

STUDIOCANAL

LE CERCLE NOIR vous présente **LE CERCLE NOIR** photos: Jérôme Pilon

the adopted





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Bruno LEVY and STUDIOCANAL present

the adopted

Marie Denarnaud
Denis Ménochet
Mélanie Laurent
Clémentine Célarié

a film by Mélanie Laurent

Screenplay and dialogue
Mélanie Laurent, Morgan Perez
Chris Deslandes

with Audrey Lamy

FRENCH RELEASE: 23 NOVEMBER 2011

100 mins.

Synopsis

THE ADOPTED is the story of a family of women whose lives are never easy but who, over time, manage to surmount their difficulties. There is little place for men in their lives so of course, when one of them falls in love, their world is thrown off balance. Everybody tries their best to find a new equilibrium. But fate barely gives them the chance to catch their breath before throwing them into a whole new reality. Once again, the family has to start over. The adoption process must once again get underway, forcing each of them to find their new places.





Encounter with Mélanie Laurent

Screenwriter, director and actor

YOU'VE BEEN DIRECTING SHORT FILMS FOR A LONG TIME. WHAT MADE YOU WANT TO MOVE UP TO A FEATURE-LENGTH MOVIE?

It's a question of continuity, the logical next step in a personal journey. It might come as a surprise, but I initially wanted to work in cinema not as an actress but as a director. As far back as high school I took the film option and I made lots of little things to learn the technical basics. After that, I carried on for my own sake, taking it more and more seriously. The short films were primarily exercises, experimental laboratories, opportunities to discover myself and to tackle the various aspects involved in directing. I made them essentially for myself, and although DE MOINS EN MOINS did screen in Cannes, it wasn't what I wanted. When Canal+ asked me to direct an X-rated short film, I took it as a challenge to approach the genre from a different angle; that of aesthetics. It was a step forward, a film for broadcast, on which I had the chance to work with certain people including Arnaud Potier, the director of photography. It was a wonderful playground to discover some people I wanted to work with, but I didn't lose sight of my objective. Because in my view, when it comes to moviemaking, the feature film is the real thing. A film is offered to the public, people put their money down on it – you're into another dimension.

YOUR CAREER AS AN ACTRESS IS BOOMING, YOU HAVE JUST RELEASED AN ALBUM, WHY ARE YOU NOW STARTING ON DIRECTING?

I may seem to be all over the place, but I manage to keep things separate. I've always been most drawn by directing. I started to act in films quite young, but I soon felt something was missing, artistically. I felt only directing could allow me to fulfill myself completely. That's what I was heading towards. That must have been so visible in my behavior that on

the film JUSQU'À TOI, the directors Jennifer Devoldère and Arnaud Potier surprised me by letting me direct a scene. They just said to me: "Go on, go for it, it's your scene." I thought it was very generous. It simply confirmed my desire. And then at one point, a little voice inside began to tell me that I was ready. Meeting Bruno Lévy was also a key factor. He believed in the project right away, he understood what I wanted to do and he backed me. Like a good producer, he made me work on it, he pushed me to go as far as I could with the ideas.

YOUR APPROACH ALSO INVOLVED WRITING THE SCREENPLAY...

Directing is not an end in itself. The idea is above all to bring a story to life, to tell the audience something. I've always written. Between the ages of 20 and 25, I must have written five screenplays, but which were all based on my personal experiences, almost like therapy. On this occasion I had to move onto something else, by building a plot, and some characters that I invented. Of course, there's a little of me in all of them because I created them, but although that may seem to sketch my personality, the story is not about me. I don't know about the world of the hospital; I don't have any children or a sister; my father is very much around and my mother doesn't drink! I strived to write about lives and feelings by drawing on what moves me most. The writing was spread over a fairly long period because I was shooting a lot. The breaks were a fortunate part of the process, because each time I went back to my script, I had some distance and I could refocus on the essential.

HOW DID YOU CONSTRUCT THE STORY OF MARINE, ALEX AND LISA?

Early on, the idea of the coma came to me. I wanted to make a film about someone who's "asleep" while those close to her wait for her to wake up. What do they do? How do they carry on with their lives? Each of them reveals their true character in the face of this absence. I also wanted this coma to transform those close to her, so I imagined this very entwined relationship with the sister, the love story, and some other things which I'd rather leave as a surprise for the audience.

In writing, I don't think about the screenplay, I'm already thinking about the finished film. I can picture the scenes, it's all laid out in my

head. It's more an emotional approach than a technical one. I also allow myself to be carried along by directing ideas. For example, I thought that for the opening of the film, I'd like to use a hand-held camera. According to how things feel, I adjust, I organize, I juggle my ingredients around the notion of the flavor that I want to produce. I started writing on my own, by hand, in notebooks. I wrote practically the whole outline. I then re-worked the writing with Morgan Perez, then with Chris Deslandes for the dialogue. I could have written alone, but for me the pleasure of working as a team is as important as the result. I love those working sessions, those exchanges. Morgan and Chris are both friends and can talk to me frankly. If an idea or a line isn't standing up, we work on it again. They respect my story and what I want to get over, but if I arrive with too many ideas because I've been thinking about it all night, Morgan can channel my input. It's nice on an interpersonal level and it's also more efficient from a work point of view. Morgan then played Alex's friend and when I was in a scene, he directed me. Chris also appears in the role of the rather difficult customer in the bookshop, who prompts some crazy laughs from Marine.

HOW DID YOU PICK YOUR CAST?

I met Marie Denarnaud for a theatre project which we never managed to complete due to my filming schedule. But I had enough time to appreciate her talent, her personality, her honesty and the approach she has to the profession in which we work. Marie has a beauty that I wanted to show off. I wanted to give her a role that would bring out something I felt was within her and which I like a lot. I wanted her to be my heroine, to embody love. She's played some great roles but she's often the friend, not the one the guy falls in love with, and yet I think she has that in her. She brings something real, something profound. If she didn't bring so much, her character's absence would not trigger such powerful things. When I see the film, I think that if it wasn't Marie playing that part, then it wouldn't work. Because she gives off so much, you become attached to her, you understand her sister, her guy and those close to her. In the first part of the film, she has to make her character exist powerfully enough so that her absence comes as a gaping hole in the second.

