

TAKE FIVE & POSSIBLES MÉDIA PRESENT

EMMA PEETERS

A FILM BY **NICOLE PALO**
WITH **MONIA CHOKRI & FABRICE ADDE**



P R E S S K I T

LOGLINE

An actress plans to commit suicide to finally make something of her life and meets a funeral parlor employee who proposes to help her... for better or for worse.

SYNOPSIS

Emma Peeters will soon be 35 and has yet to accomplish something. After years of hardship in Paris in trying to become an actress, an idea strikes her fancy: bringing her days to an end in a week's time, on her birthday. In the process Emma meets Alex Bodart, a fanciful funeral home employee who will help her in her reckless endeavor. By dint of hard work to hide their respective feelings, it seems they may succeed in bringing about Emma's final objective...

DIRECTOR'S INTENTION

This film is conceived as a therapeutic pill for anyone who ever thought of "chucking it all in" but was afraid to do so.

In the era of positive thinking, personal development, the eternal quest for happiness and fulfillment, the cult of the ego, one has to admit that people are not happier than they used to be. Most do not have the life they dreamed of. And very often, to avoid frustration, they make compromises with their ideal.

Our heroine, out of step with her times, imagines a radical solution to escape boredom, mediocrity and the unbearable contemplation of herself: take her own life. Of course, Emma is mistaken. She will realize in the end that, if you cannot do what you love, you can love what you do... and just simply love.

Emma Peeters aims to pep up the existential genre by its slight derision and caustic wit. The heroine on her unreasonable journey breathes life into the film making it anything but depressing. The love story that emerges from the suicidal enterprise offers the anticipated catharsis.

Emma Peeters is a refreshing comedy where black humor brushes with candid moments reminding us of the simple pleasures in being alive. It is also a playful evocation of Cinema's history, as seen through the eyes of a disappointed actor who imagines herself in a Bergman drama, a musical comedy or film noir. The film score and cinematography bring a soothing vintage touch.



TRAILER



<https://vimeo.com/282556804>



NICOLE PALO

SCREENWRITER
& DIRECTOR

Nicole Palo was born in 1977 in the United States. She is Belgian and American. After graduating from the University of Brussels with majors in Journalism and Scriptwriting, she studied in Denmark at the European Film College, where she directed several short films in digital format.

In 2005, she directed the short film **Anna ne sait pas (Anna doesn't know)**, shot on Super-16mm.

In 2008, she won the micro-budget feature film contest organized by Cinéastes Associés, supported by ARTE and the Belgian French community. She directed **Get Born** from the script she wrote on the theme "Being 20". The film, broadcast on ARTE in April 2009, was released on DVD under the label Actes Belges.

She also works as an expert for the MEDIA Programme of the European Union (Creative Europe) and as consultant for several production companies.

FILMOGRAPHY

2018 | **Emma Peeters**

Fiction, 87 min, HD, Take Five – Possibles Média – RTBF, Canada

Giornate degli Autori (Venice Days), Venice (IT) - 2018
Cinemanía Film Festival, Montréal (CA) - 2018

2008 | **Get Born**

Fiction, 72 min, HDV, Cinéastes Associés – ARTE – RTBF, Belgium

FIFF - Festival International du Film Francophone de Namur (BE) - 2008
Tapis Rouge au Cinéma belge, Montréal (CA) – 2009
54th Corona Cork Film Festival (IE) – 2009
Omaha Film Festival (US) - 2010
Broadcast : ARTE (FR/DE) in April 2009

2006 | **Anna ne sait pas**

Fiction, 12 min, 35 mm mdw productions – Nicole Palo, Belgium

Festival international du film d'Amiens (FR) – 2006
ShortCuts Cologne (DE) – 2006
Silence Saturn (BE) – 2006
Psarokokalo Film Festival (GR) – 2008
Broadcast : RTBF (BE), France 3 (FR), Mediaset (IT)



MONIA CHOKRI

EMMA PEETERS

Credit : Maude Chauvin

Born in Quebec city in 1982, she began her acting career after she completed her studies at Montreal's Conservatory of Dramatic Arts in 2005. Monia defended no less than a dozen plays on the boards of Montreal theaters. These include **Chroniques** (Emmanuel Schwartz) **Les mauvaises herbes** (Jasmine Dubé) at la Maison Théâtre and on tour, not to mention creations from Théâtre DuBunker - company she founded in 2006 with fellow Conservatory - **Je voudrais (pas) crever**, **Le diable en partage**, **Le songe de l'oncle** and at l'Espace GO in **La fureur de ce que je pense**.

On television, we have seen her in **Les rescapés**, **Mirador**, **Le Gentleman III** and more recently in the series **Sur-vie**, **Mensonges** and **Nouvelle adresse**.

