



SUPERSTRUCTURE  
present



# SUMMER BEATS

A film by **Lise Akoka and Romane Gueret**

Runtime: 1h52

## INTERNATIONAL PUBLICITY

Margaux AUDOUIN  
[margaux.audouin@canal-plus.com](mailto:margaux.audouin@canal-plus.com)

## INTERNATIONAL MARKETING

David GAUTER  
[david.gauter@canal-plus.com](mailto:david.gauter@canal-plus.com)



# SYNOPSIS

**Growing up in a less well-off area of Paris, 19-year-old Shai and Djeneba have always been inseparable. For one summer, the two headstrong girls escape their tower blocks to work at a summer camp in the southeast of France, where they attempt to supervise an unruly tribe of exasperating, unique and endearing kids. Their adventure will put the girls' friendship to the test and reshuffle the cards of their dreams and desires, prompting them to reconsider what the future holds.**





## BIOGRAPHY OF **LISE AKOKA & ROMANE GUERET**

Romane Gueret, after studying film at the Sorbonne, took her first steps toward directing as an assistant director, casting assistant, or camera operator.

Lise Akoka pursued a university degree in psychology and professional training as an actress at "Les Ateliers du Sudden" and the "Studio-Théâtre d'Asnières". She later discovered that working in casting and coaching children for film allowed her to merge her two main interests.

In 2014, they met while casting for a feature film, during which they auditioned more than

4,000 young, non-professional actors over several months.

In 2015, they co-directed the short film *Chasse Royale*, which won awards at several festivals and received the Illy Prize at the Directors' Fortnight in 2016. The film was later nominated for the César Award for Best Short Film in 2017. In August 2018, they co-directed the documentary *Allez garçon!*, part of the *Hobbies* collection, which aired in September 2019 on Canal+.

In 2020, their web series *Tu préfères* premiered on Arte. The 10-episode, 7-minute series

was selected for the 2021 Sundance Festival and Séries Mania.

In the summer of 2021, they directed their first feature film, *THE WORST ONES*, shot in Boulogne-sur-Mer. Released in December 2022, the film was selected for festivals worldwide and won the Un Certain Regard Prize at Cannes as well as the Valois de Diamant at Angoulême.

In the summer of 2024, they co-directed their second feature film, *SUMMER BEATS*. The film is selected for the 2025 Cannes Film Festival in the Cannes Premiere category.



## INTERVIEW WITH LISE AKOKA & ROMANE GUERET

THE DIRECTORS

### **DID YOU KNOW FROM THE START THAT YOU WANTED TO REUNITE WITH THE TWO YOUNG ACTRESSES YOU'D DISCOVERED IN TU PRÉFÈRES?**

Lise Akoka and Romane Gueret: We have known Fanta and Shirel since they were eleven years old, and our relationship continues to evolve and grow beyond our projects. Watching them grow up, and seeing them blossom into young women, has opened up new ideas for us to explore. They are like our little sisters, our combined doubles: they allow us to question our differences and points of convergence and tell our own story through

them. Moreover, our joy in filming and directing them has not diminished, and their immense talent continues to impress us. So, we wanted to cast them in roles that would allow them to showcase their abilities on the big screen. SUMMER BEATS offers them a more romantic range of acting, less close to the documentary style of *Tu Préfères*.

**JUST LIKE IN THE WORST ONES,  
WHICH DEPICTED A FILM SHOOT,  
YOU PLACE YOUR CHARACTERS IN A  
SPACE CONFINED BY TIME AND LOCA-  
TION: THAT OF A SUMMER CAMP.**

The summer camp film is a subgenre of cinema that we hold dear. *THOSE HAPPY DAYS* by Éric Toledano and Olivier Nakache is a cult film from our childhood. Moreover, the summer camp is an environment we are familiar with, having experienced it for years as children and teenagers. Lise has worked as a youth worker in summer camp and later was in charge of running one. It is a space conducive to imagining multiple situations, depicting the micro-society of children, and exploring a new type of relationship with adults. It is a place where fantasy can sneak in, where laughter and tears coexist. Everyone can relate to it. Additionally, the sum-

mer camp film provides fertile ground for comedy, playing with language, and weaving together the serious and the light-hearted.

