

KINO LORBER

HOLD ME TIGHT

Written & Directed by Mathieu AMALRIC
Starring Vicky KRIEPS and Arieh WORTHALTER

Based on Claudine GALEA's play « JE REVIENS DE LOIN »



OFFICIAL SELECTIONS

Cannes International Film Festival
Rotterdam International Film Festival
Film at Lincoln Center's Rendez Vous with French Cinema

France | 2021 | 97 min | Color | 1.85:1 | In French and German with English subtitles

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SYNOPSIS

In *Hold Me Tight*, Vicky Krieps (*Phantom Thread*, *Bergman Island*) gives another riveting performance as Clarisse, a woman on the run from her family for reasons that aren't immediately clear. Widely renowned as one of France's great contemporary actors but less well-known in North America for his equally impressive work behind the camera, Mathieu Amalric's sixth feature as director is his most ambitious to date. This virtuosic, daringly fluid portrait of a woman in crisis alternates between Clarisse's adventures on the road and scenes of her abandoned husband Marc (Arieh Worthalter) as he struggles to take care of their children at home. Amalric's film keeps viewers uncertain as to the reality of what they're seeing until the final moments of this moving, unpredictable, and richly rewarding family drama.

AN INTERVIEW WITH **MATHIEU AMALRIC**

NOTE: SPOILERS THROUGHOUT... PLEASE READ ONLY AFTER HAVING SEEN THE FILM

WHERE DID THE IDEA FOR THIS FILM COME FROM?

A close friend of mine, Laurent Ziserman, wanted to put on a play, but he had to give up the idea. And then, one evening, he handed me the text. Maybe as a kind of farewell to his project.

It was *Je reviens de loin*, a play written in 2003 by Claudine Galea, whom I didn't know. I read it on a train and began to cry and hiccup like a baby. That hasn't happened to me for a long time. I had to hide under my jacket. After *BARBARA*, I became obsessed with taking things literally, like a place I would never be able to reach and I felt, in what Galea had invented, a breach, a possible access. The melodrama acted like a trigger.

SO, YOU THEN HAD PRODUCERS LAETITIA GONZALEZ AND YAËL FOGIEL READ THE PLAY.

Yes, and they got hooked too, all the while wondering how I would handle such theoretically literary, sensitive, and poetic material. And which had never been produced! I liked that. It was a kind of challenge: giving life to this family... if I dare say. In nine days, in a sudden burst of energy, I coughed up a first draft, a little like a first assistant making a 'breakdown'. Lists of locations, action, seasons, music, roads, the car. Visual stuff, and audio stuff. Absolutely faithful to Galea's mental structure at first, scribbling notes, isolating a few words to serve as springboards: "incantation", "presume", "project", "believe", "prolong", "trance", "rite", "Rouch"... Yes, Jean Rouch's African masks and dances... Images and tears jostled each other, and we were off!

DID YOU HAVE ANY REFERENCES IN MIND?

I suddenly wanted to watch some films, which is a good sign. There would be tears and ghosts in this story. So, tearjerkers first. I watched a lot: *DRUGSTORE ROMANCE* by Paul Vecchiali, Douglas Sirk of course, Nicholas Ray, Piccoli in *I'M GOING HOME* by Oliveira, Bill Murray in Jarmusch's *BROKEN FLOWERS*, and Pagnol too... Then films about hallucinating, more mental: the Japanese, Buñuel, *THE GHOST AND MRS. MUIR*, Resnais (always Resnais!), *BOYHOOD*,

Hitchcock... Laura Kasischke's books... Sophie Calle's meanderings, the series "The Leftovers", the Pixar films UP or COCO... Tons, I can't even remember! Including some very bad films (it's important to scope out the traps you're going to fall into without even realizing it!!).

While binge-watching other people's films, I was checking things out, and reinforcing just one thing: my immediate intuition to treat true/false, delirium/reality equally, without separating them aesthetically, and without any visible seams. What she was actually going through and what she was projecting would look the same.

