

LES FILMS DU FLEUVE AND ARCHIPEL 35
PRESENT

ADÈLE HAENEL



OFFICIAL SELECTION
COMPETITION
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

THE UNKNOWN GIRL

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY
JEAN-PIERRE AND LUC DARDENNE

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SYNOPSIS

One evening, after closing her practice for the day, Jenny, a young doctor, hears the doorbell ring but doesn't answer it. The next day, the police inform her that an unidentified young woman has been found dead close by.

CAST

| | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Jenny Davin | ADÈLE HAENEL |
| Julien | OLIVIER BONNAUD |
| Bryan's father | JÉRÉMIE RENIER |
| Bryan | LOUKA MINNELLA |
| Bryan's mother | CHRISTELLE CORNIL |
| Cashier at the cybercafé | NADÈGE OUEDRAOGO |
| Lambert Junior | OLIVIER GOURMET |
| Old Lambert | PIERRE SUMKAY |
| Doctor Habran | YVES LAREC |
| Inspector Ben Mahmoud | BEN HAMIDOU |
| Inspector Bercaro | LAURENT CARON |
| Doctor Riga | FABRIZIO RONGIONE |
| Diabetic patient | JEAN-MICHEL BALTHAZAR |
| Lucas | THOMAS DORET |
| Pimp | MARC ZINGA |

A CONVERSATION WITH JEAN-PIERRE AND LUC DARDENNE

THE UNKNOWN GIRL tells the story of Jenny, a young GP, who investigates the death of an anonymous young girl. How did the film come about?

Luc Dardenne (LD): The idea of the investigation was integral from the start. We'd been thinking about it for several years. At some point, we even thought that the leading character could be a police officer.

Jean-Pierre Dardenne (JPD): But we didn't want to make a genre movie. We developed a double investigation. Jenny obsessively tries to find out the name of the girl who has been found dead and about whom nobody knows anything. She also wants to understand the reasons for this death, for which she feels partly responsible.

LD: Jenny would like to make up for it. There's nothing morbid or narcissistic about her guilt. She feels guilty for not letting the girl in but she's never complacent about it, she never wallows in self-pity and she doesn't point an accusing finger at anyone. She doesn't lecture the people she meets, let alone the audience. Besides, as the story moves on, you can tell there's a real cheerfulness to her personality.

Jenny takes care of her patients and listens to their bodies. How important was it for you to film this attentiveness?

LD: The characters have a lot of psychosomatic reactions, including dizzy spells, stomach aches, epileptic seizures... The body always responds first; it 'speaks' and expresses things we cannot always put into words. Jenny cares about her patients' suffering and tries to heal them while investigating who the unknown girl was.

JPD: We wanted Jenny to make her investigation through this attentiveness to bodies – we felt she had to remain a doctor and not become a police officer.

Did you do any research with actual doctors?

LD: A doctor friend of ours whom we've known for years served as a consultant during the writing process. She also came on set to help with the medical scenes. In addition, certain scenes were inspired by stories we heard from doctors we met.

At the beginning of the film, Jenny tells Julien, her intern, that you always have to "be stronger than your emotions". What follows partly contradicts that claim.

LD: Like any doctor, Jenny shouldn't trust her emotions when it comes to making a medical diagnosis, but they may come in handy when interacting with her patients and helping them... and even more during her investigation to discover the dead girl's identity.

In her own way, Jenny is also an "unknown girl". We don't know anything about her past or her personal life.

JPD: We felt we didn't need to dwell on it. She leaves her apartment for good to relocate to her practice, she turns down a profitable position to work as a GP in the suburbs. That's all you need to know about her. In earlier drafts of the script, you found out more about her life but these details seemed pointless to tell the story we wanted to tell.

LD: Jenny is somehow possessed by the unknown girl. Naturally it's nothing to do with supernatural possession but with moral possession. It's something that defines her investigation and her choices. That's the key element that interested us.

Jenny's patients, to various degrees, are hit by contemporary hardships including social insecurity and the disruption of the social fabric...

LD: These characters belong to today's world. They belong to that part of society that has been brutally excluded. However, we never meant for them to be 'social cases'. When Jenny sees her patients, she regards them as unique individuals, not as 'cases'. So do we.

JPD: In our films, we never look down on our characters. We never build a connection with the audience at our characters' expense.

THE UNKNOWN GIRL takes place in Seraing, in the Liège Province.

