



OFFICIAL SELECTION  
**COMPETITION**  
FESTIVAL DE CANNES





*Mommy*



## SYNOPSIS

A feisty widowed single mom finds herself burdened with the full-time custody of her rambunctious 15-year-old ADHD son. As they try to make ends meet and struggle with their unpredictable ménage, Kyla, the peculiar, new girl across the street, offers her help. Together, they find a new sense of balance, and hope is regained.

## DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Since my first film, I've talked a lot about love.

I've talked about teenagehood, sequestration and transsexualism. I've talked about Jackson Pollock and the 90s, about alienation and homophobia. Boarding schools and the very French-Canadian word "special", milking the cows, Stendhal's crystallization and the Stockholm syndrome. I've talked some pretty salty slang and I've talked dirty too. I've talked in English, every once in a while, and I've talked through my hat one too many times.

Cause that's the thing when you "talk" about things, I guess, is that there is always this almost unavoidable risk of talking shit. Which is why I always decided to stick to what I knew, or what was - more or less - close to my skin. Subjects I thought I thoroughly or sufficiently knew because I knew my own difference or the suburb I was brought up in. Or because I knew how vast my fear of others was, and still is. Because I knew the lies we tell ourselves when we live in secret, or the useless love we stubbornly give to time thieves. These are things I've come close enough to actually want to talk about them.

But should there be one, just one subject I'd know more than any other, one that would unconditionally inspire me, and that I love above all, it certainly would be my mother. And when I say my mother, I think I mean THE mother at large, the figure she represents.

Because it's her I always come back to. It's her I want to see winning the battle, her I want to invent problems to so she can have the credit of solving them all, her through whom I ask myself questions, her I want to hear shout out loud when we didn't say a thing. It's her I want to be right when we were wrong, it's her, no matter what, who'll have the last word.

Back in the days of *I Killed My Mother*, I felt like I wanted to punish my mom. Only five years have passed ever since, and I believe that, through Mommy, I'm now seeking her revenge. Don't ask.

— Xavier Dolan, May 2014



*X. Dolan on Mommy's set.*



*Pierre-Yves Cardinal, A. Olivier Pilon and others from cast and crew under the rain, on set.*

## VISUALS

We saw *Mommy* as a dark movie in its core, but we thought that, on the outside, it should be polished with light and warmth. It's the audience's mandate to identify the true nature of the film, not ours. From our end of things, we wished not to tell anyone what to think, or when to think it.

Bathing *Mommy* in whatever predictable grey, damp fog therefore seemed like cheap automatism. I dreamed of a joyful place for Die and Steve to live in, a place where everything was possible. I remember swearing to myself that I'd do everything so my characters would look and sound like the actual people from the suburb I was brought up in. Not just some caricature of themselves, but "themselves", truly.

The movie's photography had to avoid the usual tropes of despondency too. The sunsets and the magic hours, during which many sequences would take place, would drape the exteriors with reds and yellows, and the broad, harsh daylight would even blind us with its almost jovial flares.

To me, it was crucial for *Mommy*, by all possible means, to be a radiant tale of courage, love and friendship.

I don't see the point in making films about losers, nor the point in watching them. Which doesn't have anything to do with a contemptuous standpoint towards "losers" - on the contrary. I just have a particular aversion to any artistic document purporting to portray human beings through their failures. Human beings who, I think, shouldn't be defined by hardships and tags, but by feelings and dreams. Which is why I wanted to make a movie about winners, whatever befalls them in the end. I truly hope I have at least achieved that.





Anne Dorval, Suzanne Clément and X. Dolan on set, talking over their next scene.

## THE CAST

As always, I wanted the actors to be at the center of everything. I have an endless fascination for them, and studying the art of acting, investigating all of its forms and styles, analyzing its structure, refining it, understanding it is my ultimate goal.

This time around, I was hoping to take the cast along a somewhat less “latin”, less exuberant path than that of *Laurence Anyways*, and a less cerebral one than *Heartbeats*.

*Mommy*’s characters aren’t playing games, and don’t know how to express their feelings with the immodest ease with which many of my previous characters have. Die, Steve and Kyla aren’t show-offs. But they are highly boisterous, colourful beings capable of getting their point across in a coherent fashion regarding their respective background and situation.

For me, working with Anne Dorval and Suzanne Clément again meant not about returning to old patterns, but trying new ones. It was one of the most exciting - and obvious - challenges of the movie; that one shouldn’t “recognize” them. As for Antoine, he was the surprise, of course. Any filmmaker is proud to reveal new talent, or confirm talent that already has been. To me, it’s both a passion and a purpose: working with great artists and, with them, create great performances, and try to trigger great emotion.