I think maddening pain does that, doesn't it? Remember your breakups, when everything got confused: space, time, the sense of loss, pain, shifting memories, jealousy when thinking about the other, masturbation, longing to call back... pfff, you don't use sepia or filters to dissociate the true and the false at times like that, things pile up, fall apart, you become a hyperrealist about the slightest details. It hurts and it feels good! Moreover, hyperrealism is a word that comes up often. Believe everything, even if... (hence the painting based on a photo of Robert Bechtle, which is in Clarisse's empty office).

And then, as a reference, there was THE RAIN PEOPLE (1969) by Francis Ford Coppola. A woman leaves... A simultaneously tragic and life-affirming road. We went so far as to film Clarisse coming out of the cinema. She would have cried at the scene in the telephone booth (when Shirley Knight calls her husband), exactly like Anna Karina cries during Dreyer's Falconetti/Joan of Arc in Godard's MY LIFE TO LIVE. But THE RAIN PEOPLE had so infiltrated the film that we didn't need it anymore. We could pull down the scaffolding, and we didn't shoot the scene. It's the only film I showed to Christophe Beaucarne, the DOP. Images, the grain come from THE RAIN PEOPLE. Like the long brown coat in which she seems to feel protected. Our costume designer Caroline Spieth tracked it down, it's the same only softer, suede instead of leather.

HOW DID YOU ADAPT CLAUDINE GALEA'S TEXT?

By never forgetting the nerve that was touched on reading the play. So, you plunge into each scene and write until you weep. It's always very cool to take material that was not meant for a film, because then you can extirpate whatever could not be anything else but a film! It's an archeologist's game,

with just a pinpoint of light. You lay things out first. To get the story in order. In the Galea book, you only understand that the heroine has in fact invented everything about her in a final revelation. That she never did leave her family, she just imagined leaving in order to make them live and grow beyond their deaths. "If I leave, it means that they've stayed behind!...". An inversion. Almost mythological. That's what blew my mind, and what I proudly thought would for once be "pitchable" to financiers. I wrote in that sense. And started to film like that in early spring. But when editing with François Gédigier, it seemed to us that Clarisse herself should be pulling the strings of the inversion, and not we who were making the film. You can't make a melodrama with a final illusion, even if it is a tragic illusion.

SO, YOU HAD THE REVELATION MADE EARLIER.

The puppet master's hand was too obvious. The gotcha aspect quashed what touched me most of all: the workings of her own imagination and not ours. I was not enthused by a woman's suffering: a Mater Dolorosa on her Way of the Cross. No, it was her quick-wittedness, the bemused and paradoxically lucid scheming in her invention, like a burst of love that makes us love her, and not feel sorry for her. Learning the truth earlier, we come closer to her, we accompany her in the logic behind her delirium. Or the delirium behind her logic.

Afterwards on the set, what we were filming, what we had in mind, was very concrete: how this woman has to wait two months after her family has disappeared in the winter, for their bodies to be returned in the spring, and how she lived through that unbearable time... A girlfriend worried about her suggests she get some air, but the sea does her no good, she finds a job as a guide to keep herself busy, she tries alcohol, halfhearted dating. But that all falls apart, she feels haunted. ("Signora ! Signora !...") So then she returns to her empty house and tries another tactic. Illusion: 'Hey, let's just say that the young pianist seen at the municipal music school is my daughter all grown up. And the boy I saw at the skating rink is Paul grown up.' The infamous 'What if'... Her ploy works fairly well until... "Reality always wins in the end" as Terry Gilliam screams in the documentary about his first Don Quixote that was never shot.

By the way, Doña Quixote would fit Clarisse to a T!

EVEN IF WE DISCOVER THE TRUTH DURING THE FIRST THIRD OF THE FILM, WE STILL HAVE THE TIME TO FORGET THE SCENE WITH THE RESCUERS AND TO THINK: A MIRACLE WILL TAKE PLACE, HER HUSBAND AND CHILDREN ARE NOT REALLY DEAD...

Yes, that runs deep down: the audience is in the same situation of denial as Clarisse. When the children have grown, we know they are not hers, and still, we too want the same thing as she does. It feels so good to think that...