JPD: Ever since THE PROMISE back in 1996, we've shot all our films there. Even before we wrote the script – when we had nothing more than a sketchy idea of a doctor and an investigation – we already knew that we'd shoot by the freeway and the Meuse River. The location for THE UNKNOWN GIRL somehow came before the script.

LD: We were inspired by the freeway. Cars pass endlessly and at great speed on that road, much as the world follows its course, unaware of the significance of what's going on in Jenny's small practice.

After working with Cécile de France in THE KID WITH A BIKE and Marion Cotillard in TWO DAYS, ONE NIGHT, now you've directed Adèle Haenel in THE UNKNOWN GIRL.

LD: We met Adèle in Paris when she won an award for SUZANNE. After exchanging just a few words with her, we wanted to cast her as our doctor. There was something about her body, her gestures and her smile that appealed to us.

JPD: As ever, we rehearsed a lot with our actors before the shoot. We didn't do this as a read-through but on location by working on the situations and the moves. During this key process, Adèle came every day, asking lots of questions and coming up with ideas. She's at the same time spontaneous, unpredictable and light-hearted. She was so creative that she came up with options we hadn't thought of.

You also cast your 'fetish' actors, Olivier Gourmet and Jérémie Renier.

LD: We always enjoy working with them. In THE UNKNOWN GIRL, we also cast Thomas Doret who played Cyril, the kid in THE KID WITH A BIKE, Morgan Marinne who played Francis in THE SON and Fabrizio Rongione with whom we've worked several times. We also enjoyed working with Olivier Bonnaud, a young French actor who was a wonderful revelation.



A CONVERSATION WITH ADELE HAENEL

What did the Dardenne brothers mean to you before you shot **THE UNKNOWN GIRL**?

They unquestionably occupy an important place in the landscape of contemporary cinema history. I hadn't seen all of their films before we met – and I caught up with those I'd missed afterwards! – but I was familiar with some that had left a deep impression on me, including **THE PROMISE** and **TWO DAYS, ONE NIGHT**. Ever since I started out as an actress, I've been in arthouse movies. But considering the Dardennes' status, I was awestruck when they approached me. I didn't think it would ever happen to me.

What was your reaction when you read the script?

I was struck by the story's simplicity and depth. The Dardennes' work is very precise. They go straight to the point and have no use for window-dressing. You can feel this precision and lack of compromise from the script stage.

Can you define your character, Jenny?

She's no outstanding heroine – and I like that about her. We know hardly anything about her personal life. For me, the film is about Jenny's being reborn, to life and to herself, by reaching out to others. She is an empathetic listener and never looks down on anyone.

How did the Dardennes' directing methods help you portray this character?

When you have a good shorthand with your director, you don't need to talk so much. The brothers and I understood each other very well. The Dardennes don't load themselves down with psychology – with them, it's all about the body, listening and the characters' actions. I had to focus on what might seem like small details, although they're not – how do you put on medical gloves? How do you give an injection? I was so busy wondering how to actually do things that I didn't have time to think about Jenny's feelings. My performance had to be 'invisible' – anything else would have been completely inappropriate.

In THE UNKNOWN GIRL, as in any other film by the Dardennes, the social background is key.

I like films that evoke today's world. The characters are informed by their social standing and living conditions. This defines how they move on with their lives, how much they have faith in themselves and others, their health... Certain social classes are underrepresented in today's cinema. It's crucial that some directors, with the Dardennes in first place, address this issue.

The Dardennes are known to do a lot of rehearsing with their actors. What was your experience of the preparation process and of the shoot?

Their reputation for exhausting actors with countless takes is a myth. With them it's never about showing off your performance skills. I was constantly under the impression that things were moving fast. We had one month of preparation prior to the shoot, which was extremely important. All the cast members were gathered, which meant that those who didn't have much screen time immediately felt they belonged with us.

What else happens at this stage?

During rehearsals, the brothers focus intensely on how the actors move, on the situations the characters come up against, on the way they move the camera. Basically, that's when the essential directing work actually takes shape. Whenever a problem arises, they can think it over and find

a solution, so they don't have to deal with it on set. The preparation helped me to get rid of my concerns, although of course you still feel a certain pressure...

Does playing a doctor demand certain technical skills?

Throughout the preparation, I had a medical consultant with me – Martine, who's a doctor in real life. She taught me how to perform specific procedures and how to interact with patients – even though there's no magic formula.

What do you think you will keep from the experience?

With the Dardennes, I ventured into 'counterintuitive' territory, which was a crucial experience for me. They saw something in me beyond my anger. This is an integral part of me but it's not the whole story.

