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# C'EST ÇA L'AMOUR

A FILM BY CLAIRE BURGER



## SCREENING SCHEDULE

VENICE DAYS

WED. 29, 11:30 AM @ SALA PERLA (P&I)

THU. 30, 5:00 PM @ SALA PERLA (PUBLIC)

FRI. 7, 11:30 AM @ SALA PERLA (PUBLIC)

TIFF MARKET SCREENING

SUN. 9, 12:00 PM @ TIFF BELL LIGHTBOX 5 (P&I)

# C'EST ÇA L'AMOUR

(Real Love)

A FILM BY **CLAIRE BURGER**

Starring

**Bouli Lanners Justine Lacroix Sarah Henochsberg**

Runtime: 98min - France - 2018 - Scope - Dolby 5.1

**FRENCH RELEASE:**

**FIRST SEMESTER 2019 (Mars Films)**



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# SYNOPSIS

Forbach, eastern France. Present day.

Since his wife walked out on the family, Mario has raised their two daughters on his own. Frida, 14, blames him for her mother leaving. Niki, 17, dreams of independence.

Meanwhile, Mario waits for his wife to come home.



## INTERVIEW WITH **CLAIRE BURGER**

### **Why choose this title?**

For me, the title is more a question than an assertion. The film explores love in all its forms. Each character embodies a different attitude to love at a crucial moment of their existence. By delving into the heart of a town and a family, at a moment of crisis, I wanted to observe bonds that are forged or that break as people get their wires crossed or rush to judgment. A story of turbulence in a family and in society, like a piece of music for many voices, where so many points of view clash; a battlefield where constant pressure, exacerbated sensitivity and impassioned interactions bring the characters to wage violent war sometimes:

it is a film about love, but also about power, territory, reconquest and desertion. Mario is not alone in fighting to preserve or forge those bonds. Niki and Frida are also looking for love. Budding, adolescent love. And the turmoil that Frida experiences, as she discovers her sexuality, contributes to upset the family's equilibrium.

**Your previous movie, *Party Girl*, was a portrait of a resilient woman. *C'est ça l'amour* is that of a fragile man.**

The heroine of *Party Girl* is a free, independent-minded woman, who struggles to reconcile her life

as a mother with her life as a woman. Mario is a vulnerable, emotionally dependent guy. He wants to keep his wife and daughters with him, but knows that their leaving is inevitable. He has to refocus on himself and what he wants in life. It's a situation that a lot of mothers experience when their children grow up. I wanted to show a devoted father facing the same questions.

In the movie, Mario is overrun by women packing big temperaments. All the women around him are solid and strong, and they force him to reassess—his daughters, wife, coworkers, and even the woman at the rest stop. The film reflects a time in society when women are expanding their rights and freedom, but the idea was not to portray a man resisting change. Mario changes too; he repositions himself in that context.

I wanted to draw a portrait of a delicate, sensitive, affectionate man, far removed from clichés of virility. I was raised by a man like that. For Mario, I was inspired by my father's personality and his relationship to fatherhood and, above all, to passing on knowledge and culture. It was the upbringing he gave us and, to some extent, his feminism that enabled my sister and I to feel strong as women and, in my own case, legitimate as a filmmaker.

**Armelle, Mario's wife, is an example of an independent woman. She temporarily leaves her daughters in order to live her life.**

When my mother left, I felt things as a teenager that I didn't really understand or accept. At the time, I looked for someone to blame and I absorbed the event without fully ascertaining every aspect of it. I found it

interesting to revisit the situation with my adult gaze, with the ability to understand different points of view.

What I wanted to capture in the movie was the explosion: showing what absence and the trauma of separation produces; seeing what happens after someone leaves, after the void, when you have to choose life and rebuild, move on, or not.

Above all, I didn't want to make the mother a negative character. That's why I had to let her speak, let her explain that she looked after her daughters and looked after their father, and that she is allowed to fall in love, to put herself first. That's what I inherited from my mother: a woman is a woman first and a mother second. If that seems obvious now, it definitely wasn't twenty or thirty years ago. It contradicted society's expectations of women. As a child, glimpses of female role models were unclear, unsettling.

**In your films - *Forbach*, *C'est gratuit pour les filles*, *Party Girl* - your material is often autobiographical or inspired by your loved ones.**

*C'est ça l'amour* was inspired by my parents' breakup. I drew on my loved ones to write the characters of the film. In comparison to my previous movies, however, I allowed myself to reach further into fiction, which enabled me to picture this story of a family from every angle—the father's, the mother's, and the daughters' respective points of view. To tell the story, I had to shuck my subjectivity and imagine how the breakup affected other members of my family. I really enjoyed releasing my characters from issues of reality or truth so they could completely inhabit their story. Also, for the character of Mario, I wanted to work with a professional actor for the first time. The screenplay was highly structured with very

precise dialogue. I wanted scenes to play out exactly as I had written them, so with less improvisation than in my earlier movies.