I did not want the audience to feel perpetually disoriented, I wanted them to take part in a voyage that gradually makes sense, when people come out of the theater and think about this woman's invention. Like they do, for themselves. During our endless versions in the editing room (thank you, Covid!), I added, removed, tried new words for Clarisse, (Vicky immediately sent them by phone) to be said, but not immediately understood: "I invent, I imagine that I'm gone", "I'm not the one who's gone. I made it up. That way you're here." "My thing isn't working anymore." I call them cairns, those piles of stones that you see on country lanes. Bearings of the truth, reality marked out so that you can then feel better mentally.

Mystery, denial, sharing. Which is what I think brings tears to our eyes, because the shadows have dissipated but still float around us. It's a magnificent burst of the life force: "It's not true. It's not true" is what we most often scream when confronted by horror.

WE CAN ALSO WONDER WHETHER SHE'S CRAZY.

Ah yes, you can wonder about many things... You can also wonder for a while whether she isn't the one who's dead and is visiting her family that is still alive... Clarisse (Galea calls her Camille) is based on a character in *THE MAN WITHOUT QUALITIES* by Robert Musil, a woman fascinated by madness and who also leaves. We shot a scene in which Clarisse abandons herself to madness to anesthetize her suffering. "Let's be mad, maybe I won't suffer anymore." That reduced her imaginings, so we cut it. Reluctantly. Vicky was crazy, I must say. But yes, what Clarisse does at the conservatory/music school with real parents toward the end, brings us back down to earth to realize how much "craziness" was going on. The word "police" is pronounced, and we can guess at what was not filmed. She no doubt spent a lot of time watching the young girl, stalking her all the way to her doorstep. Vicky recently left me a message in that regard: good to try a little madness, not to go mad...

WHEN DID VICKY KRIEPS ARRIVE IN THE PROCESS?

It was during the nine days I spent writing in my notebook in Brittany. I arrived at this new house, I had driven all night, there was just a table, a bed, and a chair. And Vicky “visited” me just then. Really... (well, I had read PHANTOM THREAD by Paul Thomas Anderson recently). I rushed for her agent’s number, and he told me she would be in Paris in three weeks. We met. I gave her Claudine’s text. I didn’t have a screenplay yet. The next day, she called. I found her in the garden with her suitcase and there was no question of “I’ll do it” or “I won’t do it”. That’s how it all worked out.

Vicky and I always said, “our film”. I had never felt such twinness. I realized that this was the first time I wasn’t shooting with a lover or an ex. And that opens new windows... The burning red line, the shared desire that finds its exaltation in the work alone, in the making of a film together... that’s very powerful and it all comes out onscreen. Consent is what is the most erotic of all.

WHAT WAS YOUR METHOD OF WORKING TOGETHER?

Ah! That’s mysterious. No dissecting the screenplay together, preliminary readings. It was more like shyly inviting her to have some fish at my place. To see how our movements synched when setting the table or passing glasses. A set is a very physical place, it’s crowded, smelly, with incessant comings and goings. Bumping into one another. If there’s no chemistry, forget it. We sniff each other, it’s animal instinct. There’s the transmission of thoughts, discreet signals, and secret codes. Of course, in the beginning, you think it works with words, books, references to sort of ‘I know what I want.’ I worked... amusing proof, I, of course, gave Vicky THE RAIN PEOPLE. She recently admitted, once the film was completely finished, that she had just looked at it. Listening to me was better for doing things her way. With no outside influence. I love that! So, who knows how it works?

For example, Vicky would give me a playlist inspired by the screenplay, she chose a perfume for Clarisse, she was going to be crazy about the car, the AMC Pacer... (she’s one hell of a driver!!). She magnifies and adores the technical constraints of cinema, she finds her marks without looking, she’ll drop a key on the right note on the piano, bemused by a dexterity... all her own!

What comes to mind now is that there must have been a transition while we were shooting. She took the tears I wept while writing and made them her own. So that I would be in shape to think technically on location, she literally consumed herself as we watched. Incandescent.

Given that intensity, what I could do was to prepare the terrain with the crew and the people who had to act (because there are no professional actors in the film other than Aurélia Petit, Erwan Ribard, and Samuel Mathieu) so that we needed the fewest takes possible. I understudied Clarisse, I “played” Clarisse during rehearsals and then prompted Vicky with what I had come up with... movements, gestures, tempo.