Paradoxically, the fact that she's not a close friend helped us work together. That distance, from woman to woman, allowed us to always move in the direction of the film. She was elegant enough to put herself entirely in the service of the role. She put her faith in me and I think the film really mattered for her, as it did for me, and wasn't just another project. She brought a great deal of intelligence and humanity to it. What's more, she's really at home in that bookshop world.

WHAT ABOUT THE ROLE OF ALEX?

Denis Ménochet has been a close friend for a long time. He read the script when we were shooting INGLOURIOUS BASTERDS and spoke to me about it right away. He had a very fine reading, very moving. Although the role wasn't initially intended to be for him, all of a sudden I realized that he was perfect for this character. He was able to inject it with sufficient power, and bring his physicality and also his sensitivity to the role, all at the same time. There's something animal about Denis. I pushed back his boundaries and forced him to be seductive. It's not a register he's imagined playing in much. His appearance gives the impression that he's strong, and I wanted to play with that while at the same time seeking out his delicate side. I know him well enough to know that he has all that in him, but he didn't yet dare to display it in his acting. He just needed to be reassured to do it. It's always delicate working with and asking so much from someone you're close to, but with Denis, because he's generous, because he's a professional, everything went easily. This job was the occasion to discover even more of him, on a human level, but also professionally. When I look at him in the film, I think he's magnificent and because I know him, I know why.

AND MILLIE, THE MOTHER?

It wasn't an easy role because although she doesn't have much screen time, each of her scenes are pivotal. To play a mother and grandmother who's an alcoholic, while at the same time having great strength of character, you have to agree to abandon yourself without any ego and you need a lot of talent. To find the right actress, I asked myself who I'd like to have as a mother. Who has the energy, the verve, the humanity? Clémentine Célerié was the obvious choice. She really liked the script.

She saw everything that needed to be portrayed beyond the screenplay. She was impressive, both in the everyday and the emotional scenes. She was spot on right away.

WHAT ABOUT CLÉMENCE IN THE BOOKSHOP?

Audrey Lamy came along quite late because casting her character was tricky. I told her the character is funny but not just that; she'd need to convey emotion and bring to life to a fully-fledged character, and I hoped she'd agree to do it. She was extraordinary. She immediately made lots of suggestions. In the few passages of dialogue she had, she brought a real density. She was brilliant, both with the funny little touches that pepper her acting and in the emotion that she lets out when required. To me, it's as if we discover even more of her, and I'm delighted about that. All her scenes were shot in the last week and her arrival was like a breath of fresh air.

IT CAN'T HAVE BEEN EASY TO CAST THE ROLE OF YOUNG LÉO...

I met Coralie Subert whilst making THE ROUND-UP, on which she worked on casting the children. The kids liked her so much that she started to be their coach. I told her that I wasn't looking for a child actor but a certain nature – in other words, that rare pearl which everyone wants to find but rarely does. She looked all over France and showed me hundreds of photos. I was immediately drawn to the one of Théodore Maquet-Foucher. I thought he looked cute, and you could see in the photo there was a little something extra. When we went to Lyon to meet the 15 actors who'd been shortlisted, the first one totally panicked and couldn't say a word. The second one up was Théodore. He was so young that I couldn't believe he could remember his lines, but he had learnt them perfectly. He even knew mine and picked me up on it when I made a mistake! He blew us away on one line, and when he left, I knew we'd found our Léo. He revealed incredible maturity and intelligence during the shoot. At the start, I broke down the scenes for him because I thought that at five years old, he couldn't keep all the actions and lines in his head. But he did a remarkable job. We became very close and although the end of the shoot was a sort of separation, there's still a bond between him, his parents and me.

AT WHAT POINT DID YOU DECIDE TO ACT IN YOUR FILM?

Initially I didn't want to appear in it. I had read and heard about too many people who'd directed and starred in their first feature film and emerged traumatized. But my producer and our partners persuaded me. So I play a young mother, Lisa, who clings onto her odd family and who is afraid that her sister, Marine, might break away because she falls in love. She's not an immediately likeable character. We gradually get to know her. I also wanted this character to be beautiful in a way other than her appearance. Lisa is filmed simply, not fussily dressed, which suits me as an actress. I don't like spending hours in make-up. Lisa needed to have a weary look about her, due to her work and the fact that her sister is in hospital. My insomnia as a director was perfect for that; no need for any make-up. We started by filming the "Lisa" segment, so I was in every shot. Despite the fact that Morgan helped direct me, I found it really hard in the beginning. I only felt right in my role as director. I did everything I could to stay with the crew. I soon realized that this state of mind was not at all beneficial, so I tried to transform this responsibility into an advantage. The fact that I'm an actress allowed me to interact with all the other characters and steer them, to "direct" them from within whilst myself acting. For example, for the scene when Léo and Lisa spread chocolate on their faces, I could only get exactly what I wanted, right down to the tiniest gestures, by acting the scene myself opposite him. As an actress, I was able to lead my acting partners to where the director in me wanted them to be. I surprised myself with my almost-schizophrenic capacity to go from being an actress to being a director. That can no doubt be explained by the fact that I'd worked on this role for four years. It was in me, I had taken tons of notes, thought of everything. For an instinctive person like me, it was a different approach. And at the end, beyond the fatigue, I loved acting in my own film, for the pleasure of working opposite my acting partners.

YOU SAY THERE IS NOTHING OF YOURSELF IN THE FILM, BUT YOUR CHARACTER SINGS AND PERFORMS CONCERTS...

It's an aspect that was integral to the role; Lisa's only place of expression that is really personal for her. When I was writing the character, four years ago, I didn't even know that one day I would sing, let alone make an album. I didn't want to change this aspect because I really liked the idea that Lisa's instrument is the guitar and that she works amongst violins. It was another metaphor to say that she had perhaps missed her calling in life – like Alex come to think of it, who is a food critic because he didn't have the guts to become a chef. But beyond the metaphor, the demonstration seemed out of place to me and when Lisa is supposed to sing on stage at the end, I deliberately stopped before you hear her.

AS A DIRECTOR, DO YOU HAVE ANY INFLUENCES?