### **YOU DEPICT YOUNG PEOPLE FROM MARGINALISED URBAN NEIGHBOURHOODS, PLACING THEM IN AN ENVIRONMENT FREE OF THE USUAL STEREOTYPES...**

We didn't want to feed into the often misguided fantasies surrounding young people from poor urban neighborhoods –delinquency, failure, drugs –but rather pay tribute to those we admire for their energy, intelligence, sensitivity, and humour. Additionally, we feel that taking these children out of Place des Fêtes, located in the 19th arrondissement of Paris, and bringing them to the banks of a river in the Drôme region helps shift the perspective on them. Ultimately, we hope to tap into something more universal so that children, teenagers, and adults from all backgrounds can relate.

### **HOW DID YOU DETERMINE THE PERSONALITIES OF YOUR CHARACTERS, ADULTS AND CHILDREN ALIKE, SOME OF WHOM ARE STRONGLY DRAWN?**

As with THE WORST ONES, the writing process for this film was shaped by several real-world experiences. We began by taking Shirel and Fanta to after-school clubs at Place des Fêtes, where they did an internship. Then, they participated in a real summer camp, where they were hired as trainee youth workers, and we accompanied them along with our co-wri-

ter, Catherine Paillé. Additionally, both of us led workshops with children in various community centers in Montreuil.

These combined experiences allowed us to develop character profiles inspired by what we had observed, recorded, and noted. We gathered physical, psychological, behavioral, and linguistic traits, as well as small details here and there. As a result, a character is often a blend of several children we encountered during these immersive experiences. This process also enabled us to refine storylines over time and enrich our dialogues.

**«We didn't want to feed into the often misguided fantasies surrounding young people from poor urban neighborhoods.»**

We were eager to depict the vibrant world of summer camp as realistically and engagingly as possible, portraying childhood in all its complexity, its madness, and even its cruelty, while avoiding stereotypes and the condescending gaze of adults. From immersion to editing, we continuously refined our characters, keeping the writing process alive.

Moreover, we organised an actual summer camp at the filming location during the summer to ensure that our child actors had a structured environment and didn't have to travel during

the weeks of shooting. This setup allowed them to form bonds, helped them feel more comfortable in their scenes, and continued to enrich the substance of an already lengthy script. That's why we ended up with 150 hours of raw footage...

### **A FRANKNESS RUNS THROUGH THE FILM, DRIVEN BY SHAÏ'S SPONTANEITY AND THE RECURRING "WOULD YOU RATHER" GAME AS A LEITMOTIF...**

There is a freedom in Shaï that sparked many spontaneous, off-the-cuff remarks. While our dialogues were heavily scripted, we did a lot of improvisation beforehand to enrich the writing. Shaï's direct nature leads her to voice naïve questions out loud, such as her curiosity about Nael's gender identity. Children of this generation question this topic less than their elders do, as they have more readily accepted the idea that non-binary identities exist. Shaï, through her candor and lack of inhibition, seems to relieve something for the audience, who might also secretly be wondering.

At the beginning of the story, she lacks maturity, but she gradually gains some through this experience. Like a mirror, we wanted to confront Shaï and Djeneba with childhood at the moment they are leaving it behind. Djeneba, whose mother is absent and disengaged, is suddenly thrust into adulthood, while Shaï, burdened by familial and religious expectations, remains stuck in the role of an eternal child. In their own ways, both suffer from a patriarchal system that hinders their growth. But that summer will pull them, at least slightly, out of their respective dead ends.



As for “Would you rather”, it serves as a narrative device to bring their conflict to the surface and make their relationship explode. Shaï and Djeneba exchange barbs during the game, which brings out a whole range of emotions. It oscillates between existential questions and trivial comments, back and forth, allowing other characters to have their say as well. It is an intergenerational game structured around dilemmas, unexpectedly prompting deep personal and political reflections.

