

STRANGERS BY NIGHT

PRODUCTION NOTES



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SYNOPSIS

One night, in the crowded Parisian metro, Aymeric randomly bumps into Nathalie when they both enter the train. As they argue while amused commuters look on, their spark of passion grows into mutual desire, and the two decide to spend the evening together. The strangers wander the streets of Paris moving from one party to the next and delaying their goodbyes. Once the sun rises, they will become strangers again – but what if they never were?

INTERVIEW WITH ALEX LUTZ

THE VIRTUES OF IMAGINATION

When did you get the idea for this film? Was it just after you made GUY?

The project predates GUY, although I hadn't started anything by then. What gave me the idea for the film was a scene I witnessed in the Metro, an argument between a woman who got onto the carriage in a hurry and a man she collided with. They argued for a few minutes and their argument was delightful. I used some of it in the film, e.g. the way she apologises and also when she asks him whether he is with the 'tone police'. There were several of us on the train looking at each other, a little amused because their rhetoric was quite funny, so much so that we thought they liked each other. I wrote this down in a notebook: this encounter, how they make love in the photo booth, how they stay together all night long, thinking that if I ever directed it, it would have to be with a very small crew, shot within 24 hours, which of course is impossible. I saw Karin Viard, who has been a friend for a very long time. We talked about it at the César ceremony in 2019 that I attended for my film GUY. We met again later and I told her about the project, which focused on a couple over the course of one night, starting with an argument and an embrace, and I had the order of the sequences in mind. I told her I wanted to do it with a small technical crew, over a short shooting period. And then GUY had some success, I took on several roles as an actor, I resumed my show at the Folies Bergère. In the meantime, I found an ending for the film and, more importantly, the overall arc of the story, with the twist that tells us something about them. As this couple does everything from the get-go, namely argue and make love, the rest, despite their being on formal terms, established a form of familiarity I found interesting, at times when it bubbles to the surface or is lacking. This gave me the key to the game-changing ending. As a result, this familiarity and strangeness added a different value to the couple's words.

Once I had found the outline, I started working on it while hoping that Karin Viard would bring forth ideas because I wanted the film to be dynamic and about fatigue, with a 14-day shooting schedule. Not for the sake of it, but to capture the imbalance that night brings. After a sleepless night, you get over your tiredness, which is how I wanted to feel during shooting; I didn't want the comfort of time and I wanted the film to reflect this. A mixture of chaos and lightness, a little like GUY. I am comfortable with that.

The film's producer, Didar Domehri, also produced Etienne Comar's SINGING JAILBIRDS (2021) in which you star. Is that when you first met her?

I told her about my various projects, including STRANGERS BY NIGHT that I wanted to do next. She immediately expressed a strong interest. I didn't hesitate, even though I loved working with Oury Milshtein on GUY. For this project, focusing on a couple, I felt like working

with a female producer, and I thought it was important to have many women working on this film. She is a very talented, aware and patient producer.

I told her early on that I wanted to shoot with a small crew for a short period of time, and I wanted to stick to that, which she understood. It was never a struggle, rather a regular reminder. All the scenes in the film were scripted; there were just a few reversals between outdoors and indoors for some of them. There are ultimately a limited number of well-identified sequences.

When writing the script for the film, did you intend to play the lead character?

Not necessarily. Even for GUY, at some point I thought it wasn't for me. Having said that, I know how to do it, how to play these stories. Which is not to say that I will act in everything I write. I feel like writing for other people, just for them, and directing them. In addition to the films I want to direct, I am offered acting roles, people think of me sometimes, but not always... Writing and directing also gives me the opportunity to give myself roles I really want to play, and in this case, with STRANGERS BY NIGHT, to play a person in a couple. A lot of things are swapped around, the story, the age... as I was a bit tired of acting with girls who were 25 years younger than me. It's a perfect fit with Karin Viard.

Did you rehearse with Karin Viard before shooting?

We did three readings together. I have a touch of 19th century melancholy, while Karin Viard can be very practical, but in a "let's have fun along the way" manner, just like me. Her character and her acting bring radiance to the film, which offsets the fragile nature of my character, yet another reversal from what is often said of male and female conventions. She sometimes appears to be a robust driving force, although not always, as sometimes she hands it over to him.

When it comes to being admitted to the party, your character fails and she succeeds. And in the theatre, where the two characters arrive late, it is you who find the argument to get in.

They revitalise each other by performing minor acts of heroism. Throughout the life of a couple, where everyone has their own role to play, relatively comfortably, in the end the torch always passes from hand to hand.

In the film, she is the one who says time and again that she and he will not see each other again.

It mattered to me, in terms of what the ending reveals because it's her decision. The story, which is not the one told by the film and which we understand at the end, features this couple in distress, this assessment. For him, it's hard but it's not over, while for her it's something else, it's her story and theirs was over long before. He pleads and she refuses, before accepting somehow: OK, I'll give it to you one last time; we'll play it again. And he still comes out a winner in the end somehow!

When you make a film and play the lead, being in every scene, I suppose the choice of cinematographer becomes very important.

All this is thanks to Hadrien Bichet, who has an incredible talent. I loved working with him on GUY, where he was first assistant director and so much more than that. He always finds solutions, he never panics, I love him. He writes and will soon direct his own film. I met him through Oury Milshtein, who produced GUY, which was also shot with a small crew. Thomas Santucci, the line producer on GUY, also worked on STRANGERS BY NIGHT. Mathieu Le Bothlan (DP), who did a great job on GUY, and is first and foremost a cameraman, works very quickly but was not available. Hadrien recommended Éponine Momencaeu, who was DP on Jacques Audiard's DHEEPAN (2015), where I enjoyed her use of dark lighting.