Yes and no. For directing, the most useful piece of advice came from Luc Besson who, more than a year before filming, told me: "Don't listen to anyone and don't watch any films. Watch what you like a long time before and then forget it. Don't try and be like anyone. It's YOUR film." I took his advice. The day after our meeting, I watched three films and then tried to forget them: MORSE by Tomas Alfredson, for its mood, everything I like about haziness, close-ups, that impression of being able to smell the skin, that cold light. Then PUNCH DRUNK LOVE by Paul Thomas Anderson, for its audacity, its incredible framing which means something, and for its attention to sound, about which I was also very exacting. For example, when Marine and Alex meet, like when you meet someone for whom you feel something, you no longer hear the sounds in the street, you hear her heart. So we're moving away from realism towards a sort of fable, which helped the subject. I also watched GARDEN STATE by Zach Braff, for the poetry and its off-beat approach. In all three of those films, there are elements I identify with. Over the year that followed, I didn't watch them again and I hardly saw any other movies. Above all, I didn't want to shoot any sequences "in the style of". With any explicit references out of the way, I could try and find the coherence in my own style.

YOU ALSO PICKED YOUR OWN CREW.

I've been picking my crew for more than 10 years. On all the films I've made, I've always kept a close watch not only on the work to be done but also on the people doing it. A film is a team effort, so starting out with people who are competent but who also have personal qualities was essential for me. So during the preparation phase, I made a list of everyone I wanted, down to the head electrician and the grips. The production manager, Jacques Royer, who knows everyone, told me it was a sort of dream list, but given the film's budget, we'd no doubt only have a few of those on it. The first pleasant surprise on this project was that everyone I asked to come on board said yes. They all came. It was both touching and very motivating. I wanted to live up to the fact that they'd put their faith in me. I did everything I could to foster a family feeling during the shoot, so they'd be happy to be there, both professionally and personally. From that point on, thanks to them, I wasn't afraid.

YOUR FILM HAS A VERY STRONG VISUAL IDENTITY. HOW DID YOU ESTABLISH THIS?

I knew what I wanted to show on screen. During the preparation phase, the first job consisted of translating this into directorial decisions. That involved various aspects: the use of depth of field as a second level of writing in the image, the composition of the image and color palette. Arnaud Potier, the director of photography, was a real ally in this approach. It was he who suggested shooting on digital with an Alexa camera, which allowed us to obtain the desired graininess and to play with the colors. During this preparatory work, Arnaud showed me lots of things he'd made, including a perfume ad which impressed me. I really liked the format of the image. It was a ratio of 2:10, a format that is hardly used in cinema but which fit perfectly with what I wanted. The image is quite wide and if, for example, you do a close-up, there is necessarily some space around the edges and that gives a certain depth. But it's less wide than cinemascope. It wasn't easy, and it's not the norm, but I managed to insist on it. Even if the audience doesn't realize, we paid attention to every aspects of the image. Once we had the format, we had the limits of our frame. In that space, I could picture the image with the elements I wanted: the framing, coming into and out of focus, slow motion and so on.

THE FILM IS ALSO FULL OF LITTLE VIGNETTES, FLEETING IMAGES WHICH, LIKE YOUR USE OF DEPTH OF FIELD, BRING A SENSORIAL DIMENSION. HOW DID YOU ACHIEVE THAT?

We worked a lot on the shooting script. I tackled each situation in the film by trying to define exactly the best way to share it with the viewer. I wasn't after originality at any price, but I wanted the way of filming to correspond as far as possible to what impact I felt the action should have – what I notice, what I retain, what moves me. I had to find my method and go for it.

That turned out to be the vignettes that you mention, those very short sequences which come between more structured action. These are little moments, close-ups – Denis and Marie in a misty light, Théo's hand twisting in the air as he listens to Chopin – lots of miniscule moments that I picked up along the way and which we often filmed off the cuff. Sometimes I made everybody run around like mad to catch one second of footage. I shot loads. That also fit with my wish to film the actors from as close in as possible, and that aspect happened without me anticipating it. It's the only thing that I didn't premeditate. All those shots emerged during the shoot, based on what had been written and planned in the shooting script beforehand. It's an unplanned factor, which is inspired by a given light, from an actor's gestures or even a broken camera filter which transforms the image. These are little nothings that don't make up the film but which contribute to its mood, its fabric, its meaning.

YOUR USE OF DEPTH OF FIELD IS ALSO ATYPICAL. IT SOMETIMES FOCUSES THE SPECTATOR'S GAZE ON WHAT IS NOT THE MAIN ACTION, LEADING TO A SHIFT IN HOW ONE READS THE SCENE.

This isn't a deliberate artificial effect but the consequence of a wish to capture as closely as possible what the characters are feeling. When Alex looks at Lisa and Millie, the fact that only his neck in the foreground is in focus brings us closer to what he's thinking. You no longer simply watch what they're doing, you observe, you listen, you have a certain distance which a classic image probably wouldn't have.



POETRY IS ALSO OFTEN PRESENT IN YOUR FILM.

I think that comes from my childhood, especially from my grandmother. I understood this quite recently. My grandmother stage-manages everything, whatever happens. It wasn't her job, it's just in her nature. With her, Easter wasn't just a simple hunt for eggs; it became a tracking game with clues, and we might run into her somewhere in disguise to give us an extra surprise. I can see myself aged four sitting on her knee listening to the stories that she invented. She has the knack of directing real life. I think that influenced me a lot.

HOW DID YOU FEEL ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE SHOOT?

I felt very small, both in terms of size and in terms of experience! I've been on a lot of film shoots with very different directors. On each occasion, I've seen things that I would never want to happen on my set, and others which inspired me. Seeing the best of those creators in the heat of the action, seeing how delighted they were to be practicing their craft, seeing what they offered the audience – all of that convinced me even more that it's possible to bring something to spectators and that was what I wanted to experience.

HOW DID THE SHOOT GO?

I knew the people I was filming with and I knew what I wanted. As a result, the shoot went very well. We never ran over, we were even lucky with the weather, like the scene at the service station when it snowed. It was a good-natured and smooth shoot, full of delightful moments. My crew understood what I wanted to do, I respected them and I continually showed them my appreciation. That may seem naive, but that's the way I work. I think happy people work better. It's basic but it's true. I tried it out as an actress. I've made 30 films, I've seen lots of situations, from the best to the worst. I want to be like those who I've seen work the best. When you're with a director who's content and who shares, the whole crew wants to work well. When the guy doesn't say hello to anyone when he arrives on set, you're not going to make much of an effort. I learned that. Because I've been observing the crew ever since I started in this job, I know how much the finished film owes to them and I've got a lot of respect for them. So I looked out for them, and they looked out for me. We had some real experiences

together. We worked on each sequence, I got them involved in the making-of, we made a short video, it was great. In the end, although it was a first film made with not much money, lots of sets and a desire not to compromise, everything went really well.

