptiste Destremau's novel, "Si par hazard."



INTERVIEW WITH CHRISTOPHE LOUD

Where did you get the idea for this project?

After working as a producer for twenty years, I wanted to revert to my first passion, directing. I had previously directed a number of different projects and I now felt I wanted to jump feet first into a fiction feature in order to address a few themes that touched me: guilt related to the death of a loved one and the quest for liberty. Jean-Baptiste Destremau's book, "Si par hazard" (If by Chance) recommended to me by a friend, contained all of these issues.

"If by Chance" retraces the journey of a teenage girl who is convinced she is responsible for the death of her parents and little brother killed during a hiking trip while she stayed behind, since she was punished.

The subject, which is pure fiction, is inspired by a true event that occurred in August 1997, when a French family perished in Antelope Canyon in the Southwestern United States during an underground flash flood. Jean-Baptiste Destremau invented the story of this 16-year-old girl who would have stayed back at the hotel because she was grounded by her parents, and so ended up escaping the tragedy. The feeling of guilt taking hold of this adolescent interested me in particular: how do you live carrying the burden of such guilt on your shoulders for the rest of your life? Terrorist attack survivors typically question the reason why they are still alive and feel guilty not to have shared the victims' fate. Unless you are a monster, it is impossible not to face this type of questioning when faced with such enormous ordeals. It's vital. It is also a question that has no answer – you can devour all of Jung's work without finding one – but an individual can always come up with their own response. I myself went through a similar period when I lost my sister too soon and I came to this conclusion: this feeling of guilt never fades, but along the way you can learn how to live again, try to be free, while accepting it. It's a question of nuance and it is what allows me to have my heroine admit at the end of the film that she doesn't know if she is "truly" free, but what happened to her family "perhaps" wasn't her fault.



Her parents disappeared after a quarrel she had with them, reinforcing the tragic aspect of their separation.

Her last word to them was "*Bye!*" spat out in a hostile tone, which only reinforces her angst after the accident. As a result, her first reflex is to run away and later, unconsciously, to punish herself.

She even thinks about dying.

It's a reaction – practically suicidal – which is typical of adolescent mourning: "*I have no one left, nobody loves me, and nothing is holding me to this life.*" When she finds herself at the edge of a cliff and she cries out for her parents, Claire isn't far from jumping. But life is stronger, she holds onto it and is saved by an angel, Sani, the shepherdess who takes care of her in the cave, nursing her back to life, literally, by giving her something to drink that resuscitates her.



Choosing the open road rather than returning to France, Claire believes she has chosen freedom. Yet lying about her identity and mostly lying to herself, she's going to come up against a wall. Literally.

She wants to be free and actually believes she is without understanding what it means. Instead of freedom, she forgets herself, invents a new name, age and personality, believing that all these lies will save her. She tries to reconstruct herself, brick by brick, but all she ends up doing is hitting an opaque wall which she needs to break through to make it; for instance, symbolically leaving her die in front of the tramp after having broken up with Sébastien, then letting go in front of Mia, the young musician she met on the plane. It's only when she can put what happened into words that she can find the path to redemption. She can finally see her grandmother again and is freed from part of her burden. The necessity of speaking openly in order to heal is a very important notion: you have to talk to the darker side of your soul in order to confront it, and above all, you have to talk, express yourself.

In not expressing herself, whatever situations the heroine has to go through – rape, a newly adopted family, romance – there's the feeling that everything is heading towards a dead end.

Not only has she not resolved her problem, but everyone sees her as an object: a sexual object for the young men who embark her on the “special” safari; an object of substitution for the waiter who calls her sister and who hires her at the restaurant; a love fantasy for Sébastien, who is twice her age. At the same time, all of this allows Claire to go through every stage of her renaissance – her rebirth in the cave, childhood, when she recklessly follows the young men (and in so doing punishes herself again), and adolescence when she falls in love with Sébastien. But it doesn't work, naturally. How could she feel good in the midst of a family who explains to her that life is already all mapped out?

Internet plays an important role: this sustained connection with the world that she has chosen to leave behind sends her paradoxically deeper into her solitude.

Like all teenagers around the world, Claire can't stop herself from going online and it is moreover logical that she should want to know if the press is speaking about the accident and if people are searching for her.



She visits the blog of her girlfriend who has the idea of sending her messages and recording her grandmother. But Claire can't answer them. It's at once comforting to hear the voices of two people she loves who ask her to return; and it's terribly nerve-racking.

Claire maintains a passion for art: she's part of a rock band and the striking bond she has with her grandmother, who is a painter, is suffused with their shared love of poetry; and Mia, her new friend that she met on the airplane is a pianist.