The good thing with this script was that shooting took place in a different place every night, depending on the scene. 14 days is a challenge, but it is possible when there are fewer scenes. The party with the students was shot over two nights in the same place, the furniture store in one night, along with a street scene nearby. The locations were not far apart, which was convenient for team travel.

Apart from the Bir Hakeim bridge, the 16th arrondissement is a part of Paris that is not shown much in films anymore, like the relic of an era that no longer exists, a sort of ghostly Paris, albeit aesthetically pleasing. This is a realistic area when filming night-time wanderings, with hardly anyone on the streets. There is no need to empty the streets, they are already empty. It's like a dormitory, while at the same time being somewhat poetic.

You can tell that dialogue in this film, of which there is a lot, has been written very precisely.

In part, yes. There was a lot of improvisation based on very precisely written dialogue. While in GUY, we sometimes got lost in improvisation, in this case we also got lost but in a more controlled manner, with a much more structured text. I wrote it and my first assistant and co-writer Hadrien Bichet helped me with the structure and dialogue. Karin also had her say. For example, for the long scene on the bench where they talk about chemistry between two people, it was all in the script, but we didn't learn the lines by heart, we just kept the thought process in mind.

In STRANGERS BY NIGHT, the nature of dialogue is different from what we are used to. Words are not just used to talk; words used by the other are discussed and questioned. As soon as a word or phrase is uttered (alchemy, availability, not my type, the look of a winner, letting go), it becomes a topic of conversation. In one of the scenes, your character defines himself as both author and proofreader, which in a way epitomizes the film. When one person uses a word (the author), the other one corrects him/her.

They are trying to understand each other better, because words have been misunderstood that night, the purpose of which, as we understand at the end, is to heal, including through words, to learn how to talk to each other again, when you feel like everything has already been said. It's like an old couple: when you start arguing again, you feel like you know your lines by heart, having heard it before so many times. When the two of them correct each other, it's like a small battle. This questioning of words is a sign of admission, a first step. Words are tools that prevent us from fighting, from clubbing one

another, as emotions are always felt through words. What do the words we use mean; how do we reach an agreement through words; how do we end up with this couple? The film follows their journey, as they attempt to put words on their couple.

The film is also about how we use words and their limitations. At the beginning, when she says that “everything can be explained”, and he replies: “It's not all about words”. And at the end, as a voice-over, when she adds: “What do we do when there's nothing left to say”

The film is not a study of the couple but questions this meeting through the words that make up and define said couple, to know where it stands.

GUY focuses on the ravages of time, ageing. Time also gets the best of the tennis player you play in FINAL SET while, in STRANGERS BY NIGHT, it is the wear and tear of a couple that is explored over a very short period of time.

It's all about the lease of life. More than a subject, it's something I love. I only realise when I'm told... Even CATHERINE ET LILIANE, two middle-aged women with one foot in the 20th century and the other in the 21st, which makes them slightly outdated in this trendy newsroom. For me, the issue of time, what we do with it, what we miss, what we gain, is a limitless source of scripts, stories to tell, as well as embodiment, acting. With this subject, you can do anything. In any role, based on how time affects the character, you can do a lot of things; it's like working on clay.

In this double-edged story, the game is the driving force: the game for the sake of playing (rewind and start again) and a game involving the deepest part of the being, with all the attendant consequences. They both play a role. Besides playing with words, they play with their lives.

It is a strange sort of litmus test: they pretend they don't know each other. It is a triangular game that involves two players: you tell a familiar person, who you pretend you don't know, what you think of the person you live with. What would we say to each other if we were strangers? If we were, I would say: “I've hated you a thousand times, you stink, I like to cheat on you”, etc. It's easier when you pretend to be strangers. Time stands still at night. In her interviews, Françoise Sagan spoke about how the masks come off at night. People speak plainly, clearly. We achieve this mixture of day and night, of familiar and strange. Also, between the two of them, as the story gradually unfolds, the game gets tired too, which I liked. They play less and less, the game becomes more transparent. In particular, when she asks the man whether he misses his wife when she is not around, he says yes; she adds “and are you missing her right now?”, and he hesitates between continuing to play or throwing in the towel and telling the truth.

This two-pronged triangle, with the one they talk about and the one they talk to, or vice versa, facilitates politeness within the couple, a bit like therapy with a conciliator, except that they take turns playing the conciliator. It's like this: “What would she tell you? She would tell me... Well, no, I wouldn't tell you that. I'm not the other you think I'm or you've become accustomed to”. With this game, I wanted to address the issue of courtship and the codes of Marivaux's theatre in relation to the couple. In the furniture store, he makes her rehearse Marivaux, with Lisette and Silvia: “Be quiet, go and be impertinent elsewhere!” Marivaux's

THE GAME OF LOVE AND CHANCE was the first play I performed in as a teenager. I loved this work on the mask, on what to say and not to say, reversing roles. Marivaux is very modern, he talks about a woman's determination to choose love, by some sleight of hand, embedded narrative, like in the film, the game within the game.

In addition to the rules of the game they have determined (pretending not to know each other), the characters play games, as in the scene in the Chinese restaurant where they have fun imagining the lives of other customers. This allows them to widen their circle while returning to themselves.

There was a similar scene in GUY, in the restaurant with his son. They reconcile when he tells him: *"It's funny how men can be together for a very long time without telling each other anything and it's still okay"*. The son adds: *"What I like to do is to imagine everyone is a serial killer"*. And Guy replies: *"I could go for that"*. The game is conducive to a form of reconciliation, as is humor, because that is my background. Imagination is what I like about humor, with everyone adding their own contribution, the feeling of being on the same wavelength. It makes you feel incredibly good.