I feel like somewhere in time, our love of true, precise characters has withered and been replaced by ready-to-wear roles, to the benefit of whatever efficiency. We confiscate their surnames, their story, their tics, their guilty pleasures, their “details”. We ship actors off in labeled boxes, as long as they fit in the great grid of intelligible, rentable storytelling. But interesting human beings - at least the heroes of my childhood - have always existed in a far more concrete way, and the actors I admire, and with which I love to work, always put the concrete reality they’ve known and observed forever to the service of a movie. And to me, that’s always been what’s typical of great actors: they create characters, not performances.



*S. Clément on set.*

## MOMMY VS. I KILLED MY MOTHER

There are several parallel lines to be drawn between my first movie and *Mommy*. But only on the surface.

As far as I'm concerned, from direction to tone, acting style to visuals, those two films are two different planets. One unfolds through the eyes of a whimsical teenager, the other contemplates a mother's hardships. Apart from the already important switch of point of view, here is why I think those two films are intrinsically dissimilar: *I Killed My Mother* centres on a puberty crisis. *Mommy*, on a existential one.

Moreover, there is no point for me to make the same film twice. I'm delighted by this opportunity of homecoming through these mother-and-son dynamics, as that theme has always been a part of my films. But I'm all the more delighted by the opportunity to not only attempt to explore novelty within my own filmography, but to try exploring novelty on an even larger scale; that of the family movie genre. Because it represents the most emotive form of communication with the audience.

The mother is where we're from, and the child, who we are, who we've become. We never are truly at rest with those Freudian preoccupations, and they're an indelible part of us.

## MUSIC

I think music in film achieves an unconscious transaction with each and every individual in an audience, spurring them on to engage in the film throughout their own story.

Dido, Sarah McLachlan, Andrea Bocelli, Céline Dion or Oasis all have a history with each cinephile; when *Wonderwall*, for instance, was playing in 1995, one of them was heartbroken while the other was alone in some bar, or on honeymoon in Playa Del Carmen, or on her or his way back from a friend's funeral. When triggered by the sound of music, those private memories can then open and the film's writing suddenly goes farther than we thought it would. In the still of a dark theatre, we watch, in an anonymous togetherness, and I think that's undeniably profitable for any movie.

Besides, the notion that almost every song playing in *Mommy* comes from a mixtape Die's husband made before he died, and not from my own personal playlist, was a new thing for me in terms of cinematic system. I remember Pauline Kael writing about Scorsese and saying that, in the type of movies he made, songs weren't playing ON movies anymore, but IN movies ; on the radio, on tv, or in cafés. There is, in this diegetic approach, a way of engaging the public in the authentic, naked truth of the characters, making them forget about a director's ideas and desires. I like that.



## USING 1:1 AS ASPECT-RATIO

After having shot a music video in 1:1 last year, it dawned on me that this ratio translated in a somewhat unique emotion and sincerity.

The perfect square in which it consists framed faces with such simplicity, and seemed like the ideal structure for “portrait” shots. No distraction, no affectations are possible in such constricted space. The character is our main subject, inescapably at the center of our attention. Our eyes cannot miss him, her.

1:1 is, besides, the ratio of album covers in the CD industry, and of all of these jackets that have imprinted our imaginaries over time. The Die & Steve Mix 4ever being a leitmotif for us, the use of 1:1 found an additional echo.

It is also, to be frank, my DOP André Turpin’s favorite ratio which he had, apparently, dreamed of using his entire life without ever daring to do so (he’s also a director, and directed the extremely enjoyable *Zigrail*, Middle-East road trip shot in black and white and featuring some brutal early John Zorn!).

After having now spent a year with him busting my balls at about just every shot, regretting our infamous ratio, I’ve learned two things: André loves cinemascope and I, for one, have absolutely no regrets in this matter.



*A. Dorval in Oka's beach, during the shooting of a scene.*

## DIANE “DIE” DESPRÉS

Die was born a fighter. She’s been a widow for three years now, and had to start anew after her son was placed in a correctional facility.

Although she sees herself as a teen princess, she’s deeply mature when it comes to her son’s education and future, as well as dealing with crisis and problematics.

Her raging temper, her sexualized gait and manners, her coarse language - which she tries to soften up in order to impress her son - make her a comical, sharp-witted, loudmouthed being. But beneath the appearances, she’s a practically invincible woman, an unstoppable trouser, an unsinkable who’ll never take “no” for an answer.