She is saved by art and that's perhaps a little message about the purpose of creation that I have slipped into the film. In a certain way, Claire also saves her new girlfriend by introducing her to rock music. Mia isn't very happy with the music she plays, to vicariously please her mother. Claire awakens her and helps her to reveal herself.

In that, Mia plays the role of the ultimate mirror: "Twisting Fate" remains very faithful to the book by Jean-Baptiste Destremau, "If by Chance," while allowing for a certain creative license.

It's quite freely adapted. The novel is extremely dense and plays more with the notions of fate and chance. In the film, I use destiny as a driving force – that is also the reason why I wanted to change the title. And my heroine is older, she's 17.

Why did you decide to write the screenplay with Lynne Moses, an American screenwriter?

Humbly, I needed help with this first experience (writing a feature film). I had already worked with Lynne and I liked the idea of combining American pragmatism with French romanticism. The Americans have a sense of dialogue that I'm particularly fond of: colorful, very punchy, while we French are fascinated by words to the point of almost being overwhelmed by them. This restraint in the writing seemed conducive to letting the audience invest themselves in the images, and feel the emotions on a deeper level.

What was your experience with Jean-Baptiste Destremau?

None of his books had yet been adapted for cinema. The experience was therefore new to both of us. We met at the beginning of the project, and I explained in what direction I wanted to take the film. He agreed and trusted me. We stayed in contact during the entire course of making the film.

In the novel, the story takes place between the United States and Japan. Why did you decide to shoot the film in South Africa and France?

The language barrier played a role. It would have been too complicated to shoot the entire film in English. I spent a lot of time thinking about the place where Claire could make this journey. She had to feel lost, at the ends of the earth, in a place that presented enough complexity that she wouldn't want to return home straightaway. I dreamt of superb, desert landscapes – in movies, the desert is often the place where people flee to face themselves. South Africa stood out as the obvious choice and notably this magnificent site – the Wolfberg Arch – a place only accessibly on foot in the mountains that takes a 4-hour hike to reach. It is in the Cederberg, north of Cape Town. For me, Claire's passage between her life before and the one after happens here. South Africa is a beautiful country, still acutely torn by racial tension; a highly contrasted continent with a large number of different ethnicities. I've also long been touched by its particular mix of shadow and light. In the film, we meet white people and black people, farmers, shepherds, some bizarre ethnic groups like this Xhosa woman whom Claire meets in the cave, an ethnic group well-known for their devotion and kindness. I liked the idea that she and Claire would not be able to speak with one another. They only exchange looks and gestures, but that is enough.

The majority of women that Claire comes across are extremely kind...

It is the women who have the strength and might in the film. Three of them are decisive and preside over three of the film's key scenes. The first is Sani, the shepherd woman who puts Claire back on the road to life without ever being intrusive; the second is the grandmother. Marie-Christine Barrault is really compelling. She says in an internet video blog: "come back, we need you;" we can feel she isn't comfortable in front of the camera but she is so sincere, and there is such force in her words, that she becomes terribly moving. And the third is the tramp who tells her to go back home, offering her a glimpse of what might become of her if she stays. These three women bring her back to her senses and pave the way for the last scene, which is more solar, where Claire, once returned to Saint-Brieuc, is able to face other people – as well as herself, most likely.



Due to how rapidly the events follow one another and because of the heroine's hair and tall and slender figure, there is a bit of the flair of a graphic novel in this road movie.

I take that as a compliment. I tried to keep a certain loftiness while tackling major subjects: Guilt, Freedom, Lies, and Truth. I like to say that the film is an optimistic drama.

In fact, Claire never drowns in the ordeals she has to go through.

Exactly: every time she realizes that the place she is in can bog her down, she flees. Because deep down inside, she knows she has to go home and face her grandmother. In a way, she's like a flower: a little bit of water is all you need to bring her back to life; she gets back up after each gust of wind, she moves forward and blossoms.

Noémie Merlant, who plays Claire, literally carries the entire film.

The casting process was very long and I saw a lot of actresses. Noémie was an obvious choice: the depth of her portrayal, all the things that happen in her eyes – her determination, the emotions – her voice. She's beautiful, and in my eyes that's better than being pretty; youthful, for at 28 she is able to look 17. I like her timeless face, almost like someone from the early 19th century, but who could also have come from outer space. And I appreciated her commitment. Noémie found a bit of herself in the film's story. Her own journey and life experiences have led her to reflect deeply about the meaning of existence. An amusing coincidence in the film, or a matter of chance really, she spent her childhood in the region where the heroine of the film lives and had her own rock band there. She and I found that we picked the same battles.

How did you work on the character with her?