#### **YOUR SCREENPLAY REVOLVES AROUND THE NOTION OF BONDS THAT FORM OR UNRAVEL...**

It begins with the relationship between Shaï and Djeneba. At the start of the film, they are seen together in joyful moments, but as the sto-

ry progresses, the crisis between them looms. As their connection frays, new ones emerge elsewhere. However, it was also important for us to honor and celebrate the bond, sometimes intense, that exists between them and evolves, reflecting the state of childhood and adolescence.

This summer marks the end of that intense connection, the moment when Djeneba can move toward the idea of loving and being loved, and when Shaï can begin to exist independently, without relying on the gaze of a man or the expectations of her family.

#### **BENEATH THE VENEER OF SUMMER COMEDY, DRAMA EMERGES, AND SERIOUS THEMES COME TO THE SURFACE. IN THIS REGARD, THE**

#### **SEQUENCE CENTRED ON THE TESTIMONY OF A HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR IS PARTICULARLY STRIKING...**

It is a digressive sequence that was very important to us, touching on troubled childhoods, beliefs, religion, and death, topics that run through the film, whether through characters' anxiety attacks or their existential questions. Moreover, cultural identity, religious affiliation, and beliefs, especially those concerning death, hold a significant place in the conversations of the children we encountered during our real-world research. This is something that struck us deeply. This sequence also provides an escape from the enclosed world of the summer camp, where such educational outings are often organised. It also allows us to pay tribute to Lise's great-aunt, who experienced what this woman recounts.



## **YOUR FILM SITS AT THE CROSS-ROADS OF TEEN MOVIES, SUMMER CAMP FILMS, SOCIAL DRAMAS, AND SHARP-WITTED STREET COMEDY, CONSTANTLY PLAYING WITH LANGUAGE. HOW DID YOU WEAVE THESE GENRES TOGETHER?**

This blending of genres, this hybridity, is intrinsic to childhood, and we sought to capture it. Exploring childhood also means shedding light on behaviors that are sometimes troubling and ambiguous: like the little girl who tries to dominate her friend, or another who fixates on a boy without considering his consent.

The question of language is essential in this project. The sharp wit of our characters runs through the narrative and is integral to its rhythm. Our young protagonists share the experience of growing up in an environment where verbal sparring is a daily sport, a way to defend themselves, to exist, to assert their presence. They have been immersed in the art of banter from a young age. This humour, this intensity, this ferocity fills us with both exhilaration and deep affection.

In our dialogues, we wanted to reflect how children appropriate language, inventing expressions that blend literary and colloquial styles. There is a virtuosity and keen intelligence in the way they wield words. Their quick wit never ceases to impress us.

## **HOW DID YOU PUT TOGETHER YOUR CAST?**

The casting process lasted a full year and involved 1,500 children. We reunited with our casting director, Marlène Serour, with whom we had worked on THE WORST ONES and

our previous projects. Marlène and her team met many children during an extensive open casting process, visiting community centers where she organised group auditions. Each child was filmed, and we later reviewed those who intrigued or captivated us the most. There were three or four rounds of casting, which were often group work sessions where we introduced improvisation exercises and more focused work on the film's dialogues.

After casting, we held workshops to work with the children. This is an essential research phase in our process, often both challenging and wonderful. With time, patience, and effort, we witness the emergence of something truly

***“The question of language is essential in this project.”***

alive. We aim to create a structured and safe environment that helps children reach a place of confidence, where they enjoy themselves and gradually gain autonomy by exploring their own abilities. In the end, we took twenty children to the shoot.

For the adult roles, besides Fanta Kebe and Shirel Nataf, whom we already mentioned, we wanted to work again with Mouctar Diawara and Zakaria Lazab, who had appeared in Tu Préfères. For our group of youth workers, we sought diversity and distinctive personalities, remaining open to both professional actors and non-actors. Some, like Suzanne de Baecque and Yuming Hey, who play Bérangère

and Naël respectively, already had significant experience, mainly in theater, and we were drawn to their soft eccentricities. Idir Azougli, meanwhile, came from street casting, though he is now building an impressive filmography. We were moved by his vulnerability, his raw sensitivity, and felt that he immediately brought likability to his character, which was essential. As for Amel Bent, she initially came to mind because she closely matched the vision we had for the summer camp leader. But beyond that, she is a singer who shaped and delighted our adolescence selves. The moment she stepped into the room she embodied Sabrina entirely! Then she started acting, and her natural precision followed. At that point, we had no doubt. She was extremely motivated, eager to tap into a sense of spontaneity and authenticity. She worked hard and embraced our approach wholeheartedly. She also bonded wonderfully with Shirel and Fanta, seeing herself in them at the same age, effortlessly oscillating between maternal warmth and playful mischief.