**Until now, you always worked with non-professionals.**

Overall, it was important to me to move on and explore other experiences of acting. Previously, I worked exclusively with non-professionals from where I grew up. This time, I wanted to mix people and genres—Parisians and locals, from every level of society—embarking on a collective adventure and finding harmony between radically different people. I was curious to see what a professional actor might bring to the film, but it had to be an actor able to ground himself in the region where we would be shooting. Forbach is in north-eastern France, on the German border, so I soon included Belgian actors

in my search, and Bouli Lanners seemed an obvious choice to play Mario. Bouli comes from a border region, too, and speaks several languages, including the dialect spoken by people where I come from. He has loads of childhood within him, huge sensitivity. When we arranged to meet to discuss the part, he suggested we do it in Forbach rather than Paris. He wanted to see my father's house and immerse himself in the town. He immediately grasped the importance of the place to me. And when I filmed him, the childhood in his eyes mesmerized me and moved me. I wanted it to be him. He radiates the generosity and humanity that I wanted for my character on screen and that was crucial to the adventure that we were all embarking on. I was dropping him into my town and surrounding him with non-professional actors who would need support, especially the teens who would play his daughters.



### **How did you find the rest of the cast?**

We rolled out a casting operation on the ground. Justine Lacroix, who plays Frida, was spotted in a local high school. I was looking for an androgynous girl with vestiges of childhood but tilting toward adolescence. Frida collides head-on with the powerful feelings that first love generates, at an age when you could grab someone's hair to hold them back. Justine's screen tests were excellent. She was a great fit for the part and acted with commitment and emotional intensity that blew me away.

Sarah Henochsberg, playing her elder sister, is from Paris. I met her at a wedding, where she was dancing with mindblowing freedom. When we talked, I sensed a very offbeat personality, a confusing blend of maturity and spontaneity. Her character, Niki, is very responsible for her age but also full of life. Sarah's screen tests

were very persuasive. She was a natural and inventive actor. I soon organized for Justine and Sarah to meet and act out some scenes together. Despite their very different backgrounds, there was an instant connection between them. With Bouli, they seemed to form a family from the get-go. It could have been totally off in terms of accent and class but something clicked, way beyond the physical resemblance. A shared sensitivity. The connection that developed naturally between them before the shoot informs the family unit we see on screen.

The rest of the cast is made up of people recruited locally, as in my earlier films, and crew members. To play the mother, I chose Cécile Rémi-Boutang, our production manager. Among the other women in the story, Mario's boss is played by the production designer, and the female trucker is played by the extras casting director.

It was fun to bring people from behind the camera in front of it to act out scenes. I enjoy working with non-professionals. It's beautiful, watching them act for the first time. Their trust and candor make it a huge responsibility to expose them to the camera. Filming those first steps is not only very moving, but also very perilous sometimes. Bouli was my on-set wingman, exuding generosity that allowed his scene partners to work in an atmosphere of complete confidence.

### **Do you adjust your technical approach to the various types of performer?**

I have worked with the same DP, Julien Poupard, for a long time. We are very close and he was a priceless asset on set. Our predefined aesthetics for this movie (lots of pastels, taking the heat out

of colors, finding oblique angles for the camera, etc) were so many constraints designed to give the picture personality, and the actors as much freedom as possible. We use natural light to reduce setup times, preserve the actors' energy and maintain spontaneity on set. We shoot long takes without marks on the ground, so bodies and positions are unrestrained, and the camera can revisit the shot breakdown on set, even as the actors are performing. All the constraints that we dodge during the shoot come flying back in post-production. Our creative process may involve rewriting in the edit suite. That's when the film rediscovers the direction and precision that we cannot always obtain on set, by radically falling back on the actors' skills. It's the price to pay for the authenticity I want.



**You shot part of the movie in your childhood home.**

I wrote the screenplay with my father's house in mind. That's where I grew up. It was easy for me to picture the shots and block the characters in a setting I could visualize perfectly. As with my earlier films, I wanted to shoot in Forbach, my hometown. It's a special place that I wanted to continue to explore. When we were scouting locations, we looked for more spacious houses that would have made the crew's job easier, but I couldn't bring myself to shoot somewhere else. There was something moving and healing for me in filming a space so closely associated with my childhood, in having actors play roles there. I wanted to speak as sincerely and personally as possible about a situation that may seem banal but that is dramatic for many families when it happens.

***C'est ça l'amour* is a portrait of a family, a town and a whole social class.**

Forbach is an economically distressed community at the heart of a working-class region. The wealthier classes moved out long ago and the middle class is slowly disappearing. Movies tend to be set either in upscale environments—beautiful locations, characters whose purchasing power makes everything possible in narrative terms—or among society's most underprivileged groups, whose struggle to survive against overwhelming odds and obstacles is dramatically compelling. The middle class may appear less cinematic, more difficult to depict. I wanted to move people without sensationalizing, I wanted emotion to drive the story rather than plot twists. Mario has a very ordinary life, as a pen-pusher in gray, bureaucratic

offices. He seeks adventure in the cultural life of his city.

