

UNITÉ  
PRESENTS



# THE BRAVES

(ENTRE LES VAGUES)

A FILM BY ANAÏS VOLPÉ

2021 – FRANCE – DRAMA – 2K – 5.1  
FRENCH – 100'

## SYNOPSIS

---

Dreaming, falling, starting over. Margot and Alma are two best friends holding on to the energy of their youth and their burning desire to conquer the world, until life gets in the way. But their ride-or-die friendship can get them through anything: they are inseparable, unstoppable.

## INTERVIEW WITH ANAÏS VOLPÉ

---

**One of the striking features of your film is its extraordinary energy...**

That's linked to the collective momentum that was present during the production of *The Braves*.

I carefully chose everyone for this film, whether behind the camera or in front of it. I wanted to bring all these talents together: actresses, actors, non-actors, the cinematographer, costume designer, editor, and so on.

The themes explored in the film – friendship, truly believing in your dreams, an ardent love for the theatre, getting by with day jobs – are all so dear to me that I simply had to tell this story. This is my first film to be professionally produced, and we shot it between two lockdowns, all of us fully aware that we had to act quickly and make sure no one got sick. On the one hand, there was a desire that life would overcome the stress that was everywhere at the time. And, on the other, there was a sense of urgency to seize this opportunity to shoot a film – in spite of the threat that it could be stopped at any time. But our desire to tell this story was such that we were all galvanized. It was an intense and mad shoot – and that certainly shows in the film.

**What was the starting point of the script? How were Alma and Margot born?**

I'd wanted to make a film about friendship for the longest time! About the great friendships you can have – going through intense experiences with someone who isn't your lover. I wanted to create a strong, iconic duo: two young, 27-year-old women who are ready to do anything in order to exist and live.

All of this, plus a strong desire to make a film about the challenges of acting.

I also drew from my own experiences, when I arrived in Paris between the ages of 17 and 27. I wanted to explore my late twenties – that distant age from adolescence when you want to feel you haven't chosen the wrong path.

When I arrived in Paris, I didn't know anyone. I was passionate about theatre, I dreamed of directing a film and had to do a lot of odd jobs to stay alive.

I've met some incredible people and wanted to pay tribute to my women friends and the friendships women share in the arts.

I grew up with films that portrayed women as rivals in the art world – and yet, I've only experienced friendships and pure sisterhood. My friends and I have always supported each other, in both good and harsh times. I wanted to feature two young women who shared the same passion and sometimes competed for the same role, but who were still extremely supportive of each other and would face hard times together.

Alma and Margot are like, "till death do us part"!

**You also give us a glimpse into the theatre world and the spirit of a theatrical troupe...**

I took my first theatre lessons in a daycare center when I was a kid. Ever since, I've seen that the people involved in theatre come from every socio-cultural walk of life. Theatre is far from being a bourgeois milieu, and this is something I wanted to show. I'm also sensitive to group dynamics and the collective ethos created in theatre. This is how I came up with the idea of these two companies simultaneously rehearsing in the same theatre, in two different styles – but who meet for lunch. My creative process has always drawn inspiration from theatre troupes. I wanted to offer audiences a glimpse of their creative, youthful energy.

**More generally speaking, you also seem to like abolishing limits. This is evidenced by your career, which combines theatre, cinema, web series, art installations...**

It's true, I like to mix genres – which is also my approach to cinema. I find it stimulating to think that there can be elements of theatre in film, that theatre can itself become cinematic – and why not perform this play on stage one day, in parallel to the film's release?

My approach to cinema is basically a reflection of my career until now.

When I arrived in Paris, I started acting on stage. I was juggling artistic projects and day jobs. I taught myself to edit images through online tutorials. I started to make short films, then medium-length films with equipment that people would lend me. I then made a series, created an installation that was exhibited, and eventually made a feature with my film *Heis*. All of these first projects were self-produced.

*The Braves* is the first time I've worked with a producer, and I therefore wanted to mix theatre and cinema.

Margot and Alma rehearse a contemporary play next to a young troupe rehearsing a much more classical one.

I found it interesting to juxtapose two different types of theatre that coexist without competing or cannibalizing one another.

**The play that Alma and Margot are rehearsing mixes past and present, France and America. There's a circulatory movement there, too... Can you tell us about the text your heroines are performing, with its very cinematic form?**

I wrote it.

The play in the film is called "La Rive" ("The Shore").

