



Les Films Pelléas presents

Official Selection

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Toronto International  
Film Festival 2018

# MAYA

A FILM BY MIA HANSEN-LØVE

WITH ROMAN KOLINKA, AARSHI BANERJEE

2017 – FRANCE – 107'

**INTERNATIONAL SALES**

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# SYNOPSIS

**December 2012. After four months in captivity in Syria, two French reporters are released.**

**Gabriel, the younger one, is just shy of 30.**

**Following a day of interrogations and medical exams, Gabriel is allowed to see his loved ones: his father, his ex-girlfriend Naomi... His mother lives in India, where he grew up. She has cut ties with everyone.**

**A few weeks later, unable to find his bearings, Gabriel decides to leave for India. He moves into his childhood home in Goa, and meets Maya, a young Indian girl.**

# INTERVIEW WITH MIA HANSEN-LØVE

## How did you become interested in this character of the war reporter?

More than once I was struck by the aura that emanates from journalists, former hostages, once they are released. A mix of unspeakable experiences, of suffering endured, of joy to be free. Moreover, one of my grandfathers (Paul Bonnacarrère, editor's note) was a war correspondent, a journalist at *Paris Match* and the author of books about war. He died young, and I never knew him. He did not directly inspire my character, but his figure helped me with the writing. Having twice worked with Roman Kolinka, I wanted to see him carry a lead role. And I thought that, beyond his qualities as an actor, some of the aspects of his appearance on screen - a kind of reserve, charisma, harshness too - could help him get under the skin of a war reporter.

## How did family reminiscences about your grandfather mark your vision of the war correspondent?

My mother and grandmother admired my grandfather very much. They described him as a very seductive man. The romantic, heroic aspect of the profession appealed to me, of course. War reporters have a taste for adventure, for movement, which is also what nudged me toward cinema, though in a different way. Other than the characteristic qualities of a war reporter - curiosity, independence, recklessness - what fascinated me was the requisite pragmatism, the absence of any qualms of conscience in extreme situations when confronted with violence and the moral ambivalence it implies. War reporters rub shoulders with death. They flirt with it. It

may be because I situate myself at the antipodes of that kind of attitude that I wanted to try to understand it. That said, the job of a reporter is just the starting point of the film. What I was searching for, first of all, is an interior quest, the rebirth of a man after an ordeal.

## In the films in which you describe a precise milieu, like the “French Touch” in *Eden*, we know that you start with long and meticulous research. How did you document yourself on *Maya*? Did you meet with any French former hostages?

As part of the reading I did while writing this scenario, I would cite *La maison du retour* (Jean-Paul Kauffmann). I also think back on my dazzling memories of the journals of Dan Eldon (a photojournalist and artist who died at the age of 22 in Somalia), or Didier François' smile when he got off his plane. Later I did meet with two war reporters. One of them, Jonathan Alpeyrie, is a Franco-American journalist who was held hostage in Syria in 2013. His reading of the screenplay was invaluable. So was the conversation I had with Alfred de Montesquiou, another young journalist and reporter at *Paris-Match*.

## When we discover Gabriel, he has been seen by a psychologist, to whom he says: “I am not going to lie on a couch, blabbering about my detention”. That pretty much sums up your singular approach to the character: the trauma of the former hostage is not your subject. What interests you is his desire for an elsewhere, for movement.

The emotions I felt when journalist hostages were released did not have as much to do with their trauma as with their reserve, and the courage they embodied almost despite themselves. I never set out to examine post-traumatic stress disorder... What inspired me more was the power of a vocation. One month after his return to France, Didier François was back out in the field ... What dark forces motivate these journalists? They aren't very prone to introspection, and my character isn't either. They don't look backwards, and the entire film inches toward the possibility of a new





departure. The last scene, when we see him in Jordan, existed since I began writing. Through his travels and encounters, Gabriel wants to escape his melancholy. He is in search of the present. A little like me with this film.