One of the aspects I liked best was directing the actors. For example, I remember guiding Marie for the scene in which she weeps on the stairs. For technical reasons, we pushed back filming this difficult scene, and then finally we had to do it. I literally lived it with her, I tried to lead her to the character's state of mind. With the affection that I have for her, it was very powerful. It's one of my strongest memories.

DID THE ACTORS SURPRISE YOU?

Nearly all the time, because in the end we didn't work that much beforehand. We did a few readings, I told them what I was after and that's all. I always took the time to tell them how I was going to film them, because as an actress, that's something I appreciate myself. I played them the music we were going to use, I gave them as much information as possible, then it was up to them to act. I became their first audience. As a result, they brought things more freely towards what I wanted. They chose their gestures, their movements through the scene. When we finished the editing, I finally took the time to look at them, and I was even more impressed and won over by what they all display. Sometimes, you're sure of something on set, then you have doubts during the editing but in the end, you discover even more in there. I like all the characters to reach their breaking point. Each one cries once, but never the same as any of the others. For Lisa, it's from the guts, it's physical. Marine is a lost little girl, it's about letting go. For Millie, it's silent, clinical, all internalized. And for Alex, I wanted it to be the first time, for him to give way, like a dam. When he cries in the car at the service station, I helped Denis to place himself in the context of his character. It was very intense. I wanted that instant to crystallize something missing, but also have the surprise of seeing oneself crack like that. What I like in cinema is seeing the actors' humanity come through in the role.

WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO FILM IN LYON?

I didn't want to make a Parisian film, nor to film Paris, which is where the idea came from to shoot in Lyon, a city I discovered on a previous shoot. The city has its own personality, a mentality and a welcoming quality. Shooting in a provincial city also allowed me to take the crew away from their daily routine and reinforce the team spirit. Once there, people were a great help to us, especially Daniel with his bookshop. So we had some unexpected and unusual locations, like that very English little bookshop, and that old service station which looks like it's lost on the roadside, and that extended as far as the interiors, with its incredible wallpaper. We worked on that with the set designer, Stanislas Reydellet. For the costumes, Maira Ramedhan-Lévi and I asked ourselves what the characters would have bought. No luxury brands, just real stuff. One can just imagine those three women would take great delight in choosing nice things for the little boy. Having a tight budget also pushed us to have ideas, like using the little extract from CHARADE which we could afford to make Marine's favorite film because we used it in every way possible.

YOUR FILM OFTEN HAS A TIMELESS FEEL, FAR FROM THE CROWD, A BIT LIKE A FABLE. IS THAT DELIBERATE?

I didn't want to show anyone else except my characters. I didn't want to have any padding just for its own sake, I wanted to hone in on the actors, and that gives it a particular feel. In the hospital, you don't see any other patients, very few nurses, and no crowded corridors. I wanted it to be outside the usual references, both in terms of the city and the places.

THE MUSIC ALSO PLAYS AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN THE MOOD OF THE FILM.

I chose to work with Jonathan Morali from the group Syd Matters. The song over the closing credits is by him. For the rest of the score, I only gave him one piece of guidance: Marine is a violin, Lisa a guitar and Alex a piano. From there, they wrote the original soundtrack playing with these instruments in relation to the characters. For each instrument, we explored the range of how it can be used. For example for Marine, it goes from an ensemble of violins when she is in love and happy, to a fine layer when she is fragile. The one thing it is not is an illustration through sound, and the music totally integrates with the directing. The music also had to fit with the film's various moods, more romantic comedy for Marine, more everyday and childlike for Lisa's section. Alongside these original compositions, I wanted to use Chopin's nocturnes because I like them a lot, and a song by The Dø during the party for its energy and power. All these elements fed into the sound universe created by Alexis Place, Guillaume D'Ham and Cédric Lionnet. They were an invaluable help and all their suggestions serve to bolster the feeling of the film. Alexis and Guillaume spent several nights in Lyon recording sounds to create the ambient noise, and Cédric's mixing balances it all remarkably well.

DID YOU THINK ABOUT THE AUDIENCE, AND WHAT DO YOU EXPECT TO BRING TO THE VIEWER WITH THIS FILM?

I thought about it all the time, but not in the same way when as when I am just an actress. When I act, I often wonder what people are going to think about the film. I wonder whether I'd go and see that film or not. When you're directing, if you start wondering what people are going to like, you run the risk of forgetting to be yourself and trying to be what others expect. So above all I tried to be sincere and never take the viewer for an idiot. I didn't look for a fashionable subject. I didn't try to manipulate, I didn't try to wring laughter or tears out of the audience. I told the story I believed in and each person will experience it with their own sensitivity. I hope to bring the audience a sense of well-being towards these characters, caught up in what life throws at them, in melancholia, and above all hope. I hope to bring a smile of emotion... or the opposite.



WHAT ARE YOU HAPPIEST ABOUT TODAY?

I'm happy that the film exists, that it turned out as I imagined it, but I'm also happy about the way we all worked together. I felt comfortable. For the first time, I felt useful, useful to the crew so that together we were able to offer the audience a real experience. Today, I want to present the film to those for whom it was made. I also feel that I miss directing already, and I hope to return to it very soon.



Encounter with Marie Denarnaud (Marine)

HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED WITH THIS PROJECT?

I met Mélanie several years ago back when she was working on a stage play. After a casting session, she gave me the role and although the play never reached the stage because she'd just been cast by Tarantino, we still ended up working together for a fairly long period. Soon after, she told me she wanted to write a film and she wanted to include a part in it for me.

HOW DID THAT MAKE YOU FEEL, THAT A WOMAN OF YOUR OWN GENERATION, AN ACTOR LIKE YOU, WAS WRITING FOR YOU?

In the beginning, Mélanie simply said I inspired her and I embodied something she liked. It was both surprising and very touching. But it wasn't that much of a shock it should come from Mélanie, who had already astonished me when I read her play and through the work we did together on it. She operates on instinct and she takes risks. I was curious to see where she would go with it.