I wanted it to be about being uprooted, about lineage, about returning to one's homeland. On stage, the actresses play the role of a young woman who arrives in New York for the first time, following in the footsteps of her Italian great-grandmother who'd been exiled to New York. The young woman is pregnant and wants to better understand her roots before giving birth. She feels a need to reach her own shore.

In a way, this idea of being uprooted echoes what Alma and Margot are also going through.

New York is the city that never sleeps. This play is a territory that gradually takes on a life of its own within the film.

That's why, on a visual level, I wanted theatre to transform into cinema. I wanted the story my characters were playing on stage to come alive in their imaginations – but also in the spectators' imaginations. I wanted their performance to create a journey that would transport us elsewhere. Their story had to be sensorial, where a theatre could be transformed into a beating heart.

### **There's a pulsating energy running throughout your images. How did you meet American DP Sean Price Williams?**

I have been watching (and loving) Sean Price Williams' work for many years. I love his sense of imagery, his freedom, the way he speaks in interviews, and especially the work he has done with the Safdie brothers.

Since New York is an integral part of the play within the film, I wanted to work with an American cinematographer who could bring their own culture to the project. That way, you could feel the soul of the play permeating the entire film through Margot's and Alma's lives. Working with Sean in the streets of Paris was very stimulating.

Thanks to a friend who knows him, I got in touch with Sean four years ago. I sent him my previous work, and we were in contact for three years before finally meeting in January 2020.

I introduced him to my actresses. We realized that we had similar ways of working and tastes, and that we were both very instinctive.

I absolutely wanted to shoot with one particular camera: the Digital Bolex. It had been made a few years ago and it has the particular quality of having a 16 mm look while still being digital. This camera was produced for a very limited time before being stopped in 2016. In fact, there aren't many models in the world. It's rarely used today because, in the event of any technical problems, there's only one person in the world who can repair it, who's based in Los Angeles.

Sean and I thought that we needed at least two or three cameras to make sure we could finish the film if there were any problems. We looked around and had 3 cameras by the time of the shoot, one of which was brought from the United States.

Artistically, Sean and I found each other. It was a beautiful collaboration.

### **How did you work together on shot scales, which often focussed on faces?**

I wanted the film to drip with handheld camera, handheld acting, handheld editing.

It needed to throb like a heartbeat. Margot and Alma never stop moving, and I wanted the viewer to be constantly along for the ride with them on their journey, on their wavelength.

I'd always imagined the film as a constant movement, like the sea.

I wanted viewers to be very close to the characters, to feel that, when we're living through intense events, we don't necessarily have time to step back and analyze what's happening. I didn't want viewers to feel the actual *production* of the film. I wanted there to be something very raw, simple, and essential – a kind of energy, the urgency of life. And, above all, of acting.

Whenever we needed to do a tracking shot, we used a shopping cart, a van or a wheelchair. Sean and I called these “courageous shots”.

I wanted us to spend as little time as possible setting up equipment, lights, and so on. I wanted to leave as much room for acting as possible, in order to preserve the energy of the actresses. I knew that this was where the film’s main karma lay.

### **How did you choose your actresses?**

Auditions were open to all actresses who were Margot and Alma’s age. I had no preconceived image in mind, but I wanted actresses who would feel like obvious choices for this project.

I had to believe in their friendship. That they formed an obvious duo. And within the film itself, we’d have to believe that the director, Kristin, would choose them to act in the play – that she would select the two most talented actresses. That was the biggest challenge of the film: the acting.

I was looking for two Meryl Streeps!

I saw roughly one hundred and twenty actresses: first individually, then as duos. I met some incredible talents, whom I’ll undoubtedly reach out to for future projects. But, what’s certain is that Souheila Yacoub and Déborah Lukumuena were obvious choices.

I was looking for mad energies that could sustain this film from the first to the last minute. This duo had to be able to prop this movie up and take us along for the ride. As soon as I wrote the script, I thought of my characters *sensorially*.

And when I met Souheila and Déborah, I rediscovered these feelings and got the impression they could play any role. They made me laugh, they moved me to tears: they really swept me away! I immediately wanted to direct them.

### **How did you work with them?**

This is going to sound very trite, but first I needed to love them – just like I need to love all the actors I’m working with. But this is probably even truer here because I was very demanding in terms of their acting.

We rehearsed a lot before the shoot. I tried to meet up with them so we could build a relationship of trust first.

Déborah and Souheila also saw a lot of each other on their own to create their own bond.

I sent them a file with photos of actresses who had a certain gaze I liked. In it were also quotes, music, movies, stories about Alma and Margot’s friendship – a bottomless supply of references they could absorb (sounds/images/emotions) so they could arrive on set as “Margot + Alma”.