**The figure of the war reporter has been frequently treated in films and literature, often for the worst, via an entire gamut of clichés about their self-destructive tendencies, their addiction to drugs and prostitutes. In *Maya*, you avoid those facile representations as much as you can. You have written a character who is a war reporter, and who appears to be much more nuanced, and much more luminous too.**

There is some truth to those clichés: drugs, alcohol, virility, fleabag hotels, prostitutes.... All you need to do is read any war correspondent's autobiography to realize this... Lynsey Addario (*an American war photographer, author of "It's What I Do" – editor's note*), interested me, because she talks about the life of a war reporter from a woman's point of view, distant from that behavior, which she nonetheless describes. What I wanted to do was to start with those stereotypes to break free of them and move on to the unknown.

**Gabriel is traversed by two opposing currents. He is a man who lives in weightlessness, and who refuses to get attached to anyone. But love gets the best of him in India, when he meets Maya...**

There's something ambivalent about the character. Gabriel is reserved and solitary. He won't be tied down. You may suspect that he himself has created this self-defense mechanism, a protective shield that, in his profession, can save his life. But it may also go back to the wounds of his childhood. What I liked was to see him vacillate: Gabriel will feel attracted to the girl. He will grow attached to her. He does not love her as deeply as she loves him. Or at least this is what he believes... He tries to toe the line, but he surrenders. He lets his body get the better of him. Even though it remains an impossible love, the attraction he feels will help him leave. In India, Gabriel hopes to reestablish contact with something deep within himself. But

instead of his mother, he meets a young Indian girl who crosses his path. Ultimately, Maya resurrects him.

**That attraction is primarily carnal. We get the feeling that this is your most physical film, the most sensual in a long time. What motivated this return to the body in your cinema?**

First of all, India. It seemed impossible to me to film that country without trying to convey the sensuality you find there, and how it combines with an omnipresent spirituality. That coincided with a desire to refocus on the body after *Things to Come*. I believe that films respond to each other. They fill in the voids and make up for the flaws of previous films. *Things to Come* was about a woman who has renounced love. I loved making that film, but I also found it a little painful to spend two years with that idea. *Maya* is a way of remedying that. I live my films intensely, and I have an uncompromising relationship with my characters and what they go through...

**You've already filmed abroad, but bit by bit: New York in *Eden*, Vienna in *All Is Forgiven*. Why India today?**

India was at the origin of the project, no less than the figure of the war reporter. I went to Goa over several consecutive years, and I finally asked myself why I was so drawn to the country. After *Things To Come*, I needed to get away - far from France - and confront another world, with all the risks that entails. That is about how I was able to identify with Gabriel. I too needed to go to India. To take the plunge, as a way of fleeing, but also perhaps a way of finding myself. I thought that India was the country that would offer me the right distance. My previous travels helped me film these locations while avoiding any exoticism. Goa is a former Portuguese colony, with architecture and a culture all its own, where Catholicism and Hinduism coexist. The region is today considered tainted by tourism: a lost paradise, a hackneyed, sold-out utopia. I always hear that Goa isn't truly India. I wanted to get away from a





schematic vision of India, torn between splendor and misery, and try to film a more complex India, impure perhaps, but contemporary. Without relinquishing its culture, India has adopted modernity at breakneck speed. Past and future comingle everywhere. I hope that the film conveys a little of that, and especially thanks to Aarshi (Maya), who to my mind magnificently embodies the India of today. The story with Gabriel is a love story, but it also talks about a fragile rapprochement between two cultures and two worlds.

**Your manner of escaping tourist clichés depends most notably on your descriptive look...**

I'm not Indian. There is obviously going to be some distance, which I did not want to lose. And which did not prevent me from doing all I could to place myself eye-to-eye with this terrain, to truly observe it. That meant watching it live, which is not that obvious in cinema, and in India, it was a struggle. We needed to convince a crew, much of it Indian, to let me film the crazy road traffic, the electricity in the streets, the people passing by, the collisions, the crowds of drunken men on the beaches of Goa. They thought we would be assaulted by those people the minute they spotted us. But I have often filmed urban life, and I worked with the crew on remaining very discreet and capturing the reality and poetry of Indian life, while preserving the film's form and respecting the needs of my direction.

