

CATHALINA  
GEERAERTS

FELIX  
HEREMANS

GREET  
VERSTRAETE



MOSTRA INTERNAZIONALE  
D'ARTE CINEMATOGRAFICA  
LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA 2023  
Official Selection

A FILM BY  
FIEN TROCH

# HOLLY

PRIME TIME & MIRAGE PRESENT IN CO-PRODUCTION WITH TARANTULA, TOPKAPI FILMS & TABIKI FILM, LES FILMS DU FLEUVE, AGAT FILMS  
with CATHALINA GEERAERTS, FELIX HEREMANS, GREET VERSTRAETE, SEROY FAN ALICI, ELS DECEUKELIER, MARY LOUISE STERKENWYDES, ROBBY CLEIREN, SARA DE BOSSCHERE  
DIRECTED BY FIEN TROCH PRODUCED BY FRANK VAN DEN EEBDEN, SIOB KSCZ, NICO LEUNEN, AND JOHNNY JENEL COSTUME DESIGNER MAGALI COIREMANS EDITOR NATALIA TREVINO, SANNE RUIJBRECHT EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS SOPHIE VAN DEN KEYBUS AND VERONIQUE OUBRAY EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS TACO DRUJHOUT, TIJN HAZEN, MICHEL SCHÖPPING  
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS LAURENS DRIJ, PRODUCED BY DONATO ROTUNDO, JEAN PIERRE BARDENNE, LUC BARDENNE, DELPHINE TOMSON, ARNOLD HESLENFELD, LAURETTE SCHILLINGS, FRANS VAN GESTEL, ANITA VOORHAM, JULIETTE SCHRAMMECK PRODUCED BY ANTONINO LOMBARDO, ELISA HEENE

PRIME TIME mirage SAKURA DOLBY DIGITAL TOPKAPI SAKURA 88 WVF A FILM FUNDING CINEFONDS FILM FUND INCENTIVE 63 CINECITTÀ SAKURA WVF mkt2 CINEFONDS streamz 80 100

PRIME TIME AND MIRAGE  
PRESENT

# HOLLY

A FILM BY FIEN TROCH

2023 BELGIUM, NETHERLANDS, LUXEMBOURG, FRANCE  
DRAMA  
FLEMISH  
104'



Creative  
Europe  
MEDIA



# SYNOPSIS

15-year-old Holly calls her school to say she is staying home for the day. Soon after, a fire breaks out at the school, killing several students. With everyone touched by the tragedy, the community comes together, trying to heal. Anna, a teacher, intrigued by Holly and her strange premonition, invites her to join the volunteering group she runs. Holly's presence seems to bring peace of mind, warmth, and hope to those she encounters. But soon, people begin to seek out Holly and her cathartic energy, demanding more and more from the young girl.

# INTERVIEW WITH FIEN TROCH - DIRECTOR

## HOW DID THE IDEA FOR HOLLY COME ABOUT?

During the editing of my previous film Home, I felt the desire to seek a greater freedom, to make a film that was more detached from the narrative. Over the years I had collected a lot of ideas for fun scenes - I like situational humor - that I couldn't use in my previous films. Actually, I just wanted to put those scenes together and see if that would make a film. My partner Nico (Leunen, who also edits my films) suggested that I needed an arena to set all those scenes in. This is how the idea of a community in mourning after a school fire was born. Within that setting I wanted to show various humorous tales that emphasize the absurdity of how people deal with such a trauma. Only: that just didn't work. The screenplay remained a big mishmash. So I had to let go of that idea. But there was one character I always stuck with: Holly. A very ordinary girl who is suddenly credited with a special talent, in a community that is very receptive to something "supernatural" due to a tragic event. I ended up building the whole movie around her.

## HOLLY HELPS BEAR THE GRIEF OF OTHERS, AND ALSO VOLUNTEERS. CHARITY AND HELPFULNESS ARE CENTRAL THEMES IN THE FILM. WHAT INTERESTS YOU ABOUT THAT?

It is a question that concerns me in general: what does doing good mean? And why do people do that? I also think a lot about what I can do in my daily life to improve something. Especially if you live in big cities as Brussels, you are often confronted with harshness on the street. That sometimes really gets into my head. I often worry about what I can do

about it - and especially what I don't do. But strangely enough, that hardly translated into my films until now. In Holly, that issue crept organically into the story for the first time.