The nice thing was that I always had the feeling all three of us were speaking the same language, in terms of acting and directing. Since we all started in theatre, we had the same passion and commitment to the work.

They are very demanding actresses. Very serious in their preparation.

The greatest challenge was to film actresses acting as actresses who are acting!

Margot and Alma are always acting, in life and on stage. But sometimes they are no longer acting, and are overtaken by life.

Souheila and Déborah had to be both very free and very precise in these three levels of performance.

During production, there was no room for improvisation. Everything was written. They knew their lines inside out; their great professionalism and dependability were essential to the film, given the level of acting I was asking of them. We had rehearsed a lot beforehand for them to feel free on set.

I always work like that with actors: a lot of rehearsals so they can act as if everything were improvised.

With every shot, I often felt like the first take was the best because they were so present in what they were doing. Both were very precious to me and very inspiring. I had two great actresses on set, and I feel very lucky to have worked with them.

**You were also directing Italian actress Sveva Alviti, Matthieu Longatte – with whom you’ve already worked – and the great singer, Angélique Kidjo. What a cosmopolitan cast!**

I love mixing up different horizons. It fuels my creativity!

Sveva Alviti is an incredible woman. I love her deeply. I love the way she speaks, her personality, and her international image. With her too, it was immediately obvious – a real encounter. Her character was inspired by several directors with whom I’d worked as an actress: the entire world could be falling apart, but the show had to go on! I wanted her character to be demanding and tough – but also humane and empathetic.

Matthieu Longatte is a long-time friend. We’ve acted together since my first project *Heis*. He’s an actor-director, and a great source of inspiration. I was happy to work with him again on this project and make him try something different.

As for Angélique Kidjo – who plays Alma’s mother – she’s an artist I greatly admire. I immediately thought of her for this role, even though she isn’t an actress. When we met, there was also no doubt in my mind. I was touched by her and very happy she accepted my offer. It was humbling to be directing her.

With her – and like with every actress and actor in the film – I felt like I was embarking on a little journey.

For all the other secondary roles, whether in the theatre company or the other characters, I wanted to work with both professional and non-professional actors who were acting for the first time. It was very interesting to create this mix.

**Your film is set in Paris – and yet its soul is so cosmopolitan that it doesn’t feel Parisian...**

Paris is my characters’ adopted city – which also my case. I’m from Toulouse and have always felt like Paris is a “host” city for people who aren’t from there. Ultimately, I’ve never felt

“Parisian”. There was a desire to transcribe this feeling through the character of Margot, whose parents live in Switzerland – which is why we never see them.

Alma, however, grew up in a multicultural Paris, with really mixed neighbourhoods: Château Rouge, Barbès, Place des Fêtes... that’s the Paris I wanted to film because they’re the neighbourhoods I’ve become most familiar with.

Sets are very important to me. I wanted the set design in *The Braves* to be natural, so we built as few of them as possible. I did a lot of location scouting and often wanted to shoot in the street, but we were restricted by the presence of masks everywhere. I sometimes improvised in certain places and often picked spots according to the lighting already present – like in the Pigalle sequences, with the puppy bed sheets. I asked a sex shop owner to leave their outdoor lights on for us for a few more minutes (there was still a curfew at the time), and it was nice to have a little room for improvisation. I insisted on shooting the bar scenes among real customers, to keep the spirit of a pub crawl alive.

Other places, however, were more elaborately planned beforehand. The theatre, for example. Since it’s a place where the characters are creating something, I also wanted to create something there.

I had imagined a theatre without red seats. I wanted to play with conventions and avoid the typical image of a theatre you’d see in films. I wanted an underground and international theatre. One that resembled a factory.

I wanted the film’s different spaces to gradually blend and echo one another throughout the story as the characters waltzed through them.

At the end of the day, the film deals with universal themes, and sometimes propels us into an extra-dimensional space-time that isn’t really anchored in any identifiable city. Margot and Alma experience strong emotions: between their roles and their lives, between their dreams, disappointments, experiences in Paris, New York... I like the idea that the characters can navigate through several ports, without ever getting attached to a single one.

### **Your film clearly professes its faith in the power of acting and fiction...**

The idea at the heart of *The Braves* is that fiction saves us, whether we’re creators or spectators: inventing stories, acting them out, and having others travel elsewhere with us.