Jean-Claude Carrière said that about Buñuel when they spent their time outside a café, imagining the lives of passers-by, what they were about to do, etc.

We all do it to some extent, and I love it. It inspires actors and scriptwriters. Reconnecting with others makes you love life. What a joy it is to imagine the lives of others! What a pleasure it is to tell or make up stories. This is what Françoise Sagan said in one of her interviews: *"Imagination is the greatest virtue"*. And when the journalist asked her why, she said: *"Because, with a little imagination, I can say to myself: he had a funny voice, I'll ring him."*

On the bridge, they say goodbye as in a duel, back-to-back, as they walk away and, instead of turning around to shoot at each other, it is the eyes we focus on: seeing or losing sight of each other, seeing each other again and loving each other. It's a nice idea, which once again involves a game and its rules.

How many times in life do we say to ourselves: when was the right time to hold such and such in my arms? Moments that change your destiny. Here, in this dual scene, there is a risk of leaving alone or not, or a risk of having nothing more to say to each other and living with the rest, the bodies. In a fraction of a second, everything can start again and again, or stop for good.

The scene in the swingers club is beautiful, because of what is said and what happens. It is the only time the couple must deal with someone else.

I wanted their twosome, which we follow throughout the film, to become a foursome in just one scene. Two couples in an alcove, without sex, just talking. Talking to each other, even from a distance, completes the picture for the couple in the club and that in the film. If you close your eyes, the four-way conversation could be a two-way dialogue or a monologue.

There are rhymes in the dialogue and the words used. The woman at the swingers club tells your character that you are not her type, a subject that has already been discussed by the couple in the film. We remember the words used in the film (chemistry, availability, the look of a winner) which are not however witticisms.

Yes, words reappear, they are repeated, as in a fugue, with the theme they carry, even when they poke fun at each other, her making fun of her “happy cousins” and him of “the hidden bruises”.

The film made me think of a beautiful text by Maurice Blanchot, “*La douleur du dialogue*”, where he writes this about Marguerite Duras’s *The Garden Square*: “*Dialogue is rare, and do not think it is easy or happy. Listen to the two simple voices of the Garden Square: they do not seek agreement, in the manner of debating voices that go from evidence to evidence to reach an arrangement simply through consistency*”.

The conversation is at the heart of the film, especially the time taken for this conversation. I have been teased a little bit about that, especially the first scene on the bench about chemistry and availability. It was thought to be too long. It’s okay to destabilize a film. If I had trimmed down this scene, it would have become small talk. I wanted it to be somewhat different, so I had no choice but to go all the way. It resonates with you, throughout the film. These words permeate the film. Placing a word, taking the time to choose it and place it, is very important. It is unfortunate that we do not listen to the words used by others without taking time to discuss them, to dig into them. They keep hold of the words spoken in the first scene on the bench; they make them uncomfortable and they cannot get rid of them. The scene on the bench works as a springboard to set up the game they are going to play all night.

I am so glad that you mentioned Duras. There is this beautiful video where she talks about the year 2000, and you feel that she took her time to select and utter every word, to express her vision.

There is the chronology of the story, the night time and these images from the past that pop up in the story, in the swingers club and, at the end, on the bridge. Was this in the script or did the idea come up during the editing phase?

It is the result of my work with editor Monica Coleman, who made suggestions based on what I had written: the duel, turning around, the panic of not seeing each other, the long embrace to which I wanted to add sound elements, with telephone messages, lines of dialogue, linked to the medical world. Ultimately, letting others speak at the very end didn’t work, it confused the issue. As suggested by Monica Coleman, this was resolved by using images we had.

To borrow a word used and discussed in the film, there is chemistry between you and Karin Viard in the way you act.

I wrote this film for her, with our relationship in mind. Without her I wouldn’t have made it. When I wrote it, I could hear Karin’s voice. When she mentions the “tone police”, I had in mind her delivery, her diction, the music of her voice. We speak with our own words. I had already worked with her on *THE VISITORS: BASTILLE DAY* (2016, Jean-Marie Poiré) and

we became good friends, especially when we had to promote the film together. We got on well and understood each other. She gets me, she sees everything and vice versa. We feel as if we know each other inside out. As I knew her, I knew what I would put into words, even though I was sure she would question a few things.

Beyond our performance, our work as actors, it was important to find how to behave together, to touch each other, not to be prudish or embarrassed by our bodies. Karin and I talk a lot. We tell each other everything, we poke fun at each other and talk about our strengths and weaknesses and what ails us. If we hadn't had this kind of candor before acting, it wouldn't have worked. It was the same with Bruno Sanchez when we made CATHERINE AND LILIANE. We have to be putty in each other's hands.

Having said that, by the end of the shoot, Karin and I were very tired, as the scenes were shot almost in the order of the script. We had to manage the fatigue that comes with shooting at night as well as that of the characters, without one superseding the other or jeopardizing the film. The whole thing was fairly seamless. It was a pleasure to settle into the sequences, and the scene in the Chinese restaurant was great fun.

Piano holds a central place in the music of the film.

