

PARISIENNE

(PEUR DE RIEN)

A film by DANIELLE ARBID

with Manal ISSA, Vincent LACOSTE and Paul HAMY

WORLD SALES

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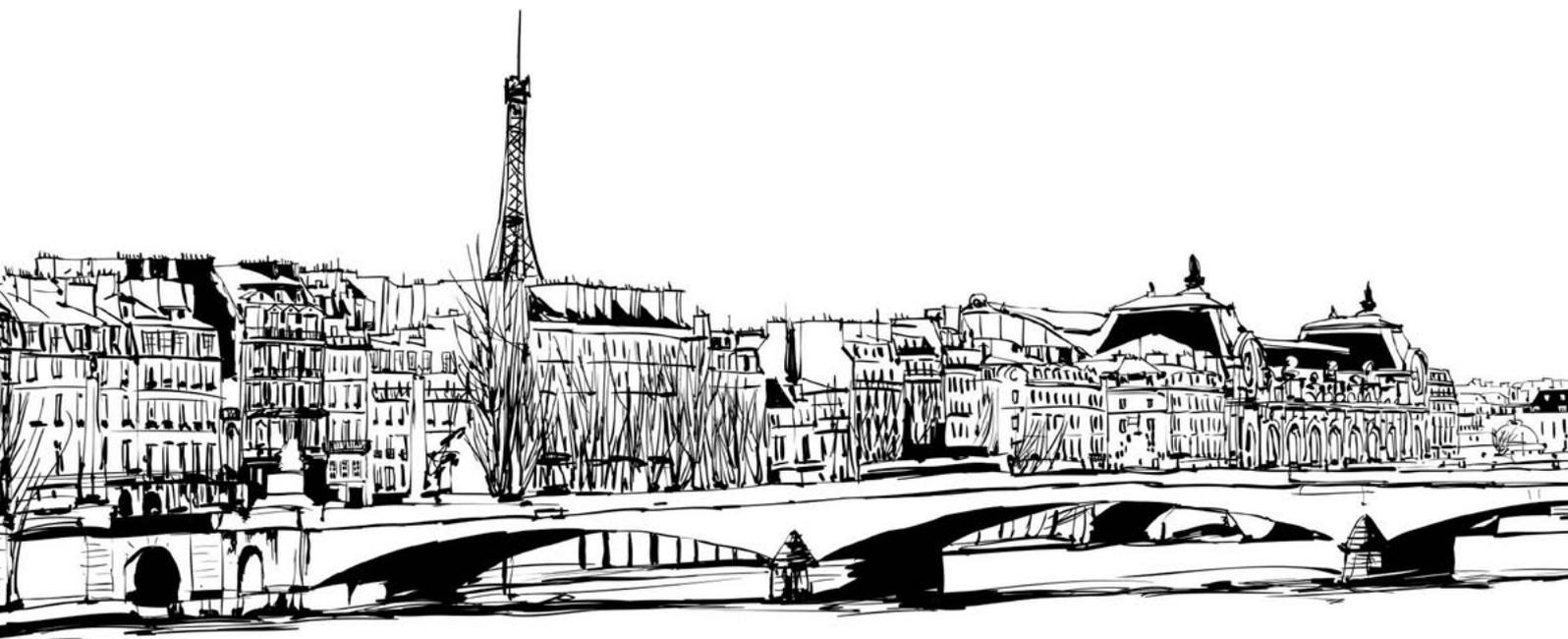
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France - 2015 - 119min - DCP - 1.85 - Dolby 5.1



SYNOPSIS

Lina, 19, arrives in Paris during the 90's. She is alone and lost. With nothing but fear and her natural instinct for self-preservation, she is looking for something she has never found in her home country Lebanon: freedom.





DANIELLE ARBID SPEAKS WITH ANNIE ERNAUX

Annie Ernaux is a major French writer published by Gallimard. Many of her works have been translated into English and published by Seven Stories Press.

Annie Ernaux: I was very touched by *PARISIENNE*, especially as I am writing a novel about a young woman who is also in late adolescence. My book is purely autobiographical, and I imagine that Lina, the protagonist, is also based in large part on your own experience.