HOW DID YOU SEE THE PROJECT DEVELOP?

Mélanie told me the story and then I read the different versions. Over more than three years, I followed its development closely. The first thing to impress me was the huge leap in quality the project took at every stage. Mélanie always has lots of ideas and a long wish-list, but despite merging all this together, she still manages to preserve the spirit of her project and bring depth to it without losing the essential. Each version was better; denser. I liked the tone, the fact that Mélanie isn't afraid of drama and that she dares to explore some very emotional feelings from her own personal perspective. The more she progressed with the writing, the more precise and clear the project became, honed of any superfluous detail to best recount the story.

WHAT DID YOU THINK ABOUT HER WANTING TO DIRECT?

For the play, Mélanie had planned to have images projected on stage, so she filmed us. That was one of her first directorial experiences and I was witness to it. I saw her do it, I knew she could be precise and could present a real point of view and that she took care of her actors. I witnessed her growing desire to direct. She was smart enough to not make her film before she was ready and before she had everything in place to shoot how she wanted and with whom she wanted. She surrounded herself with people who constantly pushed her to go further, to see her ideas out. In terms of performance, the fact that she is an actor means she is a great director of actors. Because she is often in our shoes, she knows how to project a very comfortable working environment and provide all the information we need to help us improve our performance.

HOW DID YOU WORK TOGETHER TO PREPARE THE ROLE?

Mélanie had a very clear vision of what she wanted. She was very precise about what she'd visualized for certain shots and certain constructions. We talked about it and she told me what she wanted. She told me about the look it would have and about the music. It was all very structured in her mind. Having a long time to work on it also allowed me to approach the role gradually. We also did readings with the other actors. Denis, Mélanie and I worked together, as did Mélanie and I alone to develop the relationship between the two sisters. Mélanie was very keen that we spend time together to develop a familiarity and codes like those that exist in families. She wanted there to be a real spark of humanity in the performance. Although the story isn't autobiographical for any of us, she tried to give us all characters that we could relate to so we could really let ourselves go which, in turn, would bring out something special.

DO YOU FEEL CLOSE TO MARINE, YOUR CHARACTER?

The fact that Mélanie wrote it for me meant she gave Marine certain character traits that were mine. Her taste for reading and her love of books, both as objects and for their content and the fact that she works in a bookshop, which is something I'd have loved to do – all that comes from me. Marine also loves food, just as I do. So there are lots of details we share. She is someone whose glass is half-full. I can relate to Marine's positive approach to life. Like her, I'm neither afraid of people, nor of life itself. Not even the worst it can throw at us. Like me, Marine is passionate about her work, and open to surprises.

HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE YOUR CHARACTER?

In her own way, she's a kind of pillar for the family. She takes care of concrete things, she assumes her responsibilities, and takes charge. In this family of women, she is the one with her feet on the ground. She was adopted and her reaction to that emotional turmoil was to become a stronger person. And being strong for the other members allows her to deal with her own flaws. Her meeting with Alex turns her life upside-down. Introducing someone new into this little clan of which she is a central pillar is hard, but the fact he supports her too is also tricky. It's a real test for her.

HOW DID YOU WORK TOGETHER WITH DENIS?

We worked together in a very natural and very close way. We had already worked together in workshops and although we don't function in the same manner, we are both equally rigorous. Denis needs to spend a lot of time preparing his roles, whereas I am more instinctive. I think I was able to put a block on certain mechanisms by forcing him to act in a more immediate manner. We found it very easy to work together, including the love scenes. This simple contact was possible because each of us inspired emotion in the other. I think he's very handsome and I like his personality. Even in the love scenes, Mélanie made us work hard and try out many things. She didn't want the kind of scenes you usually see. Denis and I were a little like dancers performing for her.

HOW DID IT GO WITH THE OTHER ACTORS?

I really liked working with Clémentine Célerié. She had a fine role in this movie and I think it's been a while since we've seen her like this on screen – present, powerful and extremely moving. We had some very powerful scenes together and I really liked what we shared both in our performance and off-camera.

Audrey Lamy combines humor with something much deeper. It's no coincidence that she is where she is today. We had a lot of fun. And beyond her natural sense of comedy, she has huge breadth as an actor. You sometimes forget that she's a graduate of the Conservatoire so she's able to come out with a really funny wisecrack behind which there is real emotion and something very human that few are capable of. We got on very well.

I'm used to working with children. I don't have any myself but I've lived with them a lot. I like being around kids and all that side of things went very well. Acting with Théodore Maquet-Foucher was simple and we shared some great moments. Mélanie, Coralie, the coach and I tried to balance out our relationship with him so he could be relaxed and feel supported, but also be ready when it came to shooting. I was very relaxed with him. He was remarkable and happy to be there. He was an inspiration.

MÉLANIE WAS BOTH YOUR ACTING PARTNER AND YOUR DIRECTOR...

In the end, we didn't have that many scenes together, but everything happened very naturally. Sometimes the rhythms we found were very surprising because they went beyond the acting to confirm something in our relationship, but that was never a problem. She was totally into her character with all the emotions and situations that came with it and which could sometimes be pretty extreme, but as soon as the take was done, she was back in her role as director. There was an incredible intensity to her performance but she lost none of the perspective about what could be improved in later takes. I thought she was amazing.

DURING SOME OF THE FILM, YOU ARE IN A COMA. THAT MUST HAVE BEEN QUITE AN EXPERIENCE...

It was quite strange. I wasn't able to just lie there. Even if the performance required was minimal, I still had to be in a state that allowed the others to perform. On those days, to remain coherent with the absence of my character, I tried not to be around the set too much. I avoided getting out of bed between takes. It would have been tricky anyway because I had a catheter and my head covered with electrodes. There were a few surreal moments and some really funny ones, but also many times when I felt like crying with the actors who were performing around me and whose emotion really knocked me out. To me as someone who is very active, staying still for hours was a real test, so to expend my energy, I walked to the shoot and back every day – ten miles!

YOU HAVE A GREAT DEAL OF VERY DIVERSE ACTING EXPERIENCE. WHAT DID YOU THINK OF MÉLANIE AS A DIRECTOR?

