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PRESENT

SANDRINE  
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GILLES  
LELLOUCHE

ÉLODIE  
BOUCHEZ



*in safe hands*

A FILM BY JEANNE HERRY



SELECTION  
GRAND PRIX  
CINEMA  
ELLE

OLIVIA CÔTE  
CLOTILDE MOLLET AND MIOU-MIOU  
ORIGINAL MUSIC BY PASCAL SANGLA

SCREENPLAY BY JEANNE HERRY  
PRODUCED BY ALAIN ATTAL AND HUGO SÉLIGNAC

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# IN SAFE HANDS

**A FILM BY JEANNE HERRY**

**OLIVIA CÔTE  
CLOTILDE MOLLET AND MIOU-MIOU**

**WRITTEN BY JEANNE HERRY**

**RUNNING TIME: 107min**

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**PHOTOS AND PRESS KIT DOWNLOADABLE ON THE EXTRANET**

<https://www.extranetstudiocanal.com/Materiel/>

# Synopsis

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Abandoned at birth, baby Theo's uncertain future lies in the hands of the Child Welfare Services. Jean, who is no stranger to the foster system, is given the responsibility of temporarily looking after Theo, while the members of the Adoption Agency have the difficult task of finding him a home. Meanwhile Alice, unable to have children of her own, has never stopped fighting to be a mother. After facing many setbacks, Alice is finally ready to welcome a child, just when the Adoption Service is seeking a home for Theo. Thanks to the dedicated members of social services, the paths of Alice and Theo will cross, blending the journey of Jean and the rest of the team along the way.



# Jeanne Herry

- DIRECTOR -

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## Why did you decide on the subject of adoption?

I don't think it's a subject that cinema tends to tackle, and not in the same way.

Movies look at people's search for their roots, the quest for a child and sometimes the adopted person's quest to find their parents later on, but not really the moment when the baby is put up for adoption. It's not a subject that I've encountered personally, I've had two biological children, but I've got a friend who went down the adoption road. I'd just finished my movie *Number One Fan*, I was working on a play and looking for a subject when my friend left me a message that set the whole thing off. She said "they called me, they've got a baby for me, a French baby, I'm going to see him in four days, and if everything goes well the baby will be at home with me in eight days." The mixture of euphoria and panic in her voice was fascinating. I wondered why she was surprised that it was a baby, and a French baby, and why the timeframes were so short. The way she was experiencing the event lit me up inside. I asked her permission to explore further, to meet the social workers, on the understanding that I wouldn't be telling her history. I went to Finistère where I had

a contact. I went there several times, and I understood that social workers have the task of finding parents for a baby, not finding a baby for childless parents: it was a revelation. I found some interesting fictional material in documentaries on the subject. Face-to-face sequences, talking non-stop to the baby, because Françoise Dolto has left her mark, everything I discovered was planting seeds for the future story.

**The story documents and details: the mass of procedures, from a baby's anonymous birth to adoption, doesn't weigh the film down but actually embeds it in reality. This method of describing a virtuous chain of events, from the anonymous birth of a baby to his adoption, without any lulls, is as well-oiled as precision engineering.**

When I was writing it, I thought in terms of a really simple equation: you've got a woman who doesn't want her child, and another woman who wants a child. Then I had to nourish and flesh out the equation, which is as lovely and

dry as a logical statement. And recount this whole collective force that is set in motion to make the equation possible. The movie deals with minuses that are added together to make a plus.

#### **Do the actors interact with babies or plastic dolls?**

Seeing as it's a movie that shows how babies react to verbal language, there was no way we were going to take any risks by putting them in potentially traumatic situations, scenes where they would have heard "your mother doesn't want you", etc. The actors talked to plastic dolls, including at the end, when Élodie meets Théo and breaks down as she tells him how overwhelmed she is at meeting her son.

#### **The eyes are where everything happens, that's where the bond with the baby is forged. We look at each other, and the love in the other person's eyes brings us to life. The movie is a ballet of vistas where different visions meet.**

Professionals and social workers talk a lot about observation, different views of a situation, not only for the mother and baby; their work is about subjectivity, putting together portraits. Two social workers compare their views and opinions of each adoption candidate.

#### **Which is where the title comes from, *Pupille***

I like the play on the two meanings of the word: a ward of the state and the pupil of an eye. I also paid a lot of attention to the role of my vision, the whole time we were making the movie I asked myself what my viewpoint was, for each sequence, and how to view each character, from which perspective. And the direction each character was looking in.