Danielle Arbid: That's a nice coincidence, thank you... The French title *PEUR DE RIEN*, which means 'afraid of nothing', captures how I envisioned Lina. But in dealing with the aspects of her personal life I more or less followed the method I've used since my first feature film, *In the Battlefields*, meaning that I've taken my own experience and woven a fictional story around my memories. What I actually lived through might have been harsher or milder; it doesn't matter. I prefer allowing the passage of time to play a part in the creative process. Writing is a way to grapple with one's past experience, and that's even truer of filmmaking as it involves writing the script, selecting the actors, a vision in directing them and finally the editing process. So no, to answer your question this really isn't an autobiographical work. My goal here was to show how we are all shaped by the people we meet. I wanted to say 'Thank you' to the people who've shaped my life.

Annie Ernaux: That's one way in which autobiographical writing is very different from your approach...

Danielle Arbid: When you write, are you focused on accurately portraying reality or do you embroider? Personally, all of my films are rooted in my own life but they expand to include other people. For example, this is the first time that I've written a feature-length film shot in France, and there was never any question of telling a 'French' story without taking my own story into account.

I like the fact that the film transforms the reality of my memories. For example, *In the Battlefields* sometimes replaces images from my own childhood in my mind. As André Bazin said, cinema brings the world into line with our desires...that's one of the reasons it's so magical.

Annie Ernaux: Early on I would transform reality. In *Cleaned out* [The author's first novel, published by Gallimard in 1974], I re-imagined scenes from my life, as you do in your movies. Starting with *A Man's Place* I adopted a more precise, 'objective' style, far removed from what we usually think of as novelistic. What really counts for me is whether the story rings true and whether readers see themselves in it. This is the kind of truth that I see in your film, in the way you portray Lina's sentimental education and her efforts as a foreigner striving to find her place in France.

The great thing about your heroine is her ability to grow by incorporating what she learns about her adoptive country.

Danielle Arbid: The people and places Lina comes in contact with become a sort of mirror that she uses to develop her own character. It is this collision that I wanted to explore; the life

lived even before an immigrant has any legal ties to the new country, when she is struggling to carve out an identity. What is the first impression of France? How do people view the country upon their arrival?

Annie Ernaux: Your film admirably depicts the severe toll a legal procedure can take on a foreigner. This impression is clearly palpable in the police headquarters where they are applying for a resident's permit, or in the moving court scene at the end of the movie. There is a blend of fear and hope etched into their faces. But the film can also be viewed as a social inquiry into what it means to be a foreigner. For example, at the beginning of the film Lina is welcomed by a friend who is a student. However, we see in the reaction of this person's sister that when problems arise being an immigrant is an aggravating factor.

Danielle Arbid: That's right, they don't trust her, yet they help her when she finds herself without a place to stay. And then there's also the royalist student and her friend, Skin. Paradoxically, he helps Lina and she accepts without making a judgement. I like when characters in a film are multi-dimensional.

Through these various encounters I wanted to relate how I discovered the political left and right in France. True, this might have been more pronounced in 1993, when the film is set, than it is today! Back then people were still talking about a revolution... I also wanted to tell about the left and right I discovered in the west. We don't have the same thing in the Middle-East, where political affiliations tend to be dictated by clans.

Annie Ernaux: Lina explains that she suffered more from family conflicts than from the war raging in Lebanon at that time. In my view, this is a universal truth for any adolescent with growing pains, as well as for adults in their day-to-day lives.

Danielle Arbid: *PARISIENNE* is above all a film about growing up youth, as the main character is 18 and has an instinctive desire to live the way she wants. Being young means grappling with the upheaval of discovering who you are. And I also wanted to make the most honest film I could about immigration. The result is a film about a young immigrant yearning to live her life.

In general, films about immigration have protagonists who are focused on their past: *PARISIENNE* looks to the future. That was what I did when I arrived here. It is often other people who won't allow immigrants to shake free of their roots. Lina's problem is finding people, an adoptive family composed of friends and lovers; in short, a world made up of people like her – or one that corresponds to an ideal. So she sets out on a quest.

Annie Ernaux: Your story has a universal scope: it speaks to all foreign-born French people as well as to adolescents trying to find their place in the world they're living in. The entire film is guided by Lina's sentimental – and cultural – education.

Danielle Arbid: That could explain why it was hard to secure the financing. Most people we asked to help fund the film

didn't understand this need of hers to have everything at once (laughs)... They didn't get why Lina, who moreover is of Arabic origin, fell in love not with one man but with three.

Annie Ernaux: As if it was the entire world! (laughs)

Danielle Arbid: Thank you! For Lina, it is a way of falling in love with this new world, France. Each of these men represents a different class, universe, or desire. Each one plays a role in her development.

Annie Ernaux: After having read the synopsis of your film, I was wondering if Lina's uncle, who welcomes her in France and tries to take advantage of her, was the first of the three men she meets.