Like many great directors, she knows exactly what she wants and as soon as she's got it, she moves on to something else. If she gets it in two takes, then she saves time. But that doesn't stop her being a very good listener. She knows how to take things on board and how to recognize a good idea. In terms of directing actors, she knows how to get us where we need to be to embody the character how she sees it. That's an unusual quality for a director and for an actor who directs.

When you work with Mélanie, despite the fact you might have worked very hard during the preparation phase, you are still operating in a way that allows you to get even deeper into the character and to try things. There is never any hesitation because she knows where she's going; it's about looking farther and finding more depth to the emotion. Every day we'd come up with new things and that's very motivating. Mélanie and I have had very different career paths and we are very different actors, but working together was very simple. We both know what we want. Neither of us manipulates the other. I was happy to be in her hands and I hope we have other opportunities to work together again.

YOU ACT ON STAGE, IN MOVIES AND ON TV IN VERY ECLECTIC ROLES. WHERE DOES THIS PROJECT STAND IN YOUR CAREER?

Whatever the project, I am committed and I perform as if it were the most important role in my life. All my very different and very formative experiences have somewhat paradoxically helped me reach a point where I can let go. I am an instrument at the service of a role and an oeuvre. I want to be surprised by what I am offered to play. And that's what happened with Mélanie's film. I always push myself to choose films that make sense to me. EAGER BODIES, RIVALS, and AKOIBON – they all suited me perfectly. But I never forget that in the end, it's what the audience sees and feels that counts.

WHEN YOU SAW THE FINISHED FILM, WAS THERE ANYTHING THAT SURPRISED YOU?

Many things. Starting with the scenes I don't figure in. Even if you've read them, they still take you by surprise. We also shot a lot more than the length of the film was going to allow us to keep, so I was discovering Mélanie's choices – what she had kept and what she had the courage to cut. She never lost sight of her subject, she never gave in to the intrinsic quality of a scene or a performance. She knew how to choose and that's a real strength. As such, the film found its rhythm and its uniqueness. In the end, I discovered a film that constantly surprises, both in terms of the narrative and the human relationships it deals with.

I also found the film to be very contemporary because it talks about a generation that finds it hard to deal with relationships and responsibilities. It's about people who, in their thirties, either find themselves having to take responsibility for relationships they began when they were very young, like Lisa, who already has a six-year-old daughter, or find they are hardened singletons like Marine and Alex. This is the reality that surrounds us, that affects us and goes beyond social divides. Through her film, Mélanie bears witness to the society in which she lives and that's essential to me.

I also discovered just how aesthetically beautiful the film is. Few French films are as complete on a visual level. Many different elements in Mélanie's film made me think of the best of independent American cinema. There is something lighter-than-air and poetic, combined

with a strong desire to deal with overwhelming, life-changing events and human feelings. This story makes us question the way we all have to adapt to new encounters, to what we are, to the path our lives take and to all that these things bring about. With this movie, Mélanie is offering an amazing comment on that.

She directs normal characters but brings out what is special about them. She is working in universes that are theoretically very codified – romcom, family drama, storytelling – but she doesn't use those codes. You expect lots of things, as one does from a film, but other things emerge, as happens in life. Mélanie never takes previously-trodden paths because she is following sentiments that are true.

WHAT DOES THIS FILM MEAN FOR YOUR CAREER?

The most important thing is my encounter with Mélanie. I really appreciate our connection and affection, the way we have of taking care of each other. I also liked the working environment on her film, the joy, the positive spirit and the passion. I've rarely had such a pleasant experience.

Mélanie asked something of me that I've never done before. Until now, I've mainly played characters who were really invested in drama or burlesque or comedy. Here, she told me I was going to be the one people fall in love with. Nobody had ever asked that of me before. She wanted me to be full of sunshine because my character had to give off something that makes everyone miss me. Although that was sometimes intimidating, it was like a gift to me. Because of how it was done and what it turned out to be, this film is very important to me.





Encounter with Denis Ménochet

(Alex)

WHAT DID YOU THINK WHEN YOU READ THE SCRIPT?

Everything was unusual about this film. I knew Mélanie but I didn't read the script, I heard it. We were in Berlin, shooting INGLOURIOUS BASTERDS, and one evening, she and Morgan Perez – her co-writer who I've known since the "Allô Quiche !" days – read it out loud to me. Over and above the story, I was listening to two people who I was enormously fond of, sharing something that was very important to them, and their conviction was infectious. Something lovely, sensitive and much more alive than a simple screenplay emerged through their reading. There was already emotion and energy that made you want to love your family; a raw and touching story – much like life, in fact – and something that everyone could relate to, a spirit and a warmth with no sentimentality about it at all.

WHAT DID YOU THINK WHEN MÉLANIE OFFERED YOU THE PART?

Mélanie was developing her project with a great deal of enthusiasm and many questions. We spoke regularly and in following her progress, I tried to support her as a friend. When she offered me the role of Alex, I was firstly surprised but then I immediately realized the opportunity this role presented, and my own desire to be associated with this project. It was a very powerful role, with a lot of performance often stemming from something very intimate, and I'd never taken on that kind of character before. It was both a challenge and a magnificent opportunity. I might have hesitated, but Mélanie never gave me the time. She takes everyone along with her. Her energy and the way she puts her heart into everything she does give you no choice.

WHO IS ALEX, YOUR CHARACTER?

He's a man who has no doubt suffered a great deal, without talking about it much. He reaches a point in his life where he feels he'd finally like to make something of it. He's aware something's not right in his life and he knows that he perhaps hasn't tried everything he should have to find his place. He has reached a certain maturity so he knows what he wants and what he doesn't want. He realizes that drunken nights out with his friends aren't enough to fulfill him. When he meets Marine, played by Marie Denarnaud, this encounter inspires him to move forwards and to finally reveal himself.

HOW DID YOU APPROACH YOUR CHARACTER?