## **DID YOU USE THE SAME APPROACH TO DIRECTING ACTORS AS IN THE WORST ONES ?**

We have refined this technique over several years now. It consists of equipping both child and adult actors with discreet earpieces to guide them and feed them lines during takes. We position ourselves behind the monitor, a few meters from the set, equipped with headsets, microphones, and a control panel with buttons linking us to each child. This setup places the actors in a heightened state of presence and awareness. It makes them less



conscious of their image and more focused on the scene itself. It helps them let go, making their performances both freer and more controlled.

To familiarise them with our voices and this approach, we introduced the tool during rehearsals. It's a valuable time-saving method during filming and prevents constant interruptions between takes where we are having to step onto the set and direct the actors.

### **YOUR DIRECTION IS HIGHLY FLUID AND CAREFULLY CRAFTED. WHAT WERE YOUR STYLISTIC CHOICES?**

For *SUMMER BEATS*, we wanted to limit the systematic use of handheld camera work. Our cinematographer, Jean-François Hensgens, proposed setting up a perimeter of rails around the groups of children, onto which a

mobile camera was mounted. This allowed for stable, sweeping movements shot with long focal lengths, creating a sense of immersion in the children's secret world.

We then blended these shots with those from a second, handheld camera, which was better able to capture details and follow the actors' rhythm. Just like with the performers, we remained connected to our camera operators via earpieces to orchestrate this two-camera choreography.

We also wanted to curb our tendency for close-ups and, this time, give more space to the beauty of the Drôme region, where these children spend their summer. Having rarely left their neighborhood in Place des Fêtes, Paris, they are now discovering a landscape bursting with lush vegetation. We wanted to see it through their eyes, which is why it was impor-

tant for us to include more wide shots. Our love for faces still comes through on the screen, of course, but the camera also steps back, letting in the world around them.

### **HOW DID YOU ENVISION THE LIGHT AND WARM TONES USED IN THE FILM?**

We wanted the audience to feel the overwhelming summer heat, the sweat, the sun-kissed skin, and the interaction with water. During scouting and preparation, Jean-François Hensgens captured analog test shots based on photographic references we had shared with him. Film photography allows for strong contrasts that evoke memories of past vacations. He then built the film's visual aesthetic upon the insights gained from these tests, ensuring the imagery did not feel overly nostalgic. This resulted in a distinct grain, texture, and depth that aligns with the summer light.

As for the colors, the goal was to contrast the blues, purples, and violets of the high-rises in Place des Fêtes with the warm tones, terra cotta, yellow, and orange, of the Drôme in summer. We also played with the contrast between day and night, which gradually gains prominence as the story unfolds, symbolising the characters' evolution toward greater maturity.

### **HOW DID YOU WORK WITH YOUR EDITOR, ALBERTINE LASTÉRA, TO ACHIEVE THIS OVERALL LIVELINESS?**

As with THE WORST ONES, which Albertine edited, we wanted to maintain a way of diving into sequences without necessarily knowing their beginning or conclusion. The editing had to avoid feeling overly polished. The challenge here was that we had significantly more footage and more storylines to convey, whether individual arcs or those involving two characters. The goal was to make each stand out while allowing ensemble scenes to coexist, reflecting both the difficulties and the possibilities of communal life that the film explores.

The editing process required structuring the narrative with an interplay between storytelling moments and digressions, breaking free from a simple chronicle format and predictable timelines.

### **WHY DID YOU CHOOSE MON ENFANCE BY BARBARA AS A RECURRING THEME IN THE FILM'S MUSICAL SEQUENCES?**

Incorporating Barbara's music allowed us to play with genre blending, language, and the sheer pleasure of words that runs throughout the film. The young Banabella, who sings this song about childhood, and Djeneba both have a strong affinity for language, and perhaps,

through it, they will manage to break free from social determinism. And for us it is the most beautiful song about childhood.