Yes, TCHAIKOVSKY'S JUNE: BARCAROLLE and César Franck's PRÉLUDE, FUGUE ET VARIATION as well as the theme that Vincent Blanchard, the composer of the music, designed as a fugue. I wanted the film's narration and sequence of scenes to be composed like a pianistic study. At the beginning is a reinterpreted version of JUNE, with struck chords, followed by its better-known version, with arpeggios and later stripped of a few notes. It is repeated at the end, on the bridge, with the imaginary piano. In the fugue, there is a harmonic theme, which you can enrich or simplify, while keeping this harmony. We composed our fugue with the three harmonic themes (Tchaikovsky, Franck, Vincent Blanchard's music).

Horses are featured in GUY, in your show at the Folies Bergère, and at the end of the film.

It's a horse that has escaped from a circus and when it is brought back, another horse is dying. This brings a dreamlike, strange, fantastical aspect, other than through acting and words. I have strong childhood memories of movies with horses, such as THE ELECTRIC HORSEMAN (1979, Sydney Pollack), which I saw time and again, until the videotape was worn out. I have used them in everything I've done, and I don't really know why. All I know is that these animals are very similar to us.

Interview by Charles Tesson

INTERVIEW WITH KARIN VIARD

When and under what circumstances did Alex Lutz tell you about this film project, STRANGERS BY NIGHT?

We're friends and we see each other from time to time. One day, when I was back from the gym, he told me he wanted to make a film with me, in which we meet in the *métro*. I was sweaty and in my tracksuit. During lockdown, I rang him to say we could make the film we had talked about and start writing the script. I went to his home in Orléans. We started thinking about it and I told him I'd be interested in helping write it. We went our separate ways, exchanging ideas and, Alex being Alex, he wrote it, imagined the whole thing, while telling me we would go over it all together, which we did. That was the starting point. Next, he worked on his own and with his first assistant Hadrien Bichet, and I came in to add the finishing touches. It's Alex's film, he's the one who wanted to make it, who directed it, and his assistant and I added our own touch, polishing and rewriting dialogue while reflecting on scenes. In fact, I arrived after the two of them and it was a truly collaborative approach. The film, which I like very much, is like a mirror image of the genuine, artistic friendship between Alex and myself, while factoring in the fact that we are both actors.

Is this your first time acting with Alex Lutz?

Acting in the same film, yes. I met Alex Lutz when we worked together on the Canal+ TV series *Le Débarquement* (2013). He suggested a sketch he was directing which I didn't really like. I offered him another. We got on really well, to the point of becoming inseparable, even though we only see each other from time to time. As soon as we're together, we laugh a lot and immediately behave like actors. We like to laugh, play jokes on each other and imagine things. This is apparent in the film, in some scenes, like the one in the restaurant, or in the general situation: these two people meeting for the first time, or so we believe before we find out otherwise; it's a game or an understanding between them, an agreement they have. Alex likes the fact that sometimes in life I say things that embarrass him, which forms part of our friendship. There are many aspects of ourselves in this film. Alex had written the scene in the restaurant where we imagine the lives of the other patrons in a darker vein. I told him we needed to have fun and be more playful. It was a superb collaboration, on top of everything else, namely playing these two characters. Although we play together, strangely enough we don't really play. My husband, with whom I watched the film, told me he felt like we were both on the sofa talking. It's a mixture of acting and something else. We're playing characters, not ourselves, and at the same time the film draws a lot from who we are as individuals and also of who we are when we are together, with the joy inherent in such moments. All in all, it's a strange object. This kind of film is difficult to produce, but I'd like to do it again every ten or fifteen years so that Alex and I can take stock of the situation.

As well as writing the script and arranging the scenes, you were also involved in writing the dialogue, which is very important in the film... The characters spend a lot of time discussing the words used by the other.

In fact, that is how I behave. That's what I do. The initial idea was to ask ourselves: what is a man, what is a woman? What does it mean to meet and understand each other? How does it work? What does it involve? How can you hear what the other person wants to tell you about their condition as a man or woman? That was really what Alex Lutz and I wanted to talk about in this film, because we're friends and there's no ambiguity about that. What's the difference between your reality as a man and my reality as a woman? In this day and age, all we talk about is equality, through feminism, but there's also an otherness between men and women that I love and that Alex loves too. There is a mystery when we meet someone of the opposite sex. Through the encounter that the film portrays, the idea was to find out what these differences are, whether they are due to our status as men and women, or simply a social or family construct... and to discuss it face-to-face, which is the principle of the film.

The film is very talkative but ultimately expresses a few things. We didn't worry too much about the importance of dialogue. We found this form, as sincerely and authentically as possible, consistent with the initial idea, which was what mattered most, while Alex Lutz was responsible for the form of the film. Above all, we agreed to be as free as possible, which included freedom of speech.

Was the dialogue told as written, or was some of it improvised?

Both. The crux of each scene was clear; we had to stick to it while expressing what each character had to say. There were requirements, key moments, entire sentences that had to be said, but we were allowed to add other things. There were prerequisites for every scene, i.e. ideas written in a certain way by Alex and myself, but the path to get there meant that we could take more personal routes. We always knew what the story was and we had to meet the requirements of every scene.

The one on the bench at the beginning sets both the tone and the principle, with a word that becomes a subject of conversation, a source of disagreement or possible agreement. Words no longer serve the story but shed light on the nature of the characters and their relationship.

Exactly. And above all it takes time, it takes forever. We're beyond typically effective film dialogue.

The film was shot in special conditions, in just 14 days. Was it an extra challenge or were the conditions right for you to deliver what was expected of you?

14 nights! And in June, when nights are short. The film is a special object and had to be inexpensive. That was the price of our freedom. Given the film's aspirations, a very short shooting time and a small crew were the only option. There was of course everything you need on a shoot (the assistant, the call sheet with shooting details, the call-up schedule) but this steady, frantic pace was part of the adventure. And this adventure was only possible

under these conditions. We couldn't afford another business model. We paid for this freedom and it's apparent in the film.