I always immerse myself as much as possible in my roles. I need to master my characters' situations and imagine everything there is to know about their lives. For INGLOURIOUS BASTERDS, I was determined to bury the tree stump my character hits with an ax myself. I was on set, building with the crew to get totally into the place. Just before THE ADOPTED, I'd done LE SKYLAB directed by Julie Delpy, in which I play an ex-soldier who is drunk from morning to night, and then gone straight into an extremely physical shoot across three continents – SPECIAL FORCES by Stéphane Rybojad. I adore the variety and intensity that my job brings. But then playing Alex was something totally different. I couldn't tackle him like I'd taken on my other roles. He's a character who is neither defined by his appearance nor by his context, but by what he gives off. Alex has to gradually reveal what is deep down inside him. It had to come from inside, from instinct – something that I hadn't always dared to do. Mélanie helped me by freeing up something in my acting. When I talked to her about preparing the role and his different states of mind, she explained to me that this time, I shouldn't work like that. She shook me up, knocked me off balance, stopped me from intellectualizing and pushed me to take advantage of an instinct she could feel in me. But she did it in a very kindly way. So I trusted her and it was through her method that I approached the role. She is a remarkable actor and you just have to watch her performing to see that she knows exactly how to get into the spirit of a character. She gets there quickly, she immediately hits the right note, she's got this

intensity and it's all instinctive. Seeing what she is capable of makes you want to experiment with her way of doing things.

DO YOU REMEMBER THE FIRST SCENE YOU SHOT?

Alex has a night out that ends badly. He's a little drunk and goes to Lisa's house. Lisa is the sister of the woman he loves, and he goes there to tell her that he's afraid he won't be able to bring this child up alone. We are at the heart of the character, seeing how much he misses Marine and how he doubts his own capabilities, and it's also his first real contact with Lisa, who sees him like as an intrusion into their family. There was something very special about it, because I was performing opposite a friend whom I didn't want to disappoint, a costar with whom there was a lot to express, but also in front of the director. Luckily, Mélanie – whatever hat she is wearing – puts 100% into it and here, it was impressive to see her changing that hat, depending on whether she was opposite me or behind the camera.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE WORKING WITH MARIE DENARNAUD?

Marie has humanity and an immediate breadth. We had a lot of scenes together, from shyness to love scenes and from absence to declaration. She is an actor with a lot of experience whereas I've only really been working for three years. I had to be a little instinctive on this film, so acting opposite someone who has so much depth and mastery of their craft was a real experience. Marie has spontaneity, a very strong and immediate energy, culture and experience that feed into everything she does. Opposite her, it's not about acting – she just provides you with the power to be yourself.

WERE YOU EXCITED ABOUT ANY PARTICULAR SCENES?

There are no banal scenes in the film. In each one there is something at stake and they all give rise to some powerful emotions. As such, each scene had its own special interest. Having discussed it with Mélanie, we were looking forward to the scene in the gas station. It's a very important one for my character, a really key moment. I wasn't worried about it but I knew it was going to be intense. We had to act quickly to use the snow, and Mélanie helped me get the character in the moment. She just talked to me like only a friend and someone

who has a real mastery of acting can do. As a director empowered with acting experience, she knows how to direct. But for her, it wasn't so much a question of directing as a question of dosing our intensity, because within the framework of her story and her perspective, she gave us a lot of freedom. I really enjoyed it. She guided me. Marie was also there to help me.

HOW DO YOU VIEW MÉLANIE?

She is constantly surprising, constantly impressing me. She puts all she's got into everything she does. Mélanie is an excellent actress but I think she's just demonstrating that she is also a real director. Without losing her smile, and while always paying attention to the people around her, she imposes her vision very naturally. She combines a delightful humanity with a remarkable talent for observation and a sense of the quirky.

She knows how to make others feel things, and she already managed to do that very well as an actress. But moving into directing, she is finding even more tools that enable her to express what she has inside. On set, I saw her in her place, blossoming. She knows how to listen, how to choose the best idea and she knows where she's coming from. She knows which team to pick; she chooses her people and respects them, bringing something very homely into her way of working as part of a team.

WHAT DID YOU DISCOVER WHEN YOU SAW THE FINISHED FILM?

At first, I was surprised, almost disturbed at the intimacy Mélanie had captured in me on screen. I realized I had been right to trust her. But the most striking thing remains what comes out of the film. I found it visually elegant and touching, filled with a real human message that doesn't try to give lessons. Mélanie has a gift of transmitting emotions by using images captured on the fly, details and sounds that give the impression that you're really there. She's not content with simply showing; she puts the audience right there and makes them pick up on everything that isn't said.

When I watched the film, I discovered everything I hadn't picked up during the shoot and which Mélanie had captured and created. Her directorial standpoints are remarkably well thought out. Her direction is precise; she plays with everything, with no preconceptions, she's not looking for effects; she's simply looking for even more meaning and emotion. She always has lots of ideas, like her idea of dividing the film into segments that focus on each character, or her idea of taking the title to the end. These aren't just tricks, they serve to strengthen her story.

IF YOU COULD ONLY KEEP ONE MOMENT FROM THIS EXPERIENCE, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

There are many, but one of the most powerful would definitely be the scene where Lisa, Millie and Alex tell little Léo what happened to Marine. The scene was crucial for the film, but it also needed to be performed exactly right. First, you're on Clémentine, then on Mélanie and then on me. They were both really impressive. There is no pulling any punches and no effects, you're just in there with the acting and the emotion that each individual transmits. It's experiences like these that make me love this job.

WHAT DOES THIS FILM MEAN FOR YOUR CAREER?

This film was an overwhelming experience, both on a personal and professional level and it will stay with me. It is absolutely the kind of project I wanted to be involved in when I first dreamed of making movies. I really liked being in the middle of all these personalities, these women; Mélanie, Marie and Clémentine. Mélanie taught me how to trust and how to make people trust me. Her film and my role in it have given a real legitimacy to me as an actor. In the end, THE ADOPTED liberated me. It taught me how to let go.

WHAT DO YOU THINK THIS FILM CAN BRING TO THE AUDIENCE?

This film says that even without blood ties, you're still a family. You come out of the movie with a desire to love those close to you while they are there. It's a story that reminds you that you are alive. In her own, unique way, Mélanie leads you towards life.

