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OFFICIAL SELECTION 2015



Festival del film Locarno  
Official selection

Directed by GUILLAUME SENEZ

# KEEPER





## SYNOPSIS

Maxime and Mélanie are in love. Together, they clumsily explore their sexuality with fiery curiosity until the day Mélanie realizes she's pregnant. At first Maxime takes the news badly, but then he gets used to the idea of becoming a father. He convinces Melanie to keep the baby. So it's been decided – Maxime and Mélanie, all of fifteen years old, are going to become parents.

## CAST

**Kacey Mottet Klein** (Maxime)  
**Galatea Bellugi** (Mélanie)  
**Catherine Salee** (Maxime's mother)  
**Sam Louwyck** (Maxime's father)  
**Laetitia Dosch** (Mélanie's mother)  
**Aaron Duquaine** (Lionel)  
**Leopold Buchsbaum** (Thibault)  
**Cedric Vieira** (coach)  
**Vincent Sornaga** (case worker)  
**Dominique Baeyens** (gynaecologist)  
**Sophia Leboutte** (manager teenager mothers' house)  
**Mounia Raoui** (doctor)  
**Beatrice Didier** (psychologist)  
**Arthur Mas** (Arthur)

## CREW

Director: **Guillaume Senez**  
Screenplay: **Guillaume Senez and David Lambert**  
1st Assistant: **Arnaud Kervyn**  
Photography: **Denis Jutzeler**  
Sound: **Eric Ghersinu**  
Set Designer: **Florin Dima**  
Editor: **Julie Brenta**  
Executive Producer: **Olivier Abrassart**  
Delegate Producers: **Isabelle Truc** / Iota Production - **Elisa Garbar** / Louise Productions  
Associate Co-Producers: **Bart Van Langendonck** / Savage Film - **Fabrice Preel Cleach** / Offshore

Belgium - Switzerland - France / 2015 / French / 95min / 2:35 (scope) / Dolby 5.1



# INTERVIEW WITH GUILLAUME SENEZ

**KEEPER is your first feature-length film. When did you decide you wanted to make movies?**

Guillaume Senez: When I was 15 or so, I started to realize that I would go see Mike Leigh or Abel Ferrara films when my friends rushed off to see JURASSIC PARK. I remember that, one day, when one of our teachers asked what we were planning on studying, all my friends had answered, on my behalf, that I was going to make films. I didn't quite realize it at the time but then everything sort of fell into place after that. I went to a film school in Brussels, from which I graduated in 2001. Then I made three short films: SQUARING THE CIRCLE in 2005, IN OUR BLOOD in 2009, and U.H.T in 2012.

**How did the idea for KEEPER come about?**

G.S.: Just after shooting IN OUR BLOOD, the story of an adolescent who is beaten by his father and now about to have a child himself, I felt that I had reached the right level of maturity as a man and as a filmmaker to tackle feature-length films. The success that my short film met in festivals confirmed this wish. So, my co-screenwriter David



Lambert and I decided to take the plunge, and since I still felt strongly connected with IN OUR BLOOD, I wanted to once again address the subject of paternity, which means a lot to me as the father of two children.

**Another similarity with IN OUR BLOOD: you once again chose to broach adolescence...**

G.S.: Yes, adolescence is the subject at the heart of my short films, because we are better armed to speak about things that we know for having experienced them. I couldn't quite picture myself, at the age of 36, telling a story involving the daily lives of a couple of eighty-year-olds in my first feature film. Besides, adolescence was a truly important period in my life and I have been shaped, as a person, by the many things that happened to me then. Therefore, it naturally reemerges in my work.

**Why did you choose, as your main character, a young boy who, after he finds out that his girlfriend is pregnant, wants her to keep the child at all costs?**

G.S.: In this kind of story, most films tend to focus on the female character who, it's true, finds herself faced with painful moments, both psychologically and physically. But, generally, whatever the male character might be experiencing is summarily treated at best. I therefore decided to address this pregnancy through the filter of paternity, and more specifically the helplessness that it involves. For, if Maxime can influence Mélanie's path, he has no other rights and appears entirely powerless with respect to what's happening.