**That friction between the demands of a film shoot and a desire for documentary exactitude obviously calls to mind Renoir's *The River*. Did you see the movie again before shooting?**

I saw it, but not before filming. I may have been frightened that the film would overpower me... *The River* is the absolute reference for any French filmmaker going to India. But I think there is a classic feel to *The River*, which is situated at quite a remove from Maya. Before the shoot, I saw or saw again the films of Satyajit Ray, and in particular the Apu trilogy, which depicts a man at three stages of his life. It may be the fragile Indian child, and then the interiority of Apu adult - played by the

marvelous actor Soumitra Chatterjee, who we find in many of his films - that I used as a compass. To my mind, there is an unsurpassable truth in Ray's vision of rural India, and something deeply moving in his sensitive look at childhood. And there is something unmistakably modern in his way of associating fiction, romance and documentary precision.

**This is the first time you've worked with director of photography Hélène Louvart. What role did she play in helping you find the form of the film?**

An essential role. I can't dissociate the film from Hélène's commitment. *Maya* was hard to finance. The project threw people off balance. It didn't belong to any truly defined genre, and did not fit in with any financing logic: filmed in several languages, in several countries, with no stars... So to make this film, we needed to be more passionate than ever, and especially clever. Hélène helped me come up with a way to shoot the film without sacrificing anything, especially film stock - indispensable for rendering colors, and for capturing the sensual heat of India. Each day we needed a double dose of energy to find solutions that would preserve both our freedom and our ambitions. That is what led us, for example, to shoot the sequence of the voyage in the voyage in super 16 – when Gabriel leaves by train to travel across India. To shoot that part of the film, we left as a party of four, taking planes and trains from Bengal to Rajasthan. Roman carried the cases, and I (badly) recorded the sound. I did not want to be forced into any formal decisions foreign to me for economic reasons, and the dialogue with Hélène helped me strike a balance between a light shoot and the demands of my direction.

***Maya* is one of your most musical films. How did you come up with the original soundtrack that combines unfamiliar Indian songs, with classical music and Anglo-Saxon pop?**

Music counts for a lot in all my films, even though I don't use it very much, because it's almost always diegetic. Since *Maya* is my most romantic film, I thought that it would make sense to work with a composer for the first time, but during the edit, the

film resisted the idea. So the few songs I had in mind from the start took on decisive importance. The Schubert lied imposed itself thanks to Judith Chemla – she had once performed a reworked version in French, which is what inspired my choice. The other piece that accompanied me from the start was “Distant Sky” by Nick Cave, which determines the tone of the film and which I put at the end. That song contains all the emotion the film should be striving for. We found the Indian titles as we went along. I like “Come Closer” a lot. It's a disco hit by Bappi Lahiri that Gabriel hears in the night club and that accompanies him until his accident. It's a spellbinding piece, but here it becomes almost deathly.

**This is the third time you've worked with Roman Kolinka. How did he surprise you?**

I was already familiar with his acting qualities: his authority, grace, and that certain seriousness which never looks affected. But I was stunned by his ability to adapt and by his endurance. Even though he hasn't actually acted that much, he suddenly had to carry an entire film, in a world that was foreign to him... I was impressed by how easily he slipped into every situation, whether physical or mental.

**How did your encounter with Aarshi Banerjee take place?**

It was a miraculous encounter. Aarshi lives in Mumbai, and had never acted before. When I met her, she was 16, living alone with her mother, and she looked like she had just left childhood behind. I don't think I could have made the film without her. I saw no other girl who could in any way whatsoever incarnate *Maya*. Luminous, simple, and profound. Aarshi's beauty seduced me all the more. I found it both timeless and very contemporary, while remaining far removed from the canons of Bollywood. Just before the shoot, I went through another bout of working on the script, during which I came much closer to her, not to directly use elements of her life, but by letting myself be inspired by her language, her freedom, and her way of being alive to the world.