I told her, for example, what happened to me when I was discovering the bodies. How I spent little time with the first child because I quickly saw the second. But the third stretcher, her husband's, sent me into a rage. So angry that the first responders had to hold me back, Vicky nodded: “I felt angry too.” She took her place and went for it, striking her husband's body and shrieking... We only needed one take.

WHAT ABOUT ARIEH WORTHALTER, WHO PLAYS HER HUSBAND?

Same thing. Seeing whether we work well together. Elsa Amiel, who worked as my AD some time back, made a film in which he appears: PEARL. After the premiere, I invited him for a bite to eat. Just the two of us. Even though we didn't know each other. And that was that. I felt good about him. He was the man we needed for Vicky. Secretive, gentle, and desirable. All right, the scenes at home are Clarisse's visions, but we needed to shoot them as brutally and realistically as possible. Arieh is pure presence. Look at how he exists, even with the kids, who like animals, cannot take their eyes off him.

And since I knew he would have so few scenes together with Vicky, I wanted physical, sexual longing to transpire immediately. An attraction that lasts... so that it really hurts. It just so happens that Arieh is like a magnet with kids, he's naturally interested, witty, and gentle with them... (embarrassing for the real parents!).

Arieh is gregarious, we chatted a lot together, we filled up notebooks, I leaped in with mine. We wrote during our walks all over the place with his foldable

guitar, but it was to access the same flame: his savage surrender during a take.

YOU SHOT THE FILM IN SEVERAL SEGMENTS.

First the past. Gathering the family together in the house for photos of their past together, of their lives before. Photos that fill the house and memory. Especially on the refrigerator door. Laurent Baude, our production designer, and his crew made it look so real. You already had a sense of their daily lives. How much they earned. Their habits, and their warmth too. (The house is frankly the fifth character in the film).

All four of them took pictures of each other. And I did too. DOP Christophe Beaucarne used his Polaroid. (Polaroids have become the Memory game of life gone by).

Then, because in the story as such we had to have snow, but also the thaw. We began in spring 2019, before continuing in November of the same year, and finished with a miraculous snowfall at the end of January 2020. We began editing just after the first shoot. I like shooting a film in several stages, because I have the impression of becoming a spectator. That's what made me feel what I told you about the final revelation. Of wanting more daily life here, a lighter touch there. During the last period, I told Vicky: "You know what, let's forget that you lost your family, I've had enough, now we're going to shoot nothing but funny scenes." And therefore, among others, the stuffed tomato scene, or the flute player in love with Martha Argerich. By the way, that's the last frame we shot.

THE FILM HAS A STRONG RAPPORT WITH MUSIC, IN THE SCREENPLAY WITH THE PIANO, BUT ALSO IN THE SOUNDTRACK.

Yes, Galea had a piano. Which as we all know can crystalize some rather stern parental tyrannies and frustrations! (laughter) And a mother's possessiveness of her daughter via music, Clarisse plays on that with a lot of delight and ambiguity. Since she makes things up, she can disguise her little girl as Martha Argerich, she can forget about scales and turn her daughter into an ideal... which consequently makes her an ideal mother. "I knew you could play!" But what touches me and makes me love Clarisse so much more is that she goes full hog. With Für Elise where she stopped for real, Beethoven's obligatory Sonata N°1, all right, but then Lucie alone discovers other musical

landscapes. Debussy, the better to appreciate Rameau's Variations, Schoenberg and then later! György Ligeti, (that percussive moment with the tuner when the piece radiates from her, instead of being music that was once composed). And that would have continued, amply! Her daughter would have escaped her. She would have invented a life for herself, away from me, her mother... I love how she includes detachment, disobedience. It's free love. What she would have become... I believe that we think about that at the very end of the film, thanks to the fiery gavotte played by Marcelle Meyer, a pianist from another dimension.

AND THE MUSICALITY, THE WORK WITH VOICES?