Did you keep fond memories of the shooting?

More than that. Firstly, because my role in it was different from what I am used to. Because it's about friendship and writing an artistic story, which I love. Because it's about freedom and daring, conjuring something different, stepping aside, moving away from the dictates of cinema, and it's a very pleasant feeling. It was also an opportunity to spend time with a friend. Alex and I see each other at dinner parties and, with this film, as if by magic, the story of our lives and friendship was being written as we were working. I loved it. All this has meant a lot to me. Unlike Alex Lutz, I'm just an actress and, as an actress, I respond to other people's desires, trying to do so as best I can while finding my place within the constraints of other people's desires. The film gave me real freedom, took me to another place, gave me a new experience; it was more than acting, more than embracing a role.

You talked about the freedom you enjoyed on STRANGERS BY NIGHT; did you feel the same way with Solveig Anspach, with whom you made HAUT LES COEURS! (1999) and LULU IN THE NUDE?

With Solveig, it was very different, precisely written, with no room for improvisation. Having said that, I understand why you're asking, because I had a very intimate relationship with Solveig, I trusted her completely, just like I trust Alex. I had a great deal of acting freedom, based on words close to my heart, very personal words, as if they were a part of me, which I don't always experience with other directors, in other stories, while still enjoying this acting freedom.

In the film, there is not only chemistry between the two of you, as actors, but also, based on the conditions of the shooting, in the making of the film itself.

The very deep trust we have in each other means that we surrendered to something very real in ourselves. The relationship between this couple is never in doubt. Neither is the male-female relationship, which wasn't a given. After *Guy*, Alex Lutz once again shows his inquisitive and creative nature. He is an author, very much so.

Interview by Charles Tesson on 2 May 2023

INTERVIEW WITH DIDAR DOMEHRI

You met Alex Lutz when you produced Etienne Comar's *SINGING JAILBIRDS* (2021), in which he stars?

I didn't know Alex Lutz personally before I produced this film. I really admired his work, which was truly multidisciplinary. He's a complete artist. An actor, a director, a novelist, a stage director and a painter, which I discovered during the shooting of *SINGING JAILBIRDS*. He has a permanent gallery displaying his incredible work. I was particularly impressed with his work as director and actor on *GUY*. We talked about what he wanted to do with his next film and he immediately shared an idea with me, that of *STRANGERS BY NIGHT*, which he had been thinking about for some time without really daring to go any further. I thought it was a beautiful and intriguing idea, and we started working at that point with a basic premise: to give him enough freedom while providing a specific framework for the dialogue and key situations, as he had a very clear idea of what he wanted to do, but within a setting that would leave room for improvisation, unique moments, with an original cinematic form, based on a simple story and special emotions. The result is a film that stands out.

I get the feeling that the way the film was produced and shot, with a small crew and in a limited number of days, was in keeping with the story told and not the result of the script.

That was the gamble from the outset; everything was linked. The way it was made was as important as the story told by the film, and it had to be consistent. It was designed in such a way that it would have a major impact on the viewer's experience and the emotions aroused. We wanted this kind of precariousness, to be on a razor edge all the time, to have moments of fragility and for that to show on screen. We wanted the actors to be really tired, to make the night last as long as possible. The challenge was to see the script as a basis to work on, to be developed organically during rehearsals and then shooting. When we met while filming *Singing Jailbirds*, Alex Lutz had a few ideas in mind, a very clear vision, but not much on paper. We had to put it all down in writing while asking our partners to trust the freedom we were demanding in terms of making as well as funding the film, as the script was finalized at a fairly late stage. As it was quite a different film from *GUY*, we didn't want the project to be seen in the same light. Now that we have started showing it, when people see the film, they no longer compare it with *GUY*, and that makes us happy. What they see above all is a filmmaker with his own world and his own form of storytelling. And the bond between Karin Viard and Alex Lutz is so obvious that it has little to do with *GUY*. Throughout the shooting, we felt like we were sitting on their shoulders, invading their privacy, crashing their party, as part of a verbal tug-of-war established from the outset and that they keep up all night long. Seemingly out of nowhere, the way it addresses all matters relating to life as a couple, based on an encounter, means that the film is seriously gut-wrenching. What it says about couples and everyday life is quite meaningful. It really grips you. And it does so in a very light, simple, sometimes funny way, without overdoing it.

Is it more difficult to produce a film in these conditions, with a small budget, than a more standard, well-financed production?

The main challenge was to finance the film quickly, as we had to shoot on very specific dates. Alex Lutz wanted a script that wasn't as developed as a traditional script, that committees are used to receiving. While the script is the main exhibit, with this film we had to gain the trust of the partners who were going to work with us on the project, by getting them to agree to a particular form of production, with a small crew and very short shooting times, with a script that didn't meet the usual standards. And, above all, buying into a vision of the film that wasn't very clear on paper but is clear now that the film has been completed. That was the challenge.

Were there several sources of funding?

Yes, StudioCanal, SG Image Développement 2020, Procirep, Angoa and the CNC for development, Canal +, Ciné plus and C8 for pre-purchases, as well as three Sofica companies, Cofinova 19, SG Image 2021 and Indefilms 11. The film is co-produced by Versus Production, with the participation of RTBF, Proximus and Inver Tax Shelter. The film will soon be submitted to the Advance on Receipts Committee after completion.

How did the shooting go, which was underpinned by a fairly tight schedule?