# MIA HANSEN-LØVE

was born in Paris in 1981. She began as an actress with Olivier Assayas (*Late August, Early September – Sentimental Destinies*). She was admitted to the Conservatory of Dramatic Arts in Paris' 10th arrondissement in 2001. She left in 2003 to write for the *Cahiers du Cinéma*, where she worked until 2005, at the same time directing several short subjects.

Her feature films have all been selected by category A festivals (Cannes, Locarno, Toronto, Berlin), where they were awarded prestigious prizes (The Louis Delluc Prize for the Best First Film for *All is Forgiven* in 2007, the Special Jury Prize in the Un Certain Regard section for *The Father of My Children* at Cannes in 2010, Special Mention from the Jury for *Goodbye First Love* in Locarno in 2011, and a Silver Bear for Best Director for *Things to Come* at Berlin in 2016). In all, her films count more than one hundred selections at international film festivals.

## FILMOGRAPHY

- 2016 THINGS TO COME** (L'Avenir)  
SILVER BEAR
- 2014 EDEN**  
SUNDANCE OFFICIAL SELECTION
- 2010 GOODBYE FIRST LOVE** (Un amour de jeunesse)  
LOCARNO SPECIAL MENTION
- 2009 THE FATHER OF MY CHILDREN** (Le Père de mes enfants)  
JURY PRIZE UN CERTAIN REGARD
- 2007 ALL IS FORGIVEN** (Tout est pardonné)  
DIRECTORS' FORTNIGHT OFFICIAL SELECTION



## ROMAN KOLINKA

was born in Paris in 1986. He first played several small roles, most notably in *Something in the Air* by Olivier Assayas and *Juliette* by Pierre Godeau. But it was with Mia Hansen-Løve that his acting career took off in *Eden* in 2014, and then in *Things to Come* with Isabelle Huppert in 2016, and finally in *Maya*, in which he plays the main role.

## AARSHI BANERJEE

was born in 1999 in Kharagpur, northeastern India. *Maya* is her first film.





## CAST

<b>Gabriel</b>	ROMAN KOLINKA
<b>Maya</b>	AARSHI BANERJEE
<b>Frédéric</b>	ALEX DESCAS
<b>Monty</b>	PATHY AIYAR
<b>Sigrid</b>	SUZAN ANBEH
<b>Naomi</b>	JUDITH CHEMLA
<b>Johanna</b>	JOHANNA TER STEEGE

## CREW

<b>Director</b>	MIA HANSEN –LØVE
<b>Director of photography</b>	HÉLÈNE LOUVART
<b>Sound</b>	VINCENT VATOUX
<b>Film Editing</b>	MARION MONNIER
<b>Costume Design</b>	JUDITH DE LUZE
<b>Assistant director</b>	CÉLINE BAILBLED
<b>Production director</b>	MARC BREGAIN
<b>Produced by</b>	PHILIPPE MARTIN AND DAVID THION
<b>A France-Germany coproduction</b>	LES FILMS PELLÉAS, RAZOR FILM PRODUKTION
<b>In coproduction with</b>	ARTE FRANCE CINÉMA, ZDF / ARTE, ORANGE STUDIO, SOFINERGIE 5 FCM, DAUPHIN FILMS, PIO & CO.
<b>With the participation of</b>	ARTE FRANCE, CANAL +, CINÉ + ORANGE STUDIO WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF CN6 PRODUCTIONS, CENTRE NATIONAL DU CINÉMA ET DE L'IMAGE ANIMÉE
<b>With the support of</b>	FILMFÖRDERUNGSANSTALT
<b>In association with</b>	CINÉMAGE 12
<b>Developped with the support of</b>	CINÉMAGE 12 DÉVELOPPEMENT, JOUROR FILMS
<b>With the support of</b>	EUROPEAN UNION CREATIVE EUROPE-MEDIA PROGRAM
<b>Distribution France</b>	LES FILMS DU LOSANGE
<b>Distribution Germany &amp; Austria</b>	WELTKINO
<b>International Sales</b>	ORANGE STUDIO