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Mélanie Laurent filmography

Actor

2011 THE ADOPTED by Mélanie Laurent
2010 ET SOUDAIN TOUT LE MONDE ME MANQUE
by Jennifer Devoldère
2009 REQUIEM POUR UNE TUEUSE by Jérôme Le Gris
BEGINNERS by Mike Mills
2008 THE ROUND UP by Roselyne Bosch
INGLOURIOUS BASTERDS by Quentin Tarantino
Festival de Cannes 2009 – Official Selection
THE CONCERT by Radu Mihaileanu
2007 SHOE AT YOUR FOOT by Jennifer Devoldère
ROOM OF DEATH by Alfred Lot
LE TUEUR by Cédric Anger
2006 PARIS by Cédric Klapisch
HIDDEN LOVE by Alessandro Capone
2005 DAYS OF GLORY by Rachid Bouchareb
DIKKENEK by Olivier Vanhoofstadt
DON'T WORRY I'M FINE by Philippe Lioret
César 2007 – Best Female Newcomer
2004 THE LAST DAY by Rodolphe Marconi
THE BEAT THAT MY HEART SKIPPED
by Jacques Audiard
2003 HAINAN CHICKEN RICE by Kenneth Bi
2002 SNOWBOARDER by Olias Barko
2001 EMBRASSEZ QUI VOUS VOUDREZ by Michel Blanc
2000 THIS IS MY BODY by Rodolphe Marconi
1998 THE BRIDGE by Gérard Depardieu

Director

2010 THE ADOPTED
2008 À SES PIEDS
Short – Collection Canal +
2007 DE MOINS EN MOINS
Short
Festival de Cannes – Official Selection





Marie Denarnaud filmography

2011	THE ADOPTED by Mélanie Laurent
2008	GAMINES by Eléonore Faucher
2007	ESPION(S) by Nicolas Saada
	RIVALS by Jacques Maillot
2006	IN YOUR WAKE by David Oelhoffen
2004	PAPA by Maurice Barthelemy
2003	AKOIBON by Edouard Baer
2002	EAGER BODIES by Xavier Gianolli
	NUIT NOIRE by Daniel Colas
2000	MY WIFE IS AN ACTRESS by Yvan Attal
	CHAOS by Coline Serreau
1999	T'AIME by Patrick Sébastien

Denis Ménochet filmography

- 2011 THE ADOPTED by Mélanie Laurent
DANS LA MAISON by François Ozon
SPECIAL FORCES by Stéphane Rybojad
LE SKYLAB by Julie Delpy
- 2010 LILY SOMETIMES by Fabienne Berthaud
Festival de Cannes 2010 – Directors' Fortnight
THE ROUND UP by Roselyne Bosch
ROBIN HOOD by Ridley Scott
- 2009 JOSEPH ET LA FILLE by Xavier de Choudens
INGLOURIOUS BASTERDS by Quentin Tarantino
Festival de Cannes 2009 – Official Selection
COCO BEFORE CHANEL by Anne Fontaine
- 2008 LA TRÈS TRÈS GRANDE ENTREPRISE by Pierre Jolivet
YOU WILL BE MINE by Sophie Laloy
LOVE ME NO MORE by Jean Becker
- 2007 TRIVIAL by Sophie Marceau
LA VIE EN ROSE by Olivier Dahan
MY PLACE IN THE SUN by Eric De Montalier
HANNIBAL RISING by Peter Webber
- 2006 THE PINK PANTHER by Shawn Levy
AUTUMN by Ra'up McGee
- 2005 LA MOUSTACHE by Emmanuel Carrère
FOON by Les Quiches
ORDINARY MAN by Vincent Lannoo





Clémentine Célarié filmography

2011	THE ADOPTED by Mélanie Laurent	1988	SANGUINE by Christian François
	THE STRAIGHT LINE by Régis Wargnier		OF SAND AND BLOOD by Jeanne Labrune
2010	THE WHISTLER by Philippe Lefebvre	1986	LA VIE DISSOLUE DE GÉRARD FLOQUE
2009	VICTOR by Thomas Gilou		by Gérard Lautner
	LA DIFFÉRENCE C'EST QUE C'EST PAS PAREIL		MAKE IT MINE by Pierre Jolivet
	by Pascal Laëthier		BETTY BLUE by Jean-Jacques Beineix
2003	MEAN SPIRIT by Patrick Alessandrin		JUSTICE DE FLIC by Michel Gérard
2002	THE LAWLESS HEART		LA GITANE by Philippe de Broca
	by Tom Hunsinger and Neil Hunter	1985	THE TELEPHONE ALWAYS RINGS TWICE
2001	A HELL OF A DAY by Marion Vernoux		by Jean-Pierre Vergne
	DU CÔTÉ DES FILLES		BLANCHE AND MARIE by Jacques Renard
	by Françoise Decaux-Thomelet	1984	LES NANAS by Annick Lanoë
1997	ROOM TO RENT by Khaled El Hagar		PAROLES ET MUSIQUE by Elie Chouraqui
1996	LES SCEURS SOLEIL by Jeannot Szwarc		LA VENGEANCE DU SERPENT À PLUMES
1995	XY by Jean-Paul Lilienfeld		by Gérard Oury
	LE CRI DU CŒUR by Idrissa Ouedraogo	1983	GARÇON ! by Claude Sautet
	LES MISÉRABLES by Claude Lelouch		
	À CRAN by Solange Martin		
1994	LES BRAQUEUSES by Jean-Paul Salomé		
	LA VENGEANCE D'UNE BLONDE		
	by Jeannot Szwarc		
1993	TOXIC AFFAIR by Philomène Esposito		
	VENT D'EST by Robert Enrico		
1992	ABRACADABRA by Harry Clevén		
	LES NUITS FAUVES by Cyril Collard		
	LES ANNÉES CAMPAGNES by Philippe Leriche		
1991	GÉNIAL, MES PARENTS DIVORCENT!		
	by Patrick Braoudé		
1989	NOCTURNE INDIEN by Alain Corneau		

Cast

Mélanie LAURENT

Denis MÉNOCHET

Marie DENARNAUD

Clémentine CÉLARIÉ

Audrey LAMY

Theodore MAQUET-FOUCHER

Morgan PEREZ

Nicolas MEDAD

LISA

ALEX

MARIE

MILLIE

CLÉMENCE

LÉO

PHILIPPE

SÉBASTIEN

Crew

Directed by

Screenplay

Produced by

Production manager

Photography

Sound

Location manager

Set design

Costumes

Mélanie LAURENT

Mélanie LAURENT
Morgan PEREZ
Chris DESLANDES

Bruno LEVY

Jacques ROYER

Arnaud POTIER

Cyril MOISSON

Isabelle GAUTIER

Stanislas REYDELLET

Maira RAMEDHAN LÉVI