Theatre permeates the lives of my characters, and vice versa. Alma and Margot dress up on stage as they do in life. Acting is vital for them, it’s what keeps them going in difficult times. This is also what we ourselves experienced when we shot this film mid-pandemic. I remember being locked up with my editor, editing the film during lockdown in an empty Paris... I think making this film in the face of adversity saved us from depression.

It was almost as if we were in tune with our characters, for whom theatre is central and vital.

This urgent need to live in the face of hardship can be felt in this permanent dialogue between reality and fiction.



## **Your heroines' love of acting also shows that part of their childhood still lingers...**

It's true. But I also wanted to show acting as a source of pleasure. Performance is a job – a serious one – but acting is also an outlet and an inexhaustible source of pleasure for them. I experienced this passion as a child and it has never left me. So, there was a desire to show that being an actor is difficult. But if you struggle to do it, it's also because this passion is a source of intense pleasure. This is why Alma and Margot never stop acting.

## **How did you work with your editor, since you are also a trained editor?**

*The Braves* is as much a film about acting as it is images and editing. When I met my editor, Zoé Sassier, I loved the freedom with which she talked about the script. Since it was her first feature film, I liked the fact that she had no defined methodology. I'd always edited my own projects and this is the first time I hired someone else for the job. I therefore needed someone with whom I got along almost intuitively. With Zoé, it was bliss. We understood each other perfectly. Those months of editing remain an intense memory for me.

The heart of the film had to beat fast and hard. I wanted there to be moments of rest, but the energy of the film could never decrease. Zoé knew we had to imbue the film with this energy. It was very meticulous work.

## **The colours in your film are joyful, and your credit sequence is very vibrant...**

In the end, everything functions as a duo and as duality throughout the film.

It's a film of contrasts about the complexity of living, with a lot of acting, life and *elsewheres*.

I like the idea that the film can be very colourful and visually alive. Life wins out in the end.

The credits are vivid because they open onto the first trip to New York. The theatre, this director, this play... all of it will launch our heroines. And what they are going to experience is colourful. I wanted the image to take up the whole screen, without any specific format. Life in all its intensity.

## **How did you choose the music?**

I worked with a duo – another one! The composers – David Gubitsch and Élie Mittelmann – are two friends of mine with whom I've collaborated on separate occasions in previous projects.

Since my story is made up of two DNAs, two characters and two parts, I found it interesting to have two tones, two distinct sounds and colours. The first part was mainly composed by Élie Mittelmann, and the second by David Gubitsch.

We worked in a progressive fashion. In the first part, we looked to create a catchy, 70s, jazzy sort of atmosphere. We then increasingly moved towards strings, until the silence of the final

scene, because Margot has a powerful experience – one that will enrich her on a human level while, at the same time, dispossess her.

**This is your first professionally produced feature. Were you able to find the same freedom as in your previous experiments?**

It was important for me to have the same freedom I had in my previous, self-produced projects. For me, freedom comes from making choices that first and foremost serve the story. I had specific ideas in mind – obsessions! – and I was prepared not to make the film if I had to change these choices. I was quite radical about it.

Certain things were very clear for me: I wanted to shoot with Souheila Yacoub and Déborah Lukumuena (among others), Sean Price Williams and the Digital Bolex in very natural (but atypical) settings, to mix professional and amateur actors, to have a very cosmopolitan technical team, with both beginners and veterans in supervising positions. I wanted energies to blend, and for a certain vitality to be ever-present. It was always serious, but I also never wanted us to forget that we were making a film together and how incredible an opportunity that was. Especially in the middle of a pandemic.

Sometimes people think that, the second you make a film produced by a professional company, you absolutely have to fit in a certain mould. But waves don't fit in moulds.<sup>1</sup>

**Why did you choose this title?**

I wanted to transcribe that powerful emotion one feels when being tossed about by the turbulent waves of life. These waves knock us around, and yet carry us at the same time – or, better yet, they rock us. They create a constant emotional movement that sometimes makes us feel like we're moving away from ourselves, while also moving closer at the same time. It's a path we're forced to take if we want to move towards new horizons, but also to run aground on new shores.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Translator's note: the French title is "Entre les vagues" – literally, "between the waves"*

## ABOUT ANAÏS VOLPÉ

---

Anaïs Volpé is a self-taught screenwriter, director and editor. After working in the theatre for years as an actress, she trained as a director by writing and editing several of her own films.

In 2016, she wrote, directed, edited and self-produced the multimedia project *Heis (Chroniques)*, consisting of a feature film, a web series and an art installation. The project was featured in various art venues and selected for several international film festivals (International Film Festival Rotterdam-IFFR, Premiers Plans d'Angers, FIFIB...). It went on to win many prizes, one of which was awarded at the 2016 Los Angeles Film Festival, making the project eligible for the Independent Spirit Awards.