We were lucky with the weather. We shot at the end of June 2022, when the weather was very hot. As most of the filming took place at night and outdoors, the main difficulty was fatigue. It was difficult for the crew who had to stay up several nights in a row, but necessary because the actors had to look tired. It's actually quite beautiful, the way this is perceived at the end of the night. Shooting over a short period of time was really one of the film's prerequisites. Alex Lutz wanted to work with these constraints and capture a rarely seen area of Paris, the 16th *arrondissement*, at night, where few films are made and where we were quite free to do what we wanted. With a skeleton crew, it is easier to move from one place to another, with a sense of speed and danger. You get the feeling that the city belongs to you.

There is a lot of dialogue, which is very important in the film. Did that require a lot of takes?

No, because they are two exceptional, incredible actors, which really shows on screen. They felt totally at ease with one another, with what they had to say. The dialogue construction and overall situations were already very well defined and there were quite a few rehearsals beforehand. In fact, filming went very smoothly. So there weren't that many takes because they always improvised within defined boundaries.

As well as the production and filming arrangements, what did you discuss with Alex Lutz regarding the choice of positions?

There were quite a few members of his artistic team, including department heads, he wanted to work with again after GUY. First of all Hadrien Bichet, co-writer and first assistant director, Stéphane Thiébaud on sound, Amandine Cros on costumes, who started working with Alex Lutz on the CATHERINE ET LILIANE series, and Thomas Santucci as production manager. We met cinematographer Éponine Momencau together, who turned out to be a

perfect match for what we had in mind, i.e. someone capable of capturing the night in a specific way while working within imposed shooting constraints. She did a fantastic job and we were very lucky that she agreed to work on the film, as she only works sporadically and prefers to focus on her own projects as a videographer. We also met editor Monica Coleman, with whom Alex Lutz had never worked before. Theirs was a fruitful collaboration. Editing is key to generate pace and intensity in these moments of dialogue, with extreme precision. For the music, Alex Lutz called on his playmate Vincent Blanchard, who wrote the music for GUY. Alex Lutz wanted a lot of music to go with the emotion of the characters. After discussing the end, we opted for a simplified form. All we hear is Karin Viard's voice-over and the sound of clothes rubbing together. The closing credits however feature Juliette Armanet's song, as she really liked GUY.

All in all, it was a great collaboration.

Yes, because in the end, there's this special object, a beautiful piece of cinema. It's the first time I've produced a film in this way, with this spirit, and I loved it. I'm also happy that we immediately agreed to the prerequisites, so that everything was clear and we could move forward together in the same direction.

Interview by Charles Tesson on 04 May 2023

BIOGRAPHIES

ALEX LUTZ

Alex Lutz takes his first steps on stage. Pascale Spengler hired him in her troupe Les Foirades as an actor and assistant director. Until 2000, they worked together on authors such as Brecht, Chouaki, Müller... Alex created his own company, Le Coût de la pomme, with which he staged and wrote several shows.

He discovered Paris, made his first TV shows and met Sylvie Joly. He co-wrote and directed her last show *La Cerise sur le gâteau* at the Théâtre des Mathurins. In turn, she directed the first version of his one-man show in 2008 at the Point-Virgule and introduced him to Pierre Palmade, whose play *Le Comique* (nominated for a Molière award in 2009) and *ILS SE RE-AIMENT* with Michèle Laroque he directed. In 2009 he co-wrote and directed Audrey Lamy's show and made his film debut in Michel Hazanavicius' *OSS 117: LOST IN RIO* in which he played a hippie Nazi. He played various roles in *HOLLYWOOD*, *PORN IN THE HOOD*, *FRENCH WOMEN*, *KNOCK*, *SPIROU AND FANTASIO'S BIG ADVENTURES*, *HEAVY DUTY*...

In 2009, he created his first one-man show, a tasty mix of stand-up and theatre. With Tom Dingler, his director, Alex is constantly creating new sketches and imagining new characters. From the Point-Virgule to the Châtelet, via Bobino, the Folies Bergère, the Olympia and five seasons on tour, the audience is always growing.

In 2013, Alex was elected "Humorist of the Year" by GQ magazine and received the Parisien star for "Best Comedy Show". The show was broadcast live on Canal+ in October 2015. Alex received the Molière de l'humour in 2016.

Since 2011, together with Bruno Sanches, they play *CATHERINE ET LILIANE* in *Le Petit Journal* on Canal+. In 2015, he wrote, directed and performed in his first film *LE TALENT DE MES AMIS* with Bruno Sanches, Tom Dingler, Audrey Lamy, Sylvie Testud and Jeanne Moreau.

With his second feature film as director, released in theatres in 2018, Alex Lutz received the César for Best Actor in 2019. In February 2018, Alex Lutz created his second show at the Olympia, which he will perform on the Folies Bergères stage and on tour and for which he received a second Molière de l'humour.

In 2021, the film *FINAL SET* by Quentin Reynaud was released on June 16, Alex will soon be starring in the film *VORTEX* by Gaspar Noe, also in the credits of Etienne Comar's film, *A L'OMBRE DES FILLES*.

On March 8th Alex worked with André Dussollier and Quentin Reynaud, director of the film *THE BLAZE*. He has just finished editing *STRANGERS BY NIGHT*, his third film as a director, in which he stars with Karin Viard.