We talked a great deal during pre-production and together we took a look at every scene in the screenplay. Sometimes she brought in her style and sensibilities from her own experience, during the film shoot as well. I also asked her to watch a few specific films like "Paris Texas" by Wim Wenders, "Into the Wild" by Sean Penn and "Something Wild" by Jonathan Demme, for Melanie Griffith's energy, for example...

Tell us about the staging...

Sylvestre Dedise, the director of photography whose sensitivity I like, and I planned very precisely, take by take, what we were going to do and how we were going to film it. "Twisting Fate" isn't a film with lots of dialogue; many things happen visually and in the way things are set in the frame. There are recurring images, such as the ubiquitous presence of bars, which represent the prison in which Claire has shut herself while believing she was escaping; the references to birds that haunt her. Almost the entire film was shot with a handheld camera, but it's not done in a shaky and jolting fashion. It was used to show the fragile chaos in which the heroine is struggling, without the image actually being chaotic, alternating between movements that flow smoothly and others that are more spasmodic.



Eric Neveu wrote the music.

We made a promise to work together a very long time ago. I love his universe. He brings depth, tenderness and a tremendous melancholy to the film. It's a very rich collaboration, very different from my experience as a producer. What I shared and experienced with every individual in this adventure is something I truly enjoyed. Everyone makes his or her contribution to bring a movie to life, to nurture it. The sound editing, of which no one ever speaks, the mixing...everything counts. There are, for instance, very specific choices and a real aesthetic stance taken with the soundtrack: quirky, inversed sounds, fading, magnifying effects... I'm also thinking about the sequence where Claire understands that something has happened when she sees her parents' car arrive, driven by policemen. We are really in her head. Christophe Henrotte, the sound editor, and I did a massive amount of work on the sound.

What type of a director are you?

I truly have the feeling that I worked hand in hand with my director of photography and my interpreter. We forged ahead together, very much aligned. We had a scaled-back crew – we were never more than 20 on the set, I didn't have a script supervisor – and everyone was very motivated. For most, it was their first feature film experience in the positions they held.

With the actors casted in South Africa, I had established one rule: not to persist unduly over certain scenes if something didn't work – excluding key scenes of course – but look for immediate solutions instead. Even working 10 hours a day for the 5 weeks that we were there, I didn't have the luxury of wasting a whole day on just one shot – it wasn't that kind of film. "Twisting Fate" is a movie that moves forward and the film shoot had to do the same!

Was your experience as a producer helpful?

Probably. Running a production company teaches you how to manage a group, get the best out of each person and find the right words to communicate. It also gives you the courage to not give in on certain points – convincing, for example, the South African crew to hike for 4 hours out to the Wolfberg Arch with all of the material to shoot the cave and the cliff scene under the Arch - or on the contrary to let go more quickly with respect to certain ideas or scenes, during the editing process in particular, even if it is painful. People always want to put too much into a first film (even though I knew better...).

If I look back, a good number of films we produced at Bonne Picoche, many documentaries depict life's pathways. They are often road movies whose protagonists come into their own through the encounters they make. In this sense, "Twisting Fate" follows in this same path.





CHRISTOPHE LIOD

Director



Towards the end of his studies, Christophe Lioud specialized in directing. In 1993, he founded the production company BONNE PIOCHE with Yves Darondeau and Emmanuel Priou. During the course of his career as a producer, Christophe has continued to write and work on screenplays. In 2010, he decided to start directing again.

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|------|--|
| 1987 | « Vincent » - short 10 mn |
| 1988 | « Les mains sales de Christine » - short 12 mn |
| 2010 | « Dream on » - short 7 mn TALENTS CANNES ADAMI |
| 2016 | «A tous les vents du ciel » |



Jean-Baptiste DESTREMAU

Book author

Jean-Baptiste Destremau was born in Rabat in 1968. Novelist, amateur pianist and an engineer by training, he lived for several years in Asia and worked as a financial engineer before dedicating himself to writing.

Nouvelles

- « Retour aux sources »
Taille Réelle (1991)
- « Les trois voyelles »
L'encrier renversé (1994)

Romans

- « Sonate de l'assassin »
Éditions Max Milo (2009), J'ai Lu (2010)
- « Si par hasard »
Éditions Max Milo (2010), J'ai Lu (2013)
- « Autopsie d'un rêveur »
Éditions Max Milo, 2014

CAST

Claire
Sebastian
Jeanne
Mia
Alice
Mère de Mia
Père de Mia
Sani
Victor
Jan
Wynand
Officer Sithole

Noémie Merlant
Daniel Njo Lobé
Marie-Christine Barrault
Naomi Amarger
Coline D'Inca
Fabienne Babe
Yves Lambrecht
Sylvia Mngxekeza
Marnitz van Deventer
Rowan Cloete
Gideon Le Roux
Faniswa Yisa