With THE UNKNOWN GIRL, you have a starring role in a film in competition at the Cannes Film Festival.

The Cannes Film Festival highlights a certain kind of film and it's important for those films to be screened there. But what makes me the proudest is nothing personal. I'm first and foremost proud of the film. If it wasn't at Cannes, I'd be no less proud.



ADÈLE HAENEL

FILMOGRAPHY

- 2002** **THE DEVILS**
Christophe Ruggia
- 2007** **WATER LILIES**
Céline Sciamma
- 2011** **IRIS IN BLOOM**
Valérie Mréjen
- HOUSE OF TOLERANCE**
Bertrand Bonello
- HEAT WAVE**
Jean-Jacques Jauffret
- THREE WORLDS**
Catherine Corsini
- 2012** **ALIYAH**
Elie Wajeman
- 2013** **SUZANNE**
Katell Quillévéré
César Award for Best Supporting Actress
- IN THE NAME OF MY DAUGHTER**
André Téchiné
- 2014** **LOVE AT FIRST FIGHT**
Thomas Cailley
César Award for Best Actress
- 2016** **LES OGRES**
Léa Fehner
- DIE BLUMEN VON GESTERN**
Chris Kraus
- ORPHELINE**
Arnaud des Pallières
- THE UNKNOWN GIRL**
Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne

JEAN-PIERRE AND LUC DARDENNE

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

Jean-Pierre Dardenne was born in Engis (Belgium) in April 1951. Luc Dardenne was born in Awirs (Belgium) in March 1954. They have directed numerous documentaries. In 1975, Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne founded the production company *Dérives*, which has to date produced more than 80 documentaries, including their own. In 1994, they established the production company *Les Films du Fleuve*.

1987 **FALSCH**

with Bruno Cremer

1992 **I THINK ABOUT YOU**

with Fabienne Babe, Robin Renucci

1996 **THE PROMISE**

with Jérémie Renier, Olivier Gourmet, Assita Ouédraogo

1999 **ROSETTA**

with Émilie Dequenne, Fabrizio Rongione, Anne Yernaux, Olivier Gourmet
Palme d'Or and Best Actress for Emilie Dequenne
Cannes Film Festival 1999

2002 **THE SON**

with Olivier Gourmet, Morgan Marinnie, Isabella Soupart
Best Actor for Olivier Gourmet - Cannes Film Festival 2002

2005 **THE CHILD**

with Jérémie Renier, Déborah François, Jérémie Ségard
Palme d'Or - Cannes Film Festival 2005

2008 **LORNA'S SILENCE**

with Arta Dobroshi, Jérémie Renier, Fabrizio Rongione
Best Screenplay - Cannes Film Festival 2008
Lux Prize - European Parliament 2008

2011 **THE KID WITH A BIKE**

with Cécile de France, Thomas Doret, Jérémie Renier
Grand Prix - Cannes Film Festival 2011

2014 **TWO DAYS, ONE NIGHT**

with Marion Cotillard, Fabrizio Rongione
European Film Award for Best Actress for Marion Cotillard - 2015

2016 **THE UNKNOWN GIRL**

with Adèle Haenel, Olivier Bonnaud





CREW

| | |
|------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Written and Directed by | JEAN-PIERRE AND LUC DARDENNE |
| 1 st Assistant Director | CAROLINE TAMBOUR |
| D.P. | ALAIN MARCOEN (S.B.C) |
| Camera Operator | BENOÎT DERVAUX |
| 1 st Camera Assistant | AMAURY DUQUENNE |
| Editor | MARIE-HÉLÈNE DOZO |
| Sound Engineer | JEAN-PIERRE DURET |
| Sound Editor | BENOÎT DE CLERCK |
| Sound Mixer | THOMAS GAUDER |
| Production Designer | IGOR GABRIEL |
| Costume Designer | MAÏRA RAMEDHAN-LEVI |
| Make-up | NATALI TABAREAU-VIEUILLE |
| Location Manager | GUILLAUME FERNANDEZ |
| Production Manager | OLIVIER ABRASSART |
| Stills Photographer | CHRISTINE PLENUS |
| Producers | JEAN-PIERRE AND LUC DARDENNE |
| | DENIS FREYD |
| Executive Producer | DELPHINE TOMSON |
| Coproducers | PETER BOUCKAERT |
| | BART VAN LANGENDONCK |
| Associate Producers | PHILIPPE LOGIE |
| | ARLETTE ZYLBERBERG |

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