FILMOGRAPHY

2023	STRANGERS BY NIGHT	Alex LUTZ
	THE BLAZE	Quentin REYNAUD
2020	FINAL SET	Quentin REYNAUD
2019	HEAVY DUTY	Bertrand BLIER
2018	GUY	Alex LUTZ

2017	SPIROU & FANTASIO'S BIG ADVENTURES	Alexandre COFFRE
	KNOCK	Lorraine LEVY
2016	ODD JOB	Pascal CHAUMEIL
	THE VISITORS : BASTILLE DAY	Jean-Marie POIRE
	MISS IMPOSSIBLE	Emilie DELEUZE
2015	PARIS-WILLOUBY	Arthur DELAIRE & Quentin Reynaud
	LE TALENTS DE MES AMIS	Alex LUTZ
2014	VERY BAD GIRLS	Audrey DANA
2013	PARIS OR PERISH	Reem KHERICI
	TURF	Fabien ONTENIENTE
2012	BOWLING	Marie-Castille MENTION-SCHAAR
	PORN IN THE HOOD	Franck GASTAMBIDE
	THE FRONTIER BOYS	John GROOTERS
2011	HOLLYWOO	Frédéric BERTHE & Pascal SERIEIS
	LA CROISIERE	Pascale POUZADOUX
2011	MY PIECE OF THE PIE	Cédric KLAPISCH
2010	BACON ON THE SIDE	Anne DEPETRINI
2009	OSS 117: LOST IN RIO	Michel HAZANAVICIUS
2008	FEMALE AGENTS	Jean-Paul SALOME

KARIN VIARD

After two years at the Conservatoire in Rouen, Karin Viard goes to Paris where she follows the comedy classes of Vera Gregh and Blanche Salant.

In the 1990s, Karin Viard took her first steps in the cinema with three comedies by Etienne Chatilliez, Jean-Pierre Jeunet and Cédric Klapisch.

She rose rapidly from the well-known secondary roles in TATIE DANIELLE and DELICATESSEN to leading roles in films such as Xavier Durringer's LA NAGE INDIENNE (César nomination for Best Female Hopeful) or Philippe Harel's LES RANDONNEURS (César nomination for the best supporting actress).

In 2000, she received the César for best actress and the Prix Lumières for best actress for her role in HAUT LES COEURS! by Solveig Anspach and in 2003 she obtained the César for the best actress in a second role for EMBRASSEZ QUI VOUS VOUDREZ by Michel Blanc. Since then, Karin Viard has become one of the most popular and sought-after French actresses in a variety of films: dramas such as PARLEZ-MOI DE VOUS by Pierre Pinaud, POLISSE by Maïwenn (Nomination at the César of the best actress), MA PART DU GATEAU by Cédric Klapisch or 21 NUITS AVEC PATTIE by Jean-Marie Larrieu, Arnaud Larrieu (Nomination at the César of the best supporting actress) or comedies like Eric Lartigau's LA FAMILLE BELIER (Nomination at the César of the best actress), POTICHE de François Ozon, LE CODE A CHANGE de Danièle Thompson, JALOUSE de David et Stéphane Foenkinos (Nomination at the César of the best actress and Globe de Cristal of the best actress), BECASSINE! , adapted by Bruno Podalydès, VOYEZ COMME ON DANSE by Michel Blanc.

In 2018, she starred in the film LES CHATOUILLES by Andréa Bescond and Eric Métayer. For this film, she was awarded the César for Best Supporting Actress and the Crystal Globe for Best Actress.

In 2019, we find Karin Viard alongside Benjamin Biolay in the film LES APPARENCES by Marc Fitoussi, as well as in CHANSON DOUCE by Lucie Borleteau (Nomination at the César of the best actress).

In 2021, Karin Viard was featured in FANTASMES by Stéphane Foenkinos and David Foenkinos, Laurent Lafitte's ORIGINE DU MONDE and Olivier Peyon's TOKYO SHAKING. We also find her in the film broadcast on Canal +, LA VENGEANCE AU TRIPLE GALOT directed by Alex Lutz. She is also featured in Sylvie Audcoeur's A MOTHER.

In 2022, Karin Viard plays in Jennifer Devoldere's SAGE-HOMME, MARIA REVE directed by Lauriane Escaffre and Yvonnick Muller.

She is currently playing WAHOU! by Bruno Podalydès.

She is reunited this year with Alex Lutz in his film STRANGERS BY NIGHT (closing film of the selection Un Certain Regard, at the Cannes 2023 Film Festival).

She will soon be in MAGNIFICAT by Virginie Sauveur, NOUVEAU DEPART by Philippe Lefebvre and MADAME DE SEVIGNE by Isabelle Brocard.

FILMOGRAPHY

1998	HAUT LES COEURS
1999	LES ENFANTS DU SIECLE
2000	LA PARENTHESE ENCHANTEE

2002	EMBRASSEZ QUI VOUS VOUDREZ
2003	LE ROLE DE SA VIE
2005	L'ENFER
2007	LE BAL DES ACTRICES
2009	LE CODE A CHANGE
2010	POTICHE
2011	POLISSE
2013	LULU FEMME NUE
2014	LA FAMILLE BELIER
2017	JALOUSE
2018	LES CHATOUILLES
2020	L'ORIGINE DU MONDE
2021	TOKYO SHAKING
2023	MADAME DE SEVIGNE

DIDAR DOMEHRI (Producer)

Didar Domehri founded the production company Maneki Films and the label Full House in 2009. She used to be head of international sales at Films Distribution/Playtime.

She was vice president of the selection committee of CNC's Aide aux Cinémas du Monde, member of the selection committee for the Cinéfondation residency, as well as for the Aquitaine region and CICLIC (Centre region).

In 2017 she was chosen by Unifrance and European Film Promotion to represent France for Producers on the move. She also received that same year the IFCIC award for best young independent production company, and was made chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres.

