

CHI-FOU-MI PRODUCTIONS PRESENTS



SARA FORESTIER

REDOUANNE HARJANE

JEAN-PIERRE LÉAUD

M

A FILM BY SARA FORESTIER

2017 - France - Drama, Romance - French - 99'

### SYNOPSIS

*Lila and Mo meet at a bus stop.  
Lila has a paralysing speech impediment.  
Mo is chatty and exuberant.  
Lila is preparing for her exams.  
Mo illegally races cars for a living.  
Opposites attract, and they fall in love.  
But Mo carries a secret burden...*

## DIRECTOR'S NOTE

### *Why direct?*

Ever since elementary school, I can remember how much I loved telling stories. I would write short stories or playlets and keep them in notebooks.

As a teen, I began acting in plays, and I feel as if I have always, more or less consciously, imagined the embodiment of my character as an essential cog in telling a story – in other words, the interaction or relationship between my character and the story, and not my character from an isolated perspective.

One day, just before turning sixteen, I experienced something I wanted to share with other people. Several months later, I told Abdel Kechiche about it while acting in his film, *Games of Love & Chance (L'Esquive)*. It was the story of Mo, my boyfriend at the time, who had kept his illiteracy a secret from me. Abdel encouraged me to write it.

That was in 2002. Fifteen years later, my desire and hope to share this story remained strong. Beyond its personal nature, this story seemed to possess incredible potential as a film. I felt like the premise of this illiterate man trying to hide a secret could lead to both comic and tragic situations.

I began writing the script eleven years ago, moving from the real life story to a cinematic tale. Little by little, the versions I wrote became more and more cinematic, and I saw how one could play filmically with this story.

The only thing that remains from the original episode is Mo's secret. Aside from this initial premise, my entire script is little more than the crystallisation of my desire to make a film, to create a concrete and palpable object.

### *Vitality – Complexity*

Throughout production, my quest was to find vitality. I wanted it to emerge from my film. I wanted life to creep into it.

Like with writing – where I have not tried to be realistic by simply recounting a lived experience – I was not only looking for naturalism, precision, or a series of “still life” moments for the shoot. Instead, I prefer vitality, which is a far wider concept. I seek vitality by conjuring it through this complexity.

For example, a character torn between several emotions would be in motion, and inhabited by movement. I feel like the complexity of a situation, a character and what inhabits him or her – that this multiplicity leads to movement and vitality. I am not

talking about oscillating between the two, but rather playing on the coexistence of opposites within the same time frame, the same scene, the same character.

### *The tone of the film*

I wanted harshness and comedy to coexist. My idea is that spectators should simultaneously feel different emotions. They should never know whether to laugh or cry, or simply sit comfortably and watch the events of the story. Instead, they should be in a constant state of jeopardy, always shifting with the movements of the unfolding narrative.

### *About the characters*

I tried to have these two contradictory sentences coexist: *"likeness breeds liking"* and *"opposites attract"*. Mo and Lila are opposites, and yet similar. Both sayings are equally true when explaining their attraction to one another. I like that this duality cannot define their connection in a facile way, and that their relationship possesses a more mysterious or hidden dimension.

I would really like the spectators' understanding of Lila and Mo's reasons for being together – and the possibility of them staying together – to also be in constant movement. For instance, when Lila and Mo meet, I would like the audience to think, *"this can never work"*, and yet also think it can... that Mo's roughness and Lila's fragility could coexist and perhaps cancel each other out.

There is a similarity in their respective solitudes, even though they are expressed differently – Lila, through her isolation, and Mo, through his violent, radical nature, as he risks life and death in his drag races.

Their relationship to words is, obviously, in complete opposition. Mo cannot read, but he is an incredible smooth talker. Lila cannot speak, but she reads and writes a lot. Nevertheless, there are similarities.

### *Language*

Lila and Mo have this in common: their relationship to words is "unusual." It is singular, or exacerbated.

Regarding writing: Mo both rejects it, and yet is fascinated by it, while Lila's rapport is very intimate.

Regarding speech, their similarity also comes from their singular respective relationships: Lila with her stutter and radical muteness, and Mo with his silver tongue, his freedom, his way of chewing up words, spitting them back out, reinventing them...

They also share a form of oral musicality. Lila with her silences, her spasmodic speech, and Mo with his lightning swift talk.

The same can be said for their relationship to the poetry of words. Mo invents them, and Lila rearranges them... far from any pretentiousness. Both can be said to generate a sort of "raw" poetry, far from the sacralisation of words, in an intimate – and even creative – rapport.

### *A love story*

I wanted to tell a love story with unique lovers, a singular relationship to the outside world and a particular rapport with language. This is the story of an encounter, of two people who connect. I wanted the way they connect to be unique.

### *A modern-day western*

There is something classical in the film's romanticism and narrative structure. This is why I wanted to impart a modern quality to it, especially in the language and words. I would like a certain classicism to exist in the content, with a modern form, especially visually. I would like for the film to look something like a modern-day western. Mo and Lila meet in an empty street, like in a western, except the street is paved and stripped bare and has an air of urban aridity. An urban desert. The parking lot, where Mo lives in his trailer, is also near a field of weeds, filled with wild, arid nature. It is an arid décor for two lonely cowboys.