In addition to having played in several theatre productions in Montreal, she has received notable roles in films presented at the Cannes Film Festival directed by Québécois filmmakers, namely Denys Arcand and Xavier Dolan. In **Les Amours imaginaires**, she played Marie, a young woman who falls in love with the same man as her gay male best friend Francis, played by Dolan, who also directed. The quality of her acting has been noted by critics, notably in *Les Inrockuptibles* and *Le Monde*. She can also be seen in the film by Xavier Dolan, **Laurence Anyways**, and in **Gare du Nord**, the fourth feature film by French director Claire Simon.

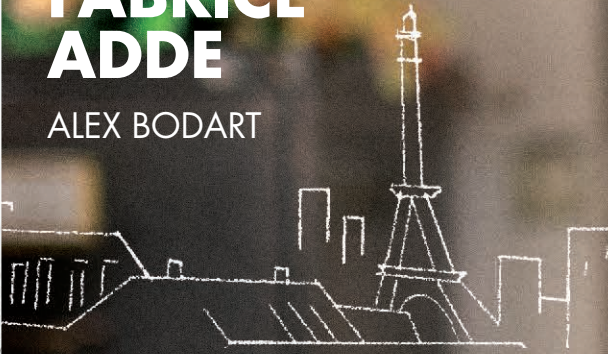
In addition, in 2013, she wrote and directed her first short film **Quelqu'un d'extraordinaire**, which earned her several awards including the Jutra (2014) for best short or medium-length film, the award at the festival South By Southwest (Texas 2014), 5 awards at the 11th gala Prends ça court ! (2014) and several other prizes.

She was seen in Robin Aubert's **Les affamés** (Best Canadian Feature Film of the Toronto International Film Festival 2017). She, also, worked on several movies in 2017: **Pauvre Georges** (Claire Devers), **Gold** (Éric Morin), **Avant qu'on explose** (Rémi St-Michel). She is currently directing her first full-length film **La femme de mon frère**, a film she also wrote.



FABRICE ADDE

ALEX BODART



At the age of 7, Fabrice Adde declares: "Later, I will be a clown...". His first prize of intrepidity obtained in primary school confirms his decision. Later, he eats a lot of soup, grows too fast and reaches the perfect figure of a beanpole. Coming from a family of Norman farmers and after going from one odd job to another in factories, he decides to get into culture himself. He then meets Jean-Pierre Dupuy and Olivier Lopez who bring him into their theater school in Caen. Fabrice stays there for two years and then, gaining maturity, manages to enter the ESACT, Royal Conservatory of Liège where he graduates in 2005.

Fabrice Adde has already made a lot of theater appearances with René Georges, Galin Stoev, Falk Richter and Aurore Fattier; on television, in the Belgian series *La Trêve*, *Souviens-toi*, *Les Témoins*; on film sets, those of Bou-

li Lanners (*Eldorado* and *Les premiers, les derniers*), Arnaud Desplechin (*Trois souvenirs de ma jeunesse*), Samuel Benchetrit (*Chien*), Eric Judor (*La Tour de contrôle infernale*) and more recently alongside Leonardo DiCaprio in Alejandro González Iñárritu's *The Revenant*.



Q&A WITH NICOLE PALO

Where did you get the idea for this film?

The idea came to me at a moment of my life when I felt I was going nowhere, when it seemed to me everything I was doing was doomed to failure. The character of Emma Peeters grew out of my frustration and the fantasy, I believe quite common, of chucking it all in. I imagined what would happen if someone actually took the bull by its horns and decided to end it for good. I started writing *Emma Peeters* to

let off steam. I found satisfaction in developing the personality of Emma and what she was going through with irony. My intention is, in reality, to make the viewers feel good, entertain them and give them food for thought. Emma Peeters' frustration is universal. What she decides to do as a consequence is a fable and is largely related to her temperament. Like a present-day Madame Bovary, she suffers from the dissatisfaction of someone who dreamed too much and refuses reality for what it is; someone for whom losing her ideal means losing herself. In planning her suicide, Emma finds the way to liberation.

Tell us about the casting. How did you choose the actors? How did you work on the characters with them?

The first to join the cast of *Emma Peeters* was Fabrice Adde. For the part of Alex Bodart, the slightly weird funeral employee, I was looking for an atypical actor. I remembered this actor who had played with Bouli Lanners in *Eldorado*. When we met, it was love at first sight. Fabrice exclaimed: "I am Alex." And despite

his long beard and shaggy hair (he was preparing for the role of the leader of the Canadian trappers in Alejandro Iñárritu's *The Revenant*), I had the uncanny feeling that the character I had invented really existed. We then began to brainstorm on the screenplay. He brought to the character and dialogue, his eccentric touch. Fabrice Adde has an innate sense of comedy. He was also a huge support during the very long film financing process.