She then co-directed the documentary web series *Dans la jungle, avec un petit couteau à beurre...* which was partly financed by the CNC, and examines the French relationship to diplomas, and the French school system overall.

For her first feature film, *The Braves*, she has collaborated with American cinematographer Sean Price Williams (*Good Time, Heaven Knows What*). In 2021, the film was selected at the Directors' Fortnight in Cannes.

### FILMOGRAPHY

#### *Writer-Director*

**2021**            **THE BRAVES (ENTRE LES VAGUES)** | Drama, 100'  
**2017**            **HEIS: CHRONIQUES** | Drama, 90'  
**2015**            **HEIS: PARALYSIS** | Short, 11'  
**2012**            **BLAST** | short

#### *Director*

**2019**            **INDEMNES** | Short, 22'

## ABOUT THE ACTRESSES

---

### SOUHEILA YACOUB - Selective Filmography

- 2021**            **THE BRAVES** (ENTRE LES VAGUES) | dir. Anaïs Volpé  
**A BRIGHTER TOMORROW** (DE BAS ÉTAGE) | dir. Yassine Qnia  
**H24** | dir. Nathalie Masduraud and Valérie Urrera, TV SERIES
- 2020**            **THE SALT OF TEARS** (LE SEL DES LARMES) | dir. Philippe Garrel  
**NO MAN'S LAND** | dir. Oded Ruskin, TV SERIES
- 2019**            **LES SAUVAGES** | dir. Rebecca Zlotowski, TV SERIES
- 2018**            **CLIMAX** | dir. Gaspar Noé
- 2017**            **STARVING GENERATION** (LES AFFAMÉS) | dir. Léa Frédeval

### DÉBORAH LUKUMUENA - Selective Filmography

- 2021**            **THE BRAVES** (ENTRE LES VAGUES) | dir. Anaïs Volpé  
**ROBUST** (ROBUSTE) | dir. Constance Meyer
- 2018**            **INVISIBLES** (LES INVISIBLES) | dir. Louis-Julien Petit
- 2017**            **THE TROUBLE SHOOTER** (ROULEZ JEUNESSE) | dir. Julien Guetta
- 2015**            **DIVINES** | dir. Houda Benyamina

## CAST

---

Margot	Souheila Yacoub
Alma	Déborah Lukumuena
Niko	Matthieu Longatte
Kristin	Sveva Alviti
Amina	Angélique Kidjo
Theatre troupe	Alexandre Desane
	Deuklo
	Julia Mugnier
	Fabien Mariano Ortiz
	Marylou Vergne

## CREW

---

Director	Anaïs Volpé
Screenwriter	Anaïs Volpé
Production	Caroline Nataf
Director of Photography	Sean Price Williams
Editing	Zoé Sassier
Assistant Director	Elisa Pascarel
Sound	Marc-Olivier Brullé
Costume	Alexia Crisp-Jones
Set Design	Girlzpop Studio
Hair & Make-up	Marietou Adjiratou Ba
Stage Manager	Nils Zachariasen
Production Director	Thomas Morvan
Post Production	Astrid Lecardonnell
Associate Producers	Thomas Morvan et Bruno Nahon
International sales	mk2 films

## INTERNATIONAL PRESS & SALES

---

### INTERNATIONAL PRESS

Christelle Randall

[christelle@christellerandall.com](mailto:christelle@christellerandall.com)

+44 7834 624 300



### INTERNATIONAL SALES

Fionnuala Jamison, Managing Director

[fionnuala.jamison@mk2.com](mailto:fionnuala.jamison@mk2.com)

Olivier Barbier, Head of Acquisitions

[olivier.barbier@mk2.com](mailto:olivier.barbier@mk2.com)

Camille Dupeuple, SVP International Sales

[Camille.dupeuple@mk2.com](mailto:Camille.dupeuple@mk2.com)

Quentin Bohanna, International Sales

[quentin.bohanna@mk2.com](mailto:quentin.bohanna@mk2.com)

Ching-Lo Hsu, International Sales

[ching-lo.hsu@mk2.com](mailto:ching-lo.hsu@mk2.com)

Anne-Laure Barbarit, Festival Manager

[anne-laure.barbarit@mk2.com](mailto:anne-laure.barbarit@mk2.com)

Visit our website [www.mk2films.com](http://www.mk2films.com)