## ANNE DORVAL

*Mommy*, Xavier Dolan (2014), *Miraculum*, Podz (2013), *Le sens de L’humour*, Émile Gaudreault (2011), *Les Amours imaginaires*, Xavier Dolan (2010), *J’ai tué ma mère*, Xavier Dolan (2009), *Serveuse demandées*, Guylaine Dionne (2008), *La vie secrète des gens heureux*, Stéphane Lapointe (2006).

Golden BAYARD for best actress, 24<sup>th</sup> international Festival of Namur (2010)  
FIPRESCI prize for best actress, 21<sup>st</sup> International Palm Springs Festival (2010)  
JUTRA prize for best actress (2010)



*S. Clément on set.*

## KYLA

Left virtually mute by a vague trauma, Kyla is high school teacher on sabbatical who has just moved into town for an undetermined amount of time.

Any remote sense of dialogue with her husband and her daughter seems impossible, and the days are silent and long. But when Steve and Die makes their entrance in her life - or is it the other way around? - she finds hope again. Her cold, timorous temper warms up, her tics grow dim, her elocution betters.

But can Kyla abandon her own family for another? Cause while every more day spent with Die and Steve seems to take her away from her troubled past, it nonetheless brings her closer and closer to an eventual turn of fate: she could disappear from their lives as swiftly as she arrived in them.

## SUZANNE CLÉMENT

*Hélène et ses soeurs*, Jean-Jacques Zilbermann (2015), *Sitting On The Edge of Marlene*, Ana Valine (2015), *Mommy*, Xavier Dolan (2014), *Laurence Anyways*, Xavier Dolan (2012), *Tromper le silence*, Julie Hivon (2010), *J'ai tué ma mère*, Xavier Dolan (2009), *C'est pas moi, je le jure!*, Philippe Falardeau (2008), *La brunante*, Fernand Dansereau (2007), *L'audition*, Luc Picard (2005), *Le Confessionnal*, Robert Lepage (1995).

Best Actress Award - Un Certain Regard, Cannes Film Festival (2012)



A. Olivier Pilon strikes a pose on set between two takes.

## STEVE DESPRÉS

Steve's charm, above all doubts, can be called unique.

Since his father's death, he's made the whole circuit of specialized centres for kids with behaviour problems and has scored a home run; he's handed back to his mother for being too much to handle. But his - excessive - love for her, his resolution to be the man around the house and the way he candidly and irresponsibly wears his heart on his sleeve make him a truly troubling antihero.

Missing his past life with his father, Steve holds onto the project of peacefully living with Die. But his condition, for which he often ends up resenting himself, keeps alienating them, and dispels the faintest notion of coexistence. There is nothing Steve wouldn't do to make his mother happy. Unfortunately nothing.

## ANTOINE OLIVIER PILON

*Mommy*, Xavier Dolan (2014), *College Boy* (vidéoclip d'Indochine), Xavier Dolan (2013), *Les Pee-Wee 3D*, Éric Tessier (2012), *Laurence Anyways*, Xavier Dolan (2011), *Frisson des collines*, Richard Roy (2010).

Best Actor, Foreign Language Film - Young Artist Awards (2012 & 2013)



*A. Dorval and S. Clément on set,  
during a night shoot.*

## CAST & CREW

Diane "Die" Després  
Kyla  
Steve O'Connor Després  
Paul  
Patrick  
Principal  
Marthe  
Natacha

ANNE DORVAL  
SUZANNE CLÉMENT  
ANTOINE OLIVIER PILON  
PATRICK HUARD  
ALEXANDRE GOYETTE  
MICHÈLE LITUAC  
VIVIANE PACAL  
NATHALIE HAMEL-ROY

Written & directed by  
Cinematography  
Original score  
Editing  
Production Design  
Costume Design

XAVIER DOLAN  
ANDRÉ TURPIN  
NOÏA  
XAVIER DOLAN  
COLOMBE RABY  
XAVIER DOLAN  
FRANÇOIS BARBEAU  
SYLVAIN BRASSARD  
NANCY GRANT  
XAVIER DOLAN

Sound Design & Mix  
Produced by

Running time  
Aspect ratio  
Format  
Country

2h14min.  
1.25 (5:4)  
Color - 35mm/DCP  
Canada

Press kit  
Photo credits

XAVIER DOLAN  
©SHAYNE LAVERDIÈRE





*A. Dorval and X. Dolan on Mommy's set.*



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