I like how westerns create drama through set design. Just like I love the idea of duels in westerns. Mo's drag races are the modern equivalent of a duel. Just like the final duel in a western, where the hero confronts the villain, there is a rather classical climax in Mo's last drag race. This is the duel where death lurks in the shadows. In the hopes of instilling complexity in this classical final climax, I want to give it an ultra-modern look.

These races will contain the most modern facets of the film, where I paid great attention to the choice of materials (car bodies, tires, etc.). There is something very organic at the heart of these scenes. A modern form of violence.

It is as if Mo's love for Lila pulled him out of his shell – out of reality. And, whenever he races, he is once again confronted with the brutality of his social reality and the modern violence of his time.

## *Personal – the Universal*

With this story, I chose the specific, or the personal, as a means to reach out to spectators. It is up to them to find something more universal in this singular story.

This is why I do not define my film as a social film.

I did not want to explore a subject through a universal lens. I wanted to tell the story of a singular love between two singular people. Mo is not just any man who cannot read, and Lila is not just any young woman who stutters.

Moreover, Mo's illiteracy is not the problem at the heart of their relationship: the problem is shame. A shame that leads to things left unsaid, to secrets, lies, and paralysis.

I chose the disability of illiteracy for this film because it is not immediately visible. It allows one to create "dishonest" situations where spectators can be in total empathy with the character, while also being completely alone in knowing their secret. This disability is serious and painful enough to create a feeling of isolation and real exclusion.

On a more personal level, this theme of experiencing shame to the point of paralysis has always deeply moved me, since the true mute in this film is Mo. He clings to his shame and will not let go. He uses Lila's disability to mask his own.

I think this story also has a more personal echo for me, resonating with something more intimate. It talks about shame in a wider, hazier sense... This reminds me of the moment when we find true love, and how it forces us to face who we really are, stripping us naked... and there are all these little things we unconsciously cling to... that we cling to instead of letting go and allowing ourselves to be penetrated by another person, to change... and open up to someone else... to become oneself and perhaps a slightly different version of oneself... Yes, the true reason for this film is about this.

Sara Forestier

## DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Sara Forestier is a French actress and director.

After her first role at age 13, in Martine Dugowson's film, *Les Fantômes de Louba*, she was critically acclaimed in 2004 for her performance as Lydia in *Games of Love & Chance (L'Esquive)* by Abdellatif Kechiche, winning her the César award for Most Promising Actress the following year.

She would soon act for Claude Lelouch, Bertrand Blier, Bruno Chiche, Santiago Amigorena, and Alain Resnais in *Wild Grass (Les Herbes Folles)*.

In 2010, she played the lead role in Michel Leclerc's *The Names of Love (Le Nom des gens)*, which opened Critics' Week at the 63<sup>rd</sup> edition of the Cannes Film Festival. For this colourful role, she was awarded the 2011 César for Best Actress.

Three years later, she was once again nominated in this category for her performance as *Suzanne* in the eponymous film, by Katell Quillévéré.

Sara Forestier also returned to the stage, working with major stage directors, like Florian Zeller, Georges Lavaudant and Hans-Peter Cloos in France.

In film, she would work with Jacques Doillon, the Larrieu Brothers, and Emmanuelle Bercot. She was nominated for the César award for Best Supporting Actress in 2016 for her role in Emmanuelle Bercot's film, *Standing Tall (La Tête Haute)*.

In 2017, she has starred in Hélène Angel's *Elementary (Primaire)*, playing the leading role.

*M* is her debut film as a director.

## CAST

Lila	Sara Forestier
Mo	Redouanne Harjane
Lila's Father	Jean-Pierre Léaud
Soraya	Liv Andren

## CREW

Screenplay	Sara Forestier
Director	Sara Forestier
Director of photography	Guillaume Schiffman
1st Assistant Director	Alain Olivieri
Editor	Éric Armbuster, Pauline Casalis, Isabelle Devinck, Sara Forestier, Joëlle Hache
Sound	Nicolas Provost & Jérôme Chenevoy
Production Design	Thierry François
Original Score	Christophe
Mixing	Niels Barletta
Production	Chi-Fou-Mi Productions Archipel 35 France 3 Cinéma
International Sales	mk2 films
French Distribution	Ad Vitam

## INTERNATIONAL SALES



55 rue Traversière  
75012 Paris

**Juliette Schrameck**

Managing Director of mk2 films  
juliette.schrameck@mk2.com

**Fionnuala Jamison**

Head of International Sales & Acquisitions  
fionnuala.jamison@mk2.com

**Ola Byszuk**

International Sales Executive  
ola.byszuk@mk2.com

## INTERNATIONAL PRESS



**Brigitta Portier**

+32 477 98 25 84

brigittaportier@alibicomunications.be