Finding Emma Peeters was a challenge. I needed an actress who combined dramatic and comic talent, who could express a wide range of emotions, and who had enough self-mockery to embody a failed actress or one who, in any case, believes she failed. I had to cross the Atlantic to find the rare gem. Monia Chokri had made a strong impression on me in Xavier Dolan's *Heartbeats (Les Amours imaginaires)*. Something in her character epitomized Emma: a form of inadequacy and a penchant for the whimsical. And in Claire Simon's *Gare du Nord*, I was struck by the strength of her expression. Monia incarnates Emma's depth, personality and humorous nature. We worked on the character during reading sessions and little by little, Emma came to life.

Approaching the age of 40 is critical for actresses... Why tackle this subject?

It is true that age is a particularly cruel factor in the acting profession, especially for female actors. It was a good basis for a comedy. That said, I am not interested in the fear of aging, but in the feeling of underachievement at a given age. I believe one's life is marked by pivotal ages that can be seen as stages of maturation or as expiry dates, depending on whether you are optimistic or pessimistic. My first feature film, *Get Born*, written on the theme "Being 20", was about reaching adulthood and confronting the disappointments of first love. The title *Get Born* conveys the idea that one becomes born, that it is a choice, a conscious act and that we build ourselves thanks to our experiences. *Emma Peeters* tackles the crisis of people in their thirties. Emma feels like she is a fallow ground, a draft version of herself because she has not achieved her goals. It is paradoxically in her suicide project – made very concrete thanks to her encounter with Alex Bodart – that she will reveal herself. A quote from Bukowski sums up the film's theme: "You have to die a few times before you can really live."

Would you say your films are personal?

My films are very personal. Emma Peeters is the sum of all my flaws. (Poor thing!) Of course, I cannot say the film is purely autobiographical. It is a transposition, an exacerbation, a juxtaposition of situations that I experienced or observed that end up having their own life. I don't feel like I invent anything, but rather that I orchestrate elements. I guess the ironic





point of view is personal too. I always prefer to laugh... at everything, even death. The character of Alex Bodart was more fictional, but as I said, the meeting with Fabrice Adde has made him flesh and bones. I put a lot of myself in my films, but I also ask the actors to make the characters their own so they seem to really exist, despite their quirkiness.

Do you let your actors improvise?

I am not an adept of pure improvisation on the set. On the other hand, I spend a lot of time on the script before the shooting with the actors, to redraft the scenes and dialogue, to discuss what the character would do or say. The actors, as they embody their characters, are often in the best position to feel what is right or true. I give them a lot of freedom and welcome their proposals. Monia and Fabrice brought a lot to the scenes and their parts. They both have an innate sense of what's funny. Then, in preparation for filming, I rework the text to make the dialogue punchy, and insure that each scene fulfills its narrative function. Improvisation can sometimes dilute the intention and distend the scenes or make them stagnate. That said, on the set, I encourage elements of surprise, for example having one actor surprise the other with a sentence that is not in the scene. Monia and Fabrice repeatedly made me burst into laughter when I did not expect it.

How did you go about finding the right tone between comedy and suicide, black humor and gravity?

Finding the right comic tone when dealing with a subject like suicide was not easy. This is one of the reasons why writing took a long time. When I portrayed Emma's unhappiness with too much realism, the story turned to drama and when I treated it too lightly, her motivation to commit suicide became too weak. The solution was in character development. The reality depicted in the film is subjective. It is seen through Emma's eyes. For her, a small event takes on huge and potentially fatal proportions. For ordinary people, her misadventures are not strong enough to justify wanting to take one's life. But for Emma, the drama she lives through is real.

The other major difficulty in the script was to maintain a goal as absolute as suicide while love comes into the picture. Here again, the solution was in the characters. Alex had to be odd enough so Emma could imagine he would support her project, would respect her choice, and be ready to help her go all the way.

During the shooting, with the actors, we pushed at times the comedy, and at times the emotion. The delicate dosing between the two was done in the editing phase, with my close collaborator, Frédérique Broos. We also had to find subtle ways to shed light on Emma's psychology and her motivation for suicide. The idea that Emma "fantasizes" was translated literally in editing: she sees herself as a movie heroine. This enabled us to link the profession of actress to a character trait of Emma. Her suicide project suddenly became another of her fantasies, a fantasy that would have no chance of becoming true without Alex's intervention.





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POSSIBLES MÉDIA – SERGE NOËL (QUEBEC, CANADA)

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