The character Anna, a teacher who also leads a voluntary organization, represents my conflicting feelings on that theme. She is a real do-gooder. On the one hand I admire people like that enormously, and on the other hand I also immediately feel the need to question that - because why do you actually want to do that? Does genuine altruism even exist? Moreover, people like Anna often adopt a rather pedantic attitude, as if they know better. That gray zone interests me. But to be clear: I have enormous respect for people who are socially engaged. And I prefer someone who only does the right thing so that they can sleep better at night than someone who just doesn't do anything at all.

## "HOLLY" DOES NOT SOUND LIKE "HOLY" BY CHANCE: MORE AND MORE PEOPLE START TO BELIEVE THAT SHE HAS SPECIAL POWERS. DID YOU WANT TO PLAY CONSCIOUSLY WITH THAT RELIGIOUS DIMENSION?

I didn't want to emphasize on religion too much, but it almost crept in naturally. I can imagine that the same mechanism was at play a long time ago when Jesus Christ was labeled the Messiah. Those are also questions that I ask myself: why do people believe something? And do they truly believe that, or is it just comfortable to go along with something like this at a difficult moment?

## ARE THERE ANY ELEMENTS OF TRUE EVENTS THAT INSPIRED HOLLY'S STORY?

The very first seed for this character was planted a long time ago. An elderly woman once told me that her husband had a heart attack, but was saved thanks to her six-year-old granddaughter. She had found him and ran to her grandmother saying: "Grandpa is sleeping on the floor". What fascinated me about that was that the woman praised her grandchild so much, constantly repeating that she had "saved" her grandfather. While the girl herself probably thought: "I just said that grandpa was sleeping on the floor". Based on that anecdote, I started to delve into stories about heroes and miracles. And in that too, I usually just saw people who happened to be in the right place at the right time, and so they suddenly became someone they might not have been at all. That's the case with Holly: she calls the school one day to report her absence, and right then and there the school burns down. Maybe she was just fooling around. But because of that she suddenly becomes someone, and she can't get out of that situation.

#### **IS THERE ANYTHING OF YOURSELF IN HOLLY?**

Yes, like her, I am very receptive to other people's emotions. Sometimes that's a bit annoying, because when I enter a place, I immediately know who is sad, and then I almost feel obliged to talk to that person. I have to consciously arm myself against that, because I absorb a lot of the sadness of the world. On the other hand, it has always helped me with my films: it allows me to easily get into the mind of my characters.

#### **HOLLY IS IN LINE WITH YOUR PREVIOUS FILMS, BUT ALSO FEELS DIFFERENT DUE TO THE PRESENCE OF A SUPERNATURAL ELEMENT (TRUE OR NOT). DID YOU CONSCIOUSLY WANT TO TAKE A NEW DIRECTION?**

I did not obsessively look for that, but especially since I wanted to break away from Home, it

felt nice to find an element that really made Holly different. At the same time, I quickly found that I didn't want to go too far in that supernatural aspect. Because then it wouldn't feel like my kind of film anymore. I wanted the story to stay grounded, and to always have that doubt: is there something supernatural going on or not?

#### **JUST LIKE IN HOME, YOUNG DEBUTANTS PLAY THE LEADING ROLES. HOW DID YOU FIND CATHALINA GEERAERTS, WHO PLAYS HOLLY?**

We saw a ton of girls for the lead, and actually Cathalina was one of the first to come to the casting. We were immediately impressed, she was a natural. But we still continued to cast for six months after that, mainly because I wasn't quite sure yet what Holly should look like. I may have had an even more frail girl in mind. But in the end we opted for Cathalina's talent: I knew I could ask her a lot, because she really could act. She's not even aware she's that good - a bit like Holly, actually...

#### **WHY DID YOU CHOOSE FELIX HEREMANS AS HOLLY'S BEST FRIEND BART, WHO APPEARS TO BE ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM?**

It was a long, unpredictable quest to find the right actor for that role. I had written the character as a boy with a disability. So we organized castings in special education schools, and also launched calls for people with disabilities, in whatever sense. We have seen people with dyslexia, but also with Down syndrome. And in the end our choice went to Felix. He is neurodiverse, but goes to a normal school and functions perfectly there. He is super independent, and does things in the city that I don't allow my own son, who is the same age, to do. On set, as a director, I sometimes had the urge to ask him to play a scene differently, but then I realized: 'no, this is just Felix, and if I wanted it to be different,

I should have cast someone else'. He's very nice, and very funny too. When I showed the first cut of the film to people, I often got the response: 'Bart is so great, but he doesn't get enough screen time'. So when we did a reshoot later, I especially invented a new, funny scene with him, where he gets kicked out of class.