**Their parents don't see eye to eye with one another about the situation. Maxime's mother instantly seems ready to support her son in his desire to**

**become a father, while Mélanie's mother sees this pregnancy as a skein of unsolvable problems reminding her of her own experience as one who became a mother too young...**

G.S.: I wanted all the supporting characters to have their own – obviously diverging – points of view on the situation, so as to bring about as much complexity as empathy. Here, we have the two mothers who come to the foreground with this massive dichotomy between their respective visions. With the first few screenings of KEEPER, I had the opportunity to observe that, depending on their personal experience and sensitivity, each filmgoer takes sides in a rather stark, clear-cut way: hating one while loving the other, or vice-versa.

**You, however, chose not to take sides...**

G.S.: Yes, for it was out of the question for me to make KEEPER a manifesto taking sides in favor of or against abortion or adoption. My goal is simply to show things as they are. Afterwards, people are free to discuss the matter. As a moviegoer, I myself have never enjoyed films that seek to impose a point of view.



**Yet we can feel an enormous amount of empathy in you for Maxime...**

G.S.: Yes. This is something I actually had the chance to observe in my years as soccer coach for young teams: the most touching kids are those who mess up but are ready to assume responsibility for their mistakes. Maxime is one of them. For instance, his first reaction when Mélanie announces that she is pregnant is to ask whether the baby is actually his. This moment reveals a lot about the naïvety and fragility of these two characters. Mélanie, just like Maxime, has no control over what's happening to them, and the question seems quite legitimate to Maxime, even if we – spectators – can find it horrible. Maxime is a tough but kind-hearted kid.

**Is it because you used to be a coach that you chose to make Maxime a boy who dreams of becoming a professional soccer player?**

G.S.: Well, something else had to be at stake behind the story. The goal here isn't for the viewer to believe that Maxime can become a pro, but that he may hope to become one – when the odds are that out of every 100 kids who play at a very high level, only 6 are bound to transfer to pro. I thus wanted this tipping moment, when Maxime grows up through the perspective of this child to be born, to also be the moment when he faces the disappointment of not achieving that specific dream, at an age when we still have a wide array of ideals...

**Maxime is played by Kacey Mottet Klein. When did you think of him?**

G.S.: I didn't write the film with a specific teenage actor in mind for the simple reason that it took five years to put together the financial backing.

Any actor I might have chosen would therefore no longer have been a teenager by the time we were ready to shoot! (laughter) However, from the very beginning, I wanted the actors to be the same age as their characters. Too frequently, we see 15-year-old kids played by older teenagers and it often destroys their credibility. For, at the age of 15, we have a way of walking, sitting or even speaking that is truly singular, as well as a relationship with our own body that is radically different. We therefore called on Laure Cochener, who worked on all my short films, for the casting. And then Ursula Meier told me about Kacey, whom she had directed in SISTER. I was a bit reluctant at first because the film was still clear in my mind and I found him a bit frail for the role. Ursula, however, explained that he had changed physically and advised me to meet him – which I did, with Laure. Then, as far as his acting is concerned, we found ourselves in the presence of someone truly exceptional. Ursula had indeed forewarned me: "Kacey," she'd said "is a Stradivarius."

**And why did you choose Galatea Bellugi to portray Mélanie?**

G.S.: We must have met nearly a hundred boys and girls aged 14 to 16. Beyond the quality of their acting, we had to believe in the pair formed by Maxime and Mélanie. We quickly observed that it was the case with Kacey and Galatea. Her apparent fragility and the fact that she hasn't experienced much in her life so far offered a perfect contrast with Kacey, who on the contrary exudes a charisma and a form of confidence resulting from a rather eventful life. Seeing these two together was seeing the obvious. In fact, it was essential to see Maxime have this kind of influence on Mélanie.