### **CAN WE SEE A FORM OF UTOPIA IN SUMMER BEATS ?**

For us, it is an ode to the possibility of living together harmoniously. The summer camp in this film brings together children from very different backgrounds, and our own small utopia consists of uniting them and making their coexistence feel realistic. Despite the tensions they experience, each of our characters will leave something behind for the others. Several will also learn to assert themselves and break free from the pressures of their peers or certain societal expectations.

### **CAN YOU EXPLAIN THE FRENCH TITLE “MA FRÈRE”?**

It is a nod to the use of “mon frère” (“bro” in English), which is commonly used by, ourselves included, to refer to both boys and girls, reflecting a linguistic trace of the still-dominant patriarchy. We decided to subvert this term by changing its gender, just as we had heard Fanta, Shirel, and some of the children say it elsewhere. We appreciate this act of reclaiming power that our two heroines allow themselves by feminising the expression.



# CAST

DJENEBA	<b>FANTA KEBE</b>
SHAIÏ	<b>SHIREL NATAF</b>
SABRINA	<b>AMEL BENT</b>
YOUSSEF	<b>IDIR AZOUGLI</b>
NAËL	<b>YUMING HEY</b>
BÉRANGÈRE	<b>SUZANNE DE BAECQUE</b>
ISMAËL	<b>ZAKARIA LAZAB</b>
ALADI	<b>MOUCTAR DIAWARA</b>
MATEO	<b>NIKOLA BULATOVIC</b>
SEKOU	<b>MOHAMED DRAME</b>
LARRY	<b>YASSINE MAHAVITA</b>
BILAL	<b>AYMANE MAZIT</b>
MOUSSA	<b>DJIBRIL DIAMOYE</b>
YASMINE	<b>NOUR LAJIRI</b>
AÏCHA	<b>FATOUMATA KONE</b>
ANOUK	<b>LILYA JABELMEKI</b>
TIGUI	<b>MARIAM DIAMOYE</b>
BANABELLA	<b>CYNTHIA HOUNKPATI</b>
ZINEB	<b>ZEINAB KARAMOKO</b>
SIMONE	<b>CAMILLE KOCH-MATHIAN</b>
RIHANNA	<b>SARA BEN AMEUR</b>
INÈS	<b>SAFA BENALI</b>
SAFIA	<b>HEAVEN PENG</b>
GUILLAUME	<b>ADHEN KSOURI</b>
DANI	<b>BRAHIM LOCHE</b>
FARES	<b>RAYAN BOUABDELLAH</b>
NAZIM	<b>WISSAM-MOHAMMED TALEB</b>

# TECHNICAL LIST

Directors	<b>LISE AKOKA AND ROMANE GUERET</b>
Screenplay	<b>LISE AKOKA, ROMANE GUERET, AND CATHERINE PAILLÉ</b>
Producers	<b>SUPERSTRUCTURE, PIERRE GRIMAUX, AND JEAN DATHANAT</b>
Casting Director	<b>MARLÈNE SEROUR</b>
Director of Photography	<b>JEAN-FRANÇOIS HENSGENS</b>
Editing	<b>ALBERTINE LASTERA</b>
First Assistant Director	<b>BENOÎT SEILLER</b>
Script Supervisor	<b>JULIE DUPEUX-HARLÉ</b>
Production Designer	<b>CHARLOTTE DE CADEVILLE</b>
Costume Designer	<b>EDGAR FICHET</b>
Makeup Artists & Hair Stylist	<b>FANNY JAKUBOWICZ AND DJOHER AIT AMER</b>
Sound Editing	<b>BORIS CHAPELLE AND JULES LAURIN</b>
Sound Mixing	<b>XAVIER THIEULIN</b>
Color Grading	<b>RICHARD DEUSY</b>
Production Manager	<b>PIERRE DELAUNAY</b>
Key Set Manager	<b>DAMIEN GAYRARD LAVAL</b>