**YOU COLLABORATED WITH CLOSE DOP FRANK VAN DEN EEDEN. CAN YOU TALK ABOUT YOUR WORK TOGETHER?**

I shot all my previous feature films with Frank. From my first film *Someone else's happiness* in 2005, there was an instant click, both artistically and amicably, and that has never left. Our collaboration is so natural that I can't imagine making a film with someone else. With every film he wants me to know how I see it first and then he starts thinking along. And that is really fundamental to me. He doesn't say how he thinks it should be, I have to determine it and only then does he dive in and make something improbable out of it. He crawls completely into the world you have created and then looks for what visually best tells the story, without ego. He is incredibly

generous and is only satisfied when I am satisfied. The identity of my films is largely determined by him. The good thing is that in the long run you know each other so well that communication is really effortless. We can be honest and direct with each other even when things aren't right and sometimes even a look is enough to know what we're thinking.

**ANOTHER FAMILIAR NAME IS THE AMERICAN MUSICIAN JOHNNY JEWEL, KNOWN FROM CHROMATICS. HE ALSO PROVIDED THE SOUNDTRACK FOR HOME. HOW DID YOUR COLLABORATION GO THIS TIME?**

For *Home* he had given us existing music, but with Holly he got involved in the script phase. He quickly sensed the direction I wanted to go. There is something disturbing in his music, reminiscent of old horror movies. But also, something very sweet, that sounds a bit distorted. Moreover, Johnny trusted us to the extent that we were allowed to rework his music as we saw fit. He delivered some songs to us like a kind of building blocks: if we wanted, we could take them apart and build something else with them in the assembly.



# FIEN TROCH - DIRECTOR

Fien Troch (1978) is a Belgian film director and screenwriter. After graduating from the Sint-Lukas in Brussels in 2000 she started on her debut feature film **SOMEONE ELSE'S HAPPINESS**, a psychological drama that deals with how a fatal car accident affects a small village in Flanders. The film was selected at TIFF and San Sebastian Film Festival, and won several awards. The film was also selected as the Oscar entry for Belgium that year.

Her second film **UNSPOKEN**, starring Emmanuelle Devos and Bruno Todeschini, depicts the aftermath of the disappearance of a young girl and was developed in the Cinéfondation of Cannes in 2007. Her third film **KID** won the Eurimages Award for Most Promising Project in Rotterdam and the Students award at the Paris International Film Festival and was shot in 2012. Her fourth feature **HOME** (2016) won the Orizzonti Best Director Award at the Venice Film Festival. She served on the Orizzonti jury the following year.

**HOLLY** is her fifth feature and will premiere in Competition at the Venice Film Festival 2023.



## FILMOGRAPHY

- 2023 **HOLLY** - Feature Film / 104 min.
- 2022 **THE RESPONDER** - Series / Direction of 2 episodes.
- 2016 **HOME** - Feature Film / 103 min.
- 2012 **KID** - Feature Film / 94 min.
- 2008 **UNSPOKEN** - Feature Film / 96 min.
- 2005 **SOMEONE ELSE'S HAPPINESS** - Feature Film / 97 min.
- 2001 **COOL SAM AND SWEET SUZIE** - Short Film / 15 min.
- 2000 **MARIA** - Short Film / 18 min.
- 1999 **WOOWW** - Short Film / 16 min.
- 1998 **VERBRANDE AARDE** - Short Film / 9 min.

# CAST

Holly	Cathalina GEERAERTS
Bart	Felix HEREMANS
Anna	Greet VERSTRAETE
Anna's Husband	Serdi FAKI ALICI
Holly's Mother	Els DECEUKILIER
Dawn	Maya LOUISA STERKENDRIES
Director	Robby CLEIREN
Sonja	Sara DE BOSSCHERE

# CREW

Director	Fien Troch
Writer	Fien Troch
Producers	Antonino Lombardo, Elisa Heene
Co-producers	Donato Rotunno, Jean-Pierre Dardenne, Luc Dardenne, Delphine Tomson, Arnold Heslenfeld, Laurette Schillings, Frans van Gestel, Anita Voorham, Juliette Schrameck
Director of Photography	Frank van den Eeden, SBC NSC
Editor	Nico Leunen, ACE
Music	Johnny Jewel
Casting	Magali Coremans
Art Direction	Natalia Treviño, Sanne Rubbrecht
Sound	Taco Drijfhout
Sound Design	Tijn Hazen
Sound Mix	Tijn Hazen, Michel Schöpping
Color Grading	Laurens Orij
Costume	Sophie Van den Keybus
Make-up	Véronique Dubray
Production	Prime Time & Mirage
Coproduction	Tarantula, Topkaki Films & Tabiki Film, Les Films du Fleuve, Agat Films
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