**How did you work with them both before filming?**

G.S.: We didn't rehearse much. My actor's never get the script. I feel comfortable with this approach because, while creating a form of collective euphoria on the set, it also gives rise to the emotional authenticity that I'm looking for in my films. I do not, however, keep secrets from my actors. They know precisely what the film is about. To achieve this, we organized readings of a 20-page synopsis during which I explained in detail what would happen in each sequence. These readings also provided us with an opportunity to discuss their character as well as their relationship with one another and with their parents. I did the same with the actors playing the parents. Then I brought all five of them together for some improvisation work based on the scene in the film when this little group discusses



whether or not to keep the baby. I was therefore able to observe very quickly that everyone had fully stepped into character. I left things there because spending too much time in rehearsal might have compromised the indispensable spontaneity that we needed to have later, while shooting.



**Then, once you started shooting, you gave them the screenplay...**

G.S.: Not at all! I simply handed them a sequence recap including a summary of each scene in two to three lines. They didn't know the dialogs before the takes and yet there is, in the end, very little difference between their words and those on my screenplay. There is a very simple reason for this: when I write, I put myself in each actor's place and more or less ask myself the same questions they may ask themselves. I therefore imagine the dialogs that they are most likely to utter spontaneously.

**How do you approach each scene with them?**

G.S.: We start with a first improvisation for which I explain to the actors what is at stake in the scene. In fact, quite quickly these initial rehearsals became full-fledged takes, after which we discussed things before doing it over again until we achieved what I wanted. My work didn't actually consist in directing my actors, but rather in working alongside them to nudge them in the direction I wanted them to take. Sometimes, I found myself whispering just one or two lines of dialog to them just to fit in as needed in the narrative continuity.

**In the roles of Maxime's and Mélanie's parents, we have Catherine Salée, Sam Louwyck and Laetitia Dosch. What prompted such choices?**

G.S.: My goal was to find talented actors who were excited about my work method and in no way reluctant to being in a film without reading the screenplay! Catherine Salée, who plays Maxime's mother, played the leading role in my short film U.H.T. and therefore knew how I worked. As far as Sam Louwyck is concerned, I met him through my

Belgian-Dutch producer and he was straightaway very enthusiastic about it. Just like Laetitia Dosch, who plays Mélanie's mother and had already worked with a similar approach for AGE OF PANIC.

**How did you orchestrate this feature film's visual atmosphere?**

G.S.: Denis Jutzeler, a well-seasoned director of photography who notably worked with Alain Tanner, did an amazing job with the film's visual flair. In our initial exchanges, I obviously told him about my way of working with the actors. I explained that I was always going to give them priority over the technical aspects, which in turn would have to follow and capture the moment without creating the slightest constraint. Denis instantly showed great enthusiasm for this approach and, while shooting, always proved extremely discreet while bringing his superb signature lighting to the film. This obviously matters a lot to me, but I didn't want the form and style to overshadow the rest. I instantly understood that we were on the same wavelength.







#### Which means?

G.S.: I think this brings us closer to the type of work he did with Alain Tanner. Denis, myself and the technical crew, we'd always ask ourselves the same question when we were stuck: what would we do if we were filming a documentary? This question never failed to shed light on the situation. Still, I didn't want this story to be treated as a documentary only focusing on realism. This is the reason, among others, why I chose to film in cinemascope.

#### Did you also show him specific film references to illustrate what you were looking to achieve?

G.S.: Yes. In particular, we watched Gus van Sant's PARANOID PARK, as well as Patrice Chéreau's THOSE WHO LOVE ME CAN TAKE THE TRAIN, which is a cult film for me, and was also filmed in cinemascope. We also watched LET THE RIGHT ONE IN and BOY A for Tomas Alfredson's and John Crowley's work on white light and unconventional framing approaches.