TECHNICAL CREW

Delegate Production Company

Bonne pioche Cinéma

Producer

Yves Darondeau, Emmanuel Priou

Coproduction

La voie Lactée

Coproducers

Nathalie Algazi, Marie Sonne-Jensen

François Drouot

South African Production

Mannequin Pictures

Director

Christophe Lioud

Script writers

Christophe Lioud and Lynne Moses

Adaptation from the novel "Si Par Hasard"

by Jean-Baptiste Destremau

Jean-Baptiste Destremau

Éditions Max Milo

Cinematography

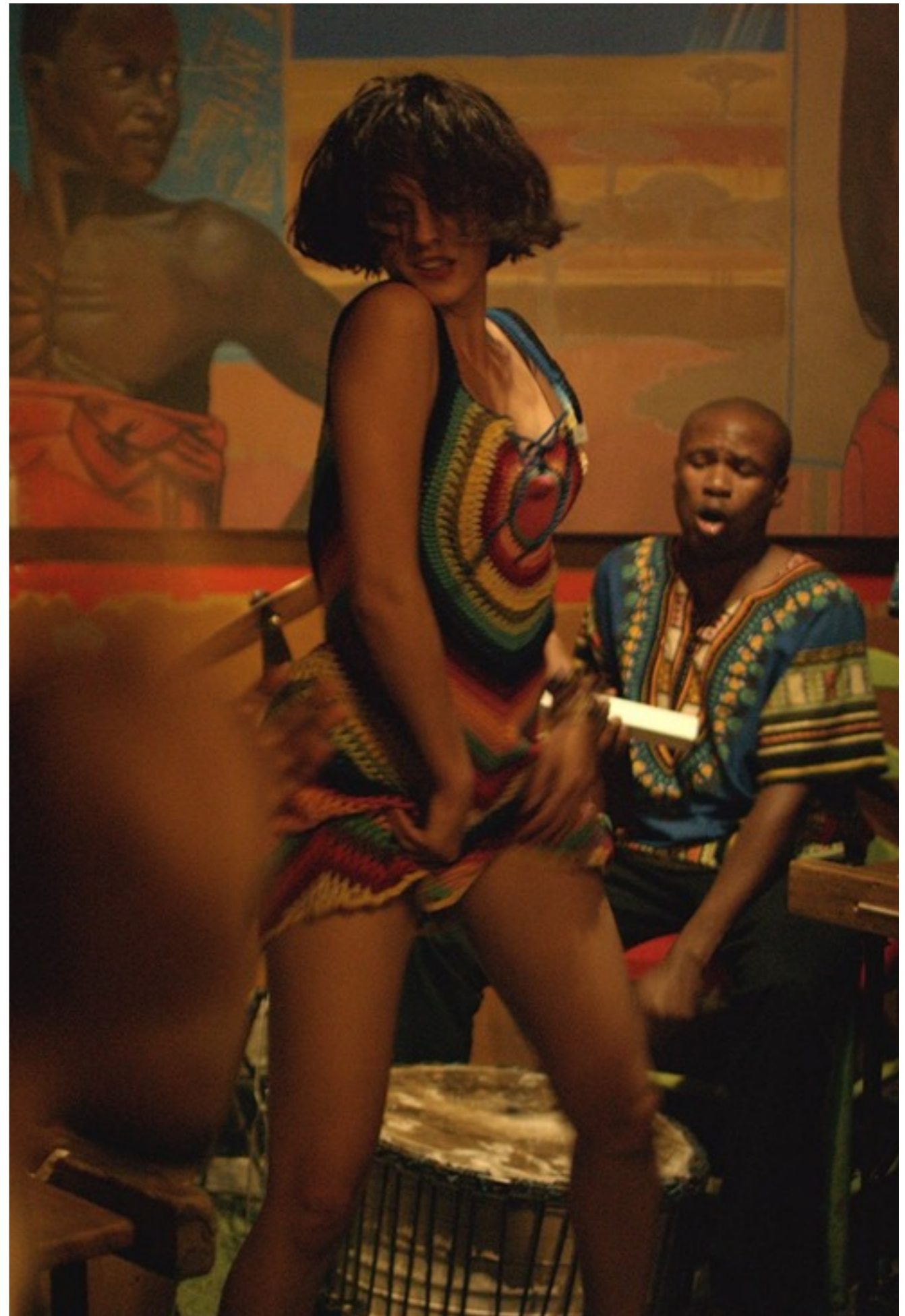
Sylvestre Dedise

Music

Eric Neveux

Sound

Jean Christophe Lion





BONNE PIOCHE
cinéma

LA VOIE LACTÉE

PROCIREP
ANGOA

COFINOVA 11

STUDIO
MAIA

CNC