Claudine Galea's text played with graphics: line-feed, italics, a play on superimposed voices. I enjoyed shooting several versions of scenes with voices: Vicky speaking to herself aloud, or as an inner voice, where I fed her lines that she integrated... With our sound engineer Olivier Mauvezin, we recorded most of the voiceovers during the shoot. Materials, echoes, rustling fabric... which I and Gedigier, Nicolas Moreau the sound editor and Stéphane Thiébaud the sound mixer, then called sensation, story, action. Sounds and gestures seem to me to be made of the same vibrations. Whether hitting piano keys or taking the back seat out of a car, the air vibrates the same. I try to give the actors very concrete gestures: closing a door with a lock, stroking a totem, a piano slamming shut, a burning notebook... Surely, living with a musician, making more and more documentaries about musicians, which I do alone, and realizing that I am practically unable to write dialogues anymore - they generally trickle out, burst forth at the very end, or are prolonged by the actors themselves. And all that is supposed to infuse and modify my tools? I am dumbstruck. (laughter)

IN HOLD ME TIGHT, ABSENCE CIRCULATES: EVEN IF THIS WOMAN HAS NOT LEFT HER FAMILY, TO US IT IS A LITTLE AS IF SHE HAD LEFT. SHE IMAGINES THAT THEY MISS HER.

And goes so far as to imagine the opposite: that they don't miss her that much at all!! The breakfast-pancake scene is in fact a scene of seduction, since they seem to have accepted her absence and to be living very well without her. I told myself that she was projecting onto them her own fear of forgetting them one day. Suddenly, it's very nice how she reactivates her desire for her husband, just after she had spit out that he was a piece of furniture...

That provoked dizzy spells during the edit. The pancake scene was shot in two 30-minute takes. Vicky was in another room, with image and sound, and could speak directly with Arieh who had an earphone (the children did not). We edited it, and six months later, back in the same empty kitchen, I suggested that Vicky remain alone and play the scene. She had memorized the edited scene using only the sound (she did not want to watch it) and began to speak to Marc in the silence. She took a cigarette because he was smoking. Marc tells her that she misses him too. She shuts her eyes, sees them, and intervenes. So we had a realistic reverse shot of this woman spellbound and alone. And it's from the friction between these two spaces/times that the melodrama seemed to spring forth.

WHAT MADE YOU WANT TO FILM THIS FEMININE SOLITUDE, VIA HER WANDERINGS, HER PHYSICAL AND PSYCHIC JOURNEYS?

Driving alone is pleasant... it makes you think. But the problem was not the girl, it was the car! Finding a car today that you would like to film, is no piece of cake. So Dylan Talleux, my first assistant, and I figured: what if the car was Marc's car in the flash-back of them meeting in the discotheque. It could then be an older car, the kind we like so much. And if Marc went skiing with the kids in that car, we can tell why she could communicate with them from her dashboard, radio, antenna, cassette.

As for her being a woman alone... I believe I've made some progress, that it's no longer my fascination with the feminine, the girls' room, the pedestal, but nothing is less sure... I don't know. Clarisse, is me? I 'is' someone else? That opens things up.

THE FILM STAYS IN YOUR HEAD FOR A LONG TIME AFTER SEEING IT, AS IF IT COULD WORK LIKE A TIME BOMB.

Surely because her protective inventions come to a stop, and that her tragedy laid bare retrospectively takes us by the throat. And then she abandons us, she leaves. I, myself, wanted to get into the car with her. Hence that furtive last frame.

With all the excessively vigorous efforts she made, through games, appetite, courage, imagination... things will work out. I don't know how to put it... It will all work out... We all go through these kinds of things with absence. There is a spirituality that we each invent in our individual ways. A kind of seance. The

joy of man's desiring! After all, it could not all end in a house that is an empty mausoleum, Clarisse must set off again, even as a kind of wandering Jew. "We recommence..."

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE THIS TITLE, SO PHYSICAL, VERY INTIMATE?

Yes, and all that before Covid!... The ideal title was "IMITATION OF LIFE", but that was already taken. (laughter) « I'm coming back from afar "was" too evocative of a sociological itinerary. I listen to songs when looking for a title, a little like Fanny Ardant in THE WOMAN NEXT DOOR. At one moment a song by Etienne Daho came on. I had imagined the nightclub scene over "La nage indienne" with its refrain: "Serre-moi fort. Si ton corps se fait plus léger, nous pourrions nous sauver" (Hug me tight. If your body grows lighter, we can save ourselves.) Which became: "Serre moins fort. Si ton cœur se fait plus léger, je pourrai me sauver." (Hug less tight. If your heart grows lighter, I can save myself.) For a long time "Serre moi(ns) fort" "hung in the balance on the screenplay. But for once the literal version won out! "Serre moi fort" finally appeared on the clapboard and so it remained. But without the dash... Three isolated words, one after the other.