#### **Was there no question of making the movie without Sandrine Kiberlain?**

I've wanted to work with her again ever since our last movie. She's a huge inspiration to me. Naturally there's a convergence between the words I write and the way she interprets them. But it's difficult to fulfil an actress who gets offered every sort of role.

#### **Is she your double?**

A sort of improved version of me, a perfect double. That's how it feels to me. I like to see Sandrine in roles like this one, as a woman who carries everyone on her shoulders. Solid, conscientious, meticulous, unconventional, funny. Gilles supports the baby and Sandrine supports Gilles. And then there's her desire, which is not reciprocated.

#### **In the movie, would you say that Élodie Bouchez, the adoption candidate, moves from vulnerability to unshakeable certainty over an eight-year period?**

At the beginning she's a bit self-effacing within her relationship, she thinks as a couple, but she gradually finds her independence. She's been worn down by life, she's suffered, but she bounces back over these ten or so years. She's determined to move forward. I chose Élodie because she was the perfect embodiment of a bright, dazzling woman, a discreet little trooper, strong without being a caricature, a bulldozer.

#### **In the movie she has a very distinctive job, an audio describer for the blind in a theater. Does filming the characters doing their jobs give a better understanding of them?**

I like people's professions. I enjoy seeing people at work, in real life and in movies. *In Safe Hands* starts





by showing us workers, then the men and women driving the profession, the organization. In Alice's case, I saw her as someone who is managed, the woman we take charge of, and I wanted the managed person to also be the manager, and not be the only one receiving help. I came across this unusual profession while rehearsing for a play; there was a man dressed all in black who slipped into the room and showed me what his job consists of. I've met lots of audio describers, they are part of the performance but on the margins. It's playful and selfless. Alice audio describes *The Bear* – which has a comic failed gunshot – by Chekhov, my favorite playwright.

### **Why give a central role to a nurturing man, Jean, played by Giles Lellouche?**

The world of adoption is very feminine, so I chose a baby boy and male foster carer. I met a man during my research, since that profession is become more and more masculinized. But I was thinking in terms of cinema, not of gender for gender's sake. Taking a fresh look at the gestures involved in caring for a baby by having a man performing them was stimulating, it was different to film. A man, ideally a slightly virile man, who has incarnated brash masculinity onscreen was a way of guaranteeing a surprise effect, for myself and the viewers, and a powerful image.

### **And no doubt for Gilles Lellouche too?**

Gilles is very much in his body, dense, sensual. A baby is a physical thing, and it worked between the two of them. And he's not a social worker, he's a foster carer chosen by the social services people. He's your ordinary man, and I had fun filming him as a househusband; the epitome of solid masculinity, responsible, reliable, funny, in a couple where the roles are reversed, the woman works away from home, makes money and encourages him to continue working, despite his moods.

### **Clotilde Mollet, who plays the advisor, introduces a sense of oddness that contrasts with the film's realism. The way she talks, her slightly old-fashioned appearance, everything about her is naturally quirky and fascinating.**

Not only is she a tremendous stage actress, she's also acted in *A Self-Made Hero*, *Amélie*, *The Untouchables*, *The Crisis*, and so on. I like her absolute authenticity. She's like that in person. When she says, "my lips are sealed", or any other trite phrase, she reignites the words, giving them life from within.

### **She turns an unlikely sequence, like the one where she explains to the baby what his biological mother didn't want to tell him, into an emotional moment. Yet, on paper, you must have thought to yourself "it's make or break...?"**

Well, yes. I was worried that people would think "this is nonsense!". But everything has been set up to make it seem plausible. The baby is freed from his inertia and enters

our world when the blank spaces in his story are filled in by the truthful words uttered by Clothilde, who "authorizes" him to commit to the adoption process.

### **The encounters between Élodie and her social worker are shot like combative yet considerate confrontations.**

To speak is to think and give birth to an action. That's maieutics. *In Safe Hands* is a film about language, the courage of expression, and its necessity. That's why the adoption journey can be so difficult for some people, because they're asked to endlessly explain themselves, to look at who they are, to articulate the origins of their deepest and darkest desires, their existence, to verbalize.