#### How long did the film shoot last?

G.S.: Only 25 days instead of the 30 initially planned. In order to fit into our budget, we had to say goodbye to these five extra days only one month before we started shooting. This entailed drastic narrative choices that I obviously wish I'd had the chance to make at the editing stage. You can't afford to make mistakes with a first feature film. I was well aware of the fact that if I failed in any way, there would not be a second chance for me. I sometimes even considered calling the whole thing off to avoid shooting myself in foot because of a filming timeframe that was too short in relation to what had to be played out. In the end, I chose to take on this risky challenge.

#### Did the film evolve much during the editing process?

G.S.: Even if we had less material than usual, the editing process always allows for some kind of rewriting, in particular when it comes to suppressing redundant moments or choosing the rhythm that you want to apply to the narrative. I had moreover the pleasure of reuniting with Julie Brenta, with whom I'd worked on my short films. Since we have the same tastes, it's very easy for me to work with her. Consequently, the narrative thread was very quickly finalized and then we mostly focused on rhythm.

#### How did you choose the music that we hear in the scenes that indeed bring a breath of fresh air into the story?

G.S.: Although I am a great fan of film scores, it's not something I've ever been particularly comfortable with for my own films. That's the reason why I didn't want to involve a composer in making KEEPER. Music, however, is present in the scenes that offer a moment for everyone to catch their breath, something that felt indispensable to this story. Since we'd cut up the narrative before shooting in order to forcefully make it fit into the given timeframe, we had to, when editing, take the time to step back and allow the audience to breathe between the different acts. The music that we hear in KEEPER is a mix of songs found in my i-Tunes library, for which we miraculously managed to secure the rights. We were able to show the film to the people in charge of negotiating the clearance for use, which was a tremendous help in the task at hand.





## DIRECTOR'S BIO

Guillaume Senez is both French and Belgian, but above all a Brussels' native. After his final-year student film at INRACI in 2001, he directed three short films that received a number of awards in festivals around the world: SQUARING THE CIRCLE in 2006, IN OUR BLOOD in 2009 (nominated for the Unifrance Award for best short film at the Cannes Films Festival and the Lutins Award) and U.H.T. in 2012, (nominated for best short film, at the Magritte Awards). Strongly encouraged by these valuable film experiences, Guillaume took on his first feature film KEEPER.

## DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Maxime, who has barely left childhood himself, attempts in every way possible to convince Mélanie to keep their baby. Beyond being a story that I'm enthusiastic about, I felt the need to film adolescence in all its beauty and complexity. I wanted to show these teenagers' fragility, their lightheartedness, their carefree nature and above all their love.

We follow this touching story from Maxime's perspective. I decided to film his journey into fatherhood, for as a father of two children it is what intrinsically speaks to me most.

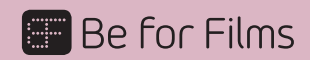
Through these young teenagers, I'm seeking to share an emotion, to share the way things feel just as they are, without over-explaining them. Far from the idea of making a message film that campaigns for a certain point of view, I just wanted to film the protagonists, follow them and become attached to them.

I'm not looking for originality, but for balance and accuracy as concerns one point of view in this masculine and adolescent journey; also, truthfulness in interpretation within a form of realistic cinema. I don't give the actors a script, we work together to find an emotional authenticity. I don't direct my actors, I accompany them. I don't try to construct characters within a frame, but with the intention of revealing characters and their existence well beyond the frame, to uncover a story emanating from real life in a true to life, honest way, which is so seldom captured.

"Keeper" in Belgium and in many other English-speaking countries means "goal-keeper". I thought it would be interesting for Maxime to be confronted with this thankless position, which in terms of powerlessness also echoes Maxime's helplessness when faced with Mélanie's pregnancy. "A keeper can't win a game. He can only save it." Thus starting from a position of utter powerlessness, **KEEPER** is, in the end, a movie about what one wishes for.



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