Didar Domehri regularly intervenes as an international market expert for the European Producer workshops EAVE and EAVE Puentes, training tomorrow's European producers as a group leader.

She also takes part every year as a producer expert in Cannes Critics' Week's Next Step program, the TorinoFilmLab, Qumra and the Full Circle Lab, founded by Mathieu Darras, and selects projects for the coproduction market When East Meets West (Trieste Film Festival).

After being vice-president of Unifrance's Feature Film commission for two years, and being part of the executive committee on the TVFI-Unifrance merger, she was appointed president of the feature films college of the new association.

She is also member of the feature film board of the Union of Independent Producers (SPI), and member of the Collectif 50/50.

She is regularly asked to be jury member in film festivals and international coproduction markets:

- Jury member of the BAFICI 2022 and of the Italian Cinema jury in Annecy
- Member of Cannes Critics' Week jury and in 2021, and for Biarritz Festival - Latin America in 2019
- Jury member for the Eurimages Award in the coproduction market of San Sebastián Film Festival in 2018, and for Rotterdam and Rome film festivals in 2020
- Jury member for the coproduction market of the International Istanbul Film Festival and the Thessaloniki International Film Festival in 2016

She has produced and coproduced 20 films : Z WORD by RKSS (in postproduction), STRANGERS BY NIGHT by Alex Lutz (Closing film 'Un Certain Regard' – Cannes 2023, Opening film – BRIFF 2023), GODLAND by Hlynur Palmason (Official selection 'Un Certain Regard' – Cannes FF 2022, Winner of Zabaltegi-Tabakalera section – SSIFF 2022, French release on December the 21st), UNDER THE FIG TREES by Erige Sehiri (Directors' Fortnight – Cannes FF 2022, Contemporary World Cinema – TIFF 2022, Winner of jury's prize – Prix ECOPROD 2022, French release on December 7th), KING by David Moreau (French release on February 16th), À L'OMBRE DES FILLES by Etienne Comar (French release on April 6th), PETITE FLEUR by Santiago Mitre (BAFICI 2022, French release June, 8th), MEMORY HOUSE by João Paulo Miranda Maria (Official Selection - Cannes FF 2020 ; Discovery - TIFF 2020 ; New Directors - SSIFF 2020), UNDER THE STARS OF PARIS by Claus Drexel (French release on October 28th 2020), GIRLS OF THE SUN by Eva Husson (Competition – Cannes FF 2017, TIFF 2017), PICKPOCKETS by Peter Webber (Netflix), LA CORDILLERA by Santiago Mitre (Official selection Cannes Film Festival 2017 - Un Certain Regard), BANG GANG (A MODERN LOVE STORY) by Eva Husson (in competition TIFF 2015), PAULINA by Santiago Mitre (Grand Prix, Cannes Film

Festival Critics' Week 2015), DÉGRADÉ by Arab & Tarzan Nasser (Cannes Film Festival Critics' Week 2015), RETURN TO ITACA by Laurent Cantet (Grand Prix Venice Days 2014), BROTHERHOOD OF TEARS by Jean-Baptiste Andréa, ELEFANTE BLANCO by Pablo Trapero (Official selection Cannes Film Festival 2012 - Un Certain Regard), 7 DAYS IN HAVANA by Laurent Cantet, Benicio del Toro, Julio Medem, Gaspar Noé, Elia Suleiman, Pablo Trapero, Juan-Carlos Tabio (Cannes Film Festival, Un Certain Regard 2012) and 11 FLOWERS by Wang Xiaoshuai (Toronto & San Sebastian FF 2011).

FILMOGRAPHY MANEKI FILMS

2011	11 FLOWERS
2012	7 DAYS IN HAVANA
2013	ELEFANTE BLANCO
2013	BROTHERHOOD OF TEARS
2014	RETURN TO ITHACA
2015	PAULINA
2016	BANG GANG (A MODERN LOVE STORY)
2016	DEGRADE
2017	THE SUMMIT
2018	PICKPOCKETS
2018	GIRLS OF THE SUN
2020	UNDER THE STARS OF PARIS
2022	KING
2022	SINGING JAILBIRDS
2022	PETITE FLEUR
2022	MEMORY HOUSE
2022	UNDER THE FIG TREES
2022	GODLAND
2023	STRANGERS BY NIGHT

CREDITS LIST

ALEX LUTZ

Aymeric

KARIN VIARD

Nathalie

JÉRÔME POULY de la Comédie Française

Alain

NOÉMIE DE LATTRE

Jolène

KENZA FORTAS

Tenancière du club

NICOLE CALFAN

Directrice de cirque

TECHNICAL CREW

A film by	Alex Lutz
Screenplay by	Alex Lutz, avec Karin Viard et Hadrien Bichet,
Director of Photography	Eponine Momencaeu
1st Director assistant	Hadrien Bichet
Editing	Monica Coleman
Set design director	Aurélien Maille
Costumes	Amandine Cros
Sound	Yves-Marie Omnes
Sound editing	Fred Demolder
Mixer	Stéphane Thiébaud
Music	Vincent Blanchard
Production director	Thomas Santucci
Post-production supervision	Gaëlle Godard-Blossier
Make-up	Lisa Schonker
Hair designer	Stéphane Malheu
Casting	Angélique Luisi, Valérie Trajanovski
Script	Jeanne Privat
Produced by	MANEKI FILMS (Didar Domehri)
In Co-production with	VERSUS PRODUCTION Jacques-Henri Bronckart Gwenaëlle Libert Tatjana Kozar
International Sales	StudioCanal
French Distributor	StudioCanal
French Publicity	Linda Marasco