### **Why does the movie take place in the countryside?**

There's a national law governing adoption protocols, but each department is allowed to make minor alternations to the protocols. And I did my writing research in Finistère. I'm quite familiar with the way they do things there. Brittany is part of my history, it's a land of the sea, and of mothers.

### **Your movie is optimistic: people work hard, discussions are fruitful, solutions are always found, impossible love can blossom into professional camaraderie, the collective approach works. Are you optimistic by nature? Does *In Safe Hands* want to be optimistic in a time when suspicion, distrust and disenchantment are on the rise?**

I found all those protocols around adoption to be fantastic, endowed with an impressive sense of civilization and way of thinking. I like the times I live in but there seems to be a sense of hysteria in the air. I'm reassured by the places where people think and trust the collective. I realize that my movie shines a favorable light on anonymous birth. Women who give up their baby would do it regardless, by themselves and badly. The system shows a remarkable degree of civilization. Even though I recognize the suffering of state wards who have to build their identity on a void, something missing. But more than that, it's a movie about the triumph of the collective. It's a catalyst, it's joyful to do things together, a movie, or a meeting which will conclude with finding a family for a child.

### **A final word about you mother, Miou-Miou, who plays a coordinator?**

She's an amazing actress. She just had to be there, in an ode to the collective. She sets the movie in motion, her voice, which I love, sets the example for the whole team!

INTERVIEW WITH

# Sandrine Kiberlain



**You and Jeanne have a long history of collaboration that goes back to her first movie.**

I liked the screenwriter before I did the person. I received the script for *Number One Fan* and did everything I could to get that movie made. Jeanne has so many good qualities, she's funny, smart and sensitive. She's honest. She's an idealist, when it comes to the world and the people in it. She's genuine and her vision of the world permeates the movie.

The words Pierre Salvadori had me say in his movie *After You* could sum up her cinema and ethics: "I have a tendency to only retain people's good sides."

When she sent me the script for *In Safe Hands*, I was won over by its structure, like *Short Cuts*, its tribute to solidarity and the collective, so naturally I jumped on board.

**What kind of actor's director is she?**

Precise and trusting. She knows what she wants, but will gladly take suggestions, because she knows how to trust herself. There's a total absence of neurosis. Jeanne likes to work in a team, her joy on set is contagious!

**Your character, Karine, is a powerful yet childlike social worker, a determined woman who's a little lost.**

Yes, Karine, my character, looks after things, manages and reassures others. Particularly Jean, the foster carer she's in love with, but something strange lingers in her heart, trepidation.

When she's speaking to the baby Alice will go on to adopt, she talks in a monotonous sort of a tone because she's slightly distant, engaged but at a distance.

**And she constantly eats candy, could that be a funny and revealing mannerism?**

I love defining a character with a playful detail like that. Jeanne came up with that habit, Karine is constantly eating candy, which ties her to the children who constantly surround her, and shows the emptiness created by a lack of love that has to be filled with sugar and sweet things.

**Jeanne Herry films an impossible love story between you and Jean, the virile yet maternal foster carer with honesty and understanding. A real man?**

A man who respects women, is kind to the people around him and instinctive when it comes to babies, captivates my character, because on top of that he has a sense of humor. This ideal guy is played by Gilles Lellouche.

I also like the couple he and his wife form in the movie. You can feel that they get along so well, its sensual and physical.

Jeanne's vision of the modern male is in step with the way men and women are evolving.

And as soon as Gilles picked a baby up, it would be calm, smiling, following him with its eyes, the baby was ecstatic. Gilles has an aura that is calming to babies. I think he was very moved by that.

**And Élodie Bouchez, who you interact with in a very emotional context?**

I've admired her for a long time. I love her sparkling nature. She's very impressive in the scene where she's talking to the baby.

Élodie did two takes, staggeringly emotional and true.





INTERVIEW WITH

# Gilles Lellouche



**Was the theme of *In Safe Hands* familiar to you?**

Honestly, I had no idea of what the journey to adoption was like in France, even though I had friends that had been through the process, and was completely oblivious to the existence of this human chain working hard to find a home for abandoned babies. I admire Jeanne for having brought this subject matter to life.

**By giving you the role of Jean, the director emphasizes how much traditionally feminine professions are being masculinized. Did it also come as a surprise that men would take care of babies and children waiting for a family?**

Surprised and impressed! All the better! I know that my character owes much to a real-life Jean, who works as a foster carer near Brest. Jeanne did a lot of research for my character, who was so well written, with humor and tenderness.