**There is a meta-aspect to the film when Mario signs up for a stage play titled *Atlas*.**

It's a play directed by Ana Borralho and João Galante that stands out from other plays because it's created in collaboration with the performers who are all local people. I went to see it in Nanterre, outside Paris, and it reverberated with the films I had made so far. I have worked in pretty hybrid forms, between fiction and documentary, most often in my hometown and sometimes with non-professional actors playing themselves. *Atlas* is a process during which each participant comes up with a phrase that captures something about them—who they are, or want to be, or the life they want. It involves making their privacy

public in order to say something about the world they live in and the world in general—something that speaks to everyone. That approach and the process of self-representation really spoke to me.

Antonia Buresi, who plays Antonia in the film, is part of the *Atlas* team. She asked me if I wanted to come with them to Charleroi, in Belgium, whose history as a once-prosperous working-class town on the skids is similar to Forbach's. On that trip, I saw how the group of performers came together by forging a bond. For people who feel vulnerable, invisible, without a voice, the ability to express something about yourself in public can be life-changing.

For the film, we recreated an *Atlas* production in Forbach by recruiting people from different backgrounds and communities. That was important for me because it's a region where the extreme

rightwing Front National is making spectacular inroads. The town imploded after the mines closed down and it suffers from a lack of vision for the future. I didn't want lingering shots of industrial landscapes, but shots of the inhabitants' bodies and faces. I wanted the camera to give them a voice. Those voices, on a personal and collective level, resonate with the story of Mario and his daughters.

**It's another important aspect of the film—the way in which the arts are defined, what art is. You defend a vision of the arts with everyone participating.**

I wanted to show characters who take an interest in the arts but not necessarily in an elitist way—the people who keep movie theaters, theatres and museums alive in the provinces. Mario spends all his spare

time at exhibitions and concerts. Music also plays an important role in the film. It's one of Mario's passions, one of the ways his great sensitivity expresses itself. I wanted to switch from serious music to pop music and back, to transcend issues of taste with the diverse soundtrack of family life. All kinds of musical genres feature in the movie: Corsican polyphony, classical, Italian pop ballads, electro, etc. I also worked with a choreographer, contemporary artists and stage directors so that the arts are everywhere in the film. I wanted to show that culture not only raises society up, but also heightens emotions. I wanted this place to get its art back. ■

## FILMOGRAPHY & BIOGRAPHY CLAIRE BURGER

**Claire Burger** graduated in Film Editing from La Fémis. In 2008 she made *Forbach*, a short that won the Cinéfondation award at Cannes and the Grand Prix at Clermont-Ferrand's Film Festival. Together with Marie Amachoukeli, she co-directed *C'est Gratuit pour les Filles*, - screened at Cannes (Semaine de la Critique) and awarded a César for best short feature film and a special mention at the national competition in Clermont-Ferrand. The collaboration with Marie Amachoukeli continued in 2014 when they were also joined by Samuel Theis. *Party Girl*, written and directed by the three artists, was selected by Un Certain Regard, at Cannes, and won the Caméra d'Or and the Prix d'Ensemble.

**2018** C'est ça l'amour (Real Love)

**2014** Party Girl (with Marie Amachoukeli and Samuel Theis) - Caméra d'or 2014

**2013** Demolition Party (with Marie Amachoukeli, short)

**2009** C'est gratuit pour les filles  
(It's Free for Girls, with Marie Amachoukeli, short)

**2009** Toute ma vie j'ai rêvé (short)

**2008** Forbach (short)

## CAST

**Bouli LANNERS**.....Mario

**Justine LACROIX**.....Frida

**Sarah HENOCHSBERG** .....Niki

**Cécile REMY-BOUTANG** .....Armelle

**Antonia BURESI**.....Antonia

**Célia MAYER** .....Alex

**Lorenzo DEMANGET** .....Nazim

## SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY BOULI LANNERS

### As Actor

**DOG** | Samuel BENCHETRIT | 2018  
**ABOVE THE LAW** | François TROUKENS et Jean-François HENSGENS | 2017  
**BLOODY MILK** | Hubert CHARUEL | 2017  
**HEAL THE LIVING** | Katell QUILLEVERE | 2016  
**RAW** | Julia DUCOURNAU | 2016  
**LULU IN THE NUDE** | Solveig ANSPACH | 2014  
**9 MONTH STRETCH** | Albert DUPONTEL | 2013  
**NOT DEAD** | Benoît DELEPINE, Gustave KERVERN | 2012  
**RUST & BONE** | Jacques AUDIARD | 2012

### As Director

**THE FIRST, THE LAST** | 2016  
**THE GIANT** | 2011  
**ELDORADO** | 2008  
**ULTRA NOVA** | 2005

## CREW

Direction and screenplay.....**Claire BURGER**  
Producer .....**Isabelle MADELAINE**  
Director of Photography.....**Julien POUPARD**  
Sound .....**Julien SICART, Fanny MARTIN, Olivier GOINARD**  
Casting .....**Cynthia ARRA**  
Production Designer .....**Pascale CONSIGNY**  
Costume Designer .....**Isabelle PANNETIER**  
Editor .....**Laurent SÉNÉCHAL, Claire BURGER**  
Production Manager .....**Cécile REMY-BOUTANG**  
1st Assistant Director.....**Alma GALY-NADAL**

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