ALL THIS TIME WE'VE BEEN SPEAKING ABOUT THE FILM, WE NEVER ONCE PRONOUNCED THE WORD GRIEF.

True. Let's applaud our dead to see... The time of grief, what a joke. There's no such thing in real life: "Get over it and get back to work". No one lives like that, intimately, an abyss. Alone, you go mad trying to put one foot in front of the other. We're all like that. Aren't we?

Interviewed by Olivier Joyard

SELECT FILMOGRAPHY

MATHIEU AMALRIC

BARBARA (2017)

THE BLUE ROOM (2014)

ON TOUR (2010)

LE STADE DE WIMBLEDON (2001)

VICKY KRIEPS

CORSAGE (2022) by Marie Kreutzer

BERGMAN ISLAND (2021) by Mia Hansen-Løve

NEXT DOOR (2021) by Daniel Brühl

OLD (2021) by M. Night Shyamalan

PHANTOM THREAD (2017) by Paul Thomas Anderson

THE YOUNG KARL MARX (2016) by Raoul Peck

A MOST WANTED MAN (2014) by Anton Corbin

BEFORE THE WINTER CHILL (2013) by Philippe Claudel

HANNA (2010) by Joe Wright

ARIEH WORTHALTER

HUNTED (2020) by Vincent Paronnaud

THE END OF LOVE (2020) by Keren Ben Rafael

A BIGGER WORLD (2019) by Fabienne Berthaud

SYMPATHY FOR THE DEVIL (2019) by Guillaume de Fontenay

TWELVE THOUSAND (2019) by Nadège Trebal

GIRL (2018) by Lukas Dhont

RAZZIA (2018) by Nabil Ayouch

PEARL (2018) by Elsa Amiel

CAST

| | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Vicky KRIEPS | Clarisse |
| Arieh WORTHALTER | Marc |
| Anne-Sophie BOWEN-CHATET | Lucie |
| Sacha ARDILLY | Paul |
| Juliette BENVENISTE | Lucie (Adolescent) |
| Aurèle GRZESIK | Paul (Adolescent) |
| Aurélia PETIT | Girlfriend at the Gas Station |
| Erwan RIBARD | Real Estate Agent |
| Samuel MATHIEU | Marc's Colleague |
| Cuca BAÑERES FLOS | Waitress at the Chalet |

CREW

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|--------------------------------|---|
| Director | Mathieu AMALRIC |
| Screenplay by | Mathieu AMALRIC |
| Director of Photography | Christophe BEAUCARNE |
| Editor | François GEDIGIER |
| Sound engineer | Olivier MAUVEZIN Martin BOISSAU |
| Sound editor | Nicolas MOREAU |
| Mixing | Stéphane THIÉBAUT |
| Production designer | Laurent BAUDE |
| Costume Designer | Caroline SPIETH |
| Casting director | Franzo CURCIO |
| Make up | Delphine JAFFART Flore MASSON |
| Hairdresser | Kay PHILLIPS |
| Production manager | Frédéric BLUM |
| First AD | Dylan TALLEUX |
| Location manager | Rémi DUCHÊNE |
| Produced by | Laetitia GONZALEZ & Yaël FOGIEL with Felix VON BOEHM |
| Production | LES FILMS DU POISSON |

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|----------------------------------|---|
| In coproduction with | GAUMONT ARTE FRANCE CINEMA LUPA FILM |
| In partnership with | CNC |
| With the participation of | CANAL+ CINÉ+ BAYERISCHER RUNDFUNK ARTE |
| With the support of the | CENTRE NATIONAL DU CINÉMA ET DE L'IMAGE ANIMÉE RÉGION NOUVELLE AQUITAINE RÉGION OCCITANIE DÉPARTEMENT DE LA CHARENTE MARITIME |
| In association with | INDÉFILMS 8 CINÉMAGE 14 CINÉCAPITAL |

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