**To which you add your impressive presence, as virile and protective man.**

I don't have many alternatives to personifying what I already am. Virile, yes, I'll give you that, but what really gets me is when I'm seen as macho or a typical straight lout, as I was described a few years ago. My character in *In Safe Hands* was written with such benevolence that I simply slipped into a mindset of tenderness and thoughtfulness, which I assume comes with its own doubts. I really adore this Jean who lives in his domestic cocoon, creates a bond with a baby knowing he will only be with him for a couple of months, as the baby was his son, and cooks for his wife! I love that Jeanne Herry had my wife say to me in the movie: "I don't like it when you're not doing anything, you're not sexy when you're not doing anything." Men have changed, can change and will change... I've got a 9-year-old daughter, and the difference in attitude between the father I am today and the how my father was with me is so big, it feels like a whole different world! All that is the subject matter of *In Safe Hands* and my character feeds off it.

**Jeanne Herry is an actress, writer and director: how did she direct you?**

She's an amazing woman, full of life and hunger, she loves her actors, maybe because of her own acting experience. As opposed to some directors, she isn't afraid of the actors. It's always a fruitful and playful relationship, never restrictive.

**You're acting with Sandrine Kiberlain, who has a, let's say, asymmetrical passion for you. How did working with the French Katharine Hepburn go?**

It was an absolute delight working with Sandrine! It's quite simple, she's amazing and she has that thing, a sort of grace that I love and is rarely seen in actors, she's totally immersed in the intelligence of the performance. Mathieu Amalric also has that. She's wonderful on and off the set.

**Tell me about Élodie Bouchez, the woman adopting, whom Jean gently teaches to trust herself in her relationship with the baby.**

I have to say I was impressed by her unflagging emotional and physical engagement. Even more impressive was the scene when she talks to the baby,

she offers herself up, she's in a state of incredible emotional vibration. Right from our first scene together, I realized there was something exceptional about her acting.

***In Safe Hands* endorses the collective and mutual aid, is that something you also support?**

I completely support its message, its hopes, even its utopia, a return to solidarity, a word that is gradually being distorted. I jokingly said to Jeanne on set: "your viewers will think that taxes are worth paying" ... As grouchy sceptics of public services, here we have a brilliant demonstration that public money goes toward this act of grafting, a happy adoption, and not just on the construction of yet another roundabout!

It's much like what I wanted to express in my movie *Sink or Swim*, trust in the collective, humanity, the rejection of all-pervasive technology.



INTERVIEW WITH

# Élodie Bouchez



## Was the subject close to you?

I have some friends who have adopted, but didn't know anything about the subject until my role in *In Safe Hands*, other than that every story is unique. The script was incredible, confident writing, a daring structure, like a sprawling ballet about the birth of this baby and his destiny. I was impressed, it reminded me of *Short Cuts*.

## Did you do any research or meet any adoptive mothers?

Jeanne didn't ask me to, so I stuck to her methods. Alice's journey was totally clear and transparent to me. She goes on a long journey, having a child

is a problem within her relationship, but this fairly lonely destiny in the end leads her to the act of grafting, the adoption. As I see it, the character is an ode to trust, trust in destiny, and the benevolence of the various social workers.

## Was using a plastic doll for the scene where you meet your baby, Théo, frustrating, or did it not change anything?

I'd forgotten that! Jeanne reminded me about it not that long ago. I was so concentrated on what had to be done that I just did it, no questions asked. To me, it was a baby, my baby, I lost my voice, and broke down, all the groundwork I had done in preparation had subconsciously taken a hold of me, and I think the scene works well. I suggested to Jeanne



that I do it with that burst of emotions, she wanted more control, and in the end the highly emotional scene was kept.

#### How does Jeanne Herry work as a director?

She's very precise, and is good at tweaking, helping the actors to explore, with subtle touches. She radiates enthusiasm, life, clarity, and the actors naturally deliver.

#### Olivia Côte plays your "dedicated" social worker in scenes that are heartbreaking as well as constructive, real confrontations.

It's her vision that helps Alice define her plan in more detail. Olivia and I have the same way of working, with energy, humor and concentration. I adored our osmosis.

#### Jeanne decided to go for a close-up shot in the first scene, is it exciting to be seen from so close up, exposed, laid bare?

I act "blind-folded", and I love it. Since I've been in the industry, I refuse to know how I'm being filmed, framed, how the shot's set up. I go for it, a wide shot, comfortable, or facing the camera, and I just trust.

#### Did you know anything about Alice's profession before the movie?

We imagine and understand that she had another job, when she was married, but her work as an audio describer is what Jeanne emphasizes, and that suits my character; it's something she does in the shadows, but her contribution is so important, she brings so much to the blind, a gift, a remedy.



INTERVIEW WITH

# Olivia Côte



## How long have you known Jeanne?

We have been friends for 20 years, we met at the École de Strasbourg. It was platonic love at first sight. Jeanne and I are very close friends, I think she's extraordinary, to the point where I have her as one of my "emergency contacts in the event of an accident". She is stability personified. And then there's her talent as a director, her keen eye, honesty, and love for others, never blaming or judging them. She knows how to direct actors because she truly loves them. Jeanne explored different means of expression, she was an actor, writer, stage director, but when I saw her film work, I told her "girl, you've found the perfect fit!"

## You've worked with over a dozen female directors, including Jeanne Herry, that must be a record for a young French actress like yourself. Is that a deliberate, political decision?

I can't explain it, but I've always attracted women! I always found it easier to work with them, it's fluid, there are no unspoken tensions tied to seduction and to men's susceptibility to interfere with and weigh down the relationship. All those directors, Léa Fazer, Marion Vernoux, Lisa Azuelos, Mona Achache, Solveig Anspach, Marie-Castille Mention-Schaar, come from different generations, backgrounds, yet working with them always came naturally, effortlessly. It's a joy to work with director who's also a friend, like Jeanne.



### How would you define Lydie's energy?

She has plenty to spare, for setting off again on the human adventure that comes with each case. She's a woman who has dedicated her whole life to protecting children. I wanted to meet a social worker before production started, because I knew I was going to be in a difficult scene where I had to tell a couple that their application for adoption had been rejected. How do you tell someone that? How can you be empathetic, without being swallowed whole by the suffering you're causing?

### Is Lydie about a vision, as the movie's name indicates, linked to the other social workers?

It's about observation and listening. I'm bowled over by my character. It's such a strange and marvelous job, between empathy and firmness, everyday being confronted with vulnerable, unguarded people, full of hope and so fragile.

My motto for understanding and acting the role was "get involved while keeping the right distance".

### The movie advocates solidarity, the collective, so that these social organizations have the resources to carry out their mission.

Jeanne often said, "it's a homage to the French Republic, its social workers and educators." Ten people are paid to forge a destiny for a ward of the state, an abandoned baby. I just hope they get to carry on doing it. All this solidarity that gets to work on finding a family for a child, it's touching, it's magnificent. Gilles Lellouche, who was also affected, said "the movie will make people happy. They'll love seeing what their taxes are going on!"

### How did Jeanne Herry direct that the other collective, of actors?

She supports them and moves in the same direction as them. Her gentle and confident way of directing reminds me of a quote by Friedrich Nietzsche, "dancing in chains". Jeanne works with precision and frees herself despite or thanks to the restrictions.





# Cast

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SANDRINE KIBERLAIN Karine  
GILLES LELLOUCHE Jean  
ÉLODIE BOUCHEZ Alice  
OLIVIA CÔTE Lydie  
CLOTILDE MOLLET Mathilde  
MIOU-MIOU Irène  
LEÏLA MUSE Clara  
STEFI CELMA Auxiliary worker Élodie  
YOUSSEF HADJI Ahmed

With special appearances by  
JEAN-FRANÇOIS STÉVENIN and BRUNO PODALYDÈS

# Crew

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Director	JEANNE HERRY
Script	JEANNE HERRY
Producers	ALAIN ATTAL and HUGO SÉLIGNAC
Producer	VINCENT MAZEL
Director of photography	SOFIAN EL FANI
Editing	FRANCIS VESIN
Original music	PASCAL SANGLA
Sound	NICOLAS PROVOST VINCENT MAUDUIT STEVEN GHOUTI
Sets	JOHANN GEORGE
Costumes	MARIE LE GARREC
Production	TRÉSOR FILMS and CHI-FOU-MI PRODUCTIONS
Distribution	STUDIOCANAL