Danielle Arbid: In a certain sense, this uncle is the first male pillar in the foundation of Lina's new life. Without being aware of it, he influences her future by triggering her decision to run away. I decided to respect the characters of both Lina and her uncle when I filmed this initial confrontation. The scene establishes the heroine's inner strength, as she is 'afraid of nothing' when faced with this imposing, somewhat violent and sexually aggressive man.

Annie Ernaux: You never judge the behavior of Lina or of the other characters. This is so important! In life, people often act without analyzing their true motivations. I always follow this rule when I write: who am I to judge?

Danielle Arbid: I prefer grey rather than black and white in cinema. And in life. I refuse to pass judgement on the characters in the film, including the uncle. Each one has a reason for their behavior. The uncle finds himself alone one evening with Lina, who is 18, beautiful and not a blood relation – why wouldn't he make a pass at her? The actor playing the role came to understand that I wanted him to defend the truth of the character. My approach was the same when I filmed Lina's turbulent reunion with her family in Lebanon. The mother is tired of her children and her sick husband...but she is affectionate. Our view of other people, and ourselves, is constantly evolving; why try and depict this process as being static?

Annie Ernaux: The scene where Lina is in the car with her mother and brother, who are constantly arguing, is quite violent. It explains everything about why she wanted to pick up and move away.

Danielle Arbid: Lina is right to want to escape from this stifling situation, where she never would have had a chance to be herself. That said I never wanted the audience to pity or condemn her: I wanted *PARISIENNE* to be a positive film above all.

My first few years in France were harder and more isolated than what Lina goes through. I wrote and directed this film after having taken a long look at what I had gone through. And ultimately my experience was positive. It's in that sense that *PARISIENNE* is a re-creation, looking back from who I am and what I feel today. When I arrived here, I too met some exceptional people; after months in the desert I finally found an oasis. France does not exist in a vacuum; people make it what it is.

Annie Ernaux: That's a key point, one that has brought us together, on which we both agree completely.

Danielle Arbid: I knew you through your work before we met two years ago. I carried *Simple Passion* [Published by Gallimard in 1991] around with me for months and gave a copy to each of my friends in love! In a short book you convey some essential truths by telling an intimate story that strikes a chord in us all.

Annie Ernaux: In Spanish, the title was translated *Pura Pasión*, probably because it only deals with the heroine's emotions and thoughts.

Danielle Arbid: That's what I found so appealing: the emotions dominate the story.

Annie Ernaux: When Lina meets Jean-Marc, I felt a real empathy for her even though I hated everything about this man.

Danielle Arbid: And yet I was convinced that you would be charmed by him!

Annie Ernaux: Physically, yes (laughs). But what he represents doesn't appeal to me in the least!

Danielle Arbid: And yet in *Simple Passion* you said that you were attracted to men who liked power and had a taste for luxury.

Annie Ernaux: It's true that I did hunger after those things... when I was an adolescent (laughs).

Danielle Arbid: I would still defend Jean-Marc: he's a man who needs to go from woman to woman without settling down. I suppose that could be viewed as a bit of a cliché. But that's the gateway to fiction: an image that gradually takes shape via other men. When I first came to France I thought that French men were like those I had read about in my classes on Marivaux or Proust. All romantic!

Annie Ernaux: He could symbolize the image of French charm: self-confident, assured and with a penchant for rendezvous in chic restaurants and chateaux.

Danielle Arbid: Yes and such men do exist. But it's the last man with whom Lina has an adventure – the one played by Vincent Lacoste – who is the most deeply rooted in his times.

Annie Ernaux: I like the fact that you don't resolve the ambiguity of Lina's character: we don't know if she is attracted to Jean-Marc's wealth or his self-confidence. There is no superfluous psychological explanation; she simply goes with her feeling when she meets him.

Danielle Arbid: This is a story of sexual initiation. Moreover, I've always had trouble filming spoken dialogue, especially when actions speak so eloquently. I prefer filming a sex scene to an endless discussion in a café! *PARISIENNE* is my 'talkiest' film, which shows that I'm becoming a real French director (laughs). But Lina doesn't focus on Jean-Marc's

money; she is bewitched by his smile.

Annie Ernaux: Of the three men in the picture my favorite is Julien, perhaps because he reminds me of some men I've known – one in particular, who was younger than me. He writes Lina this wonderful letter in which he tells her how happy he is to 'be something of a stranger'. And yet he also has this bizarre idea of putting music on when he wants to sleep with her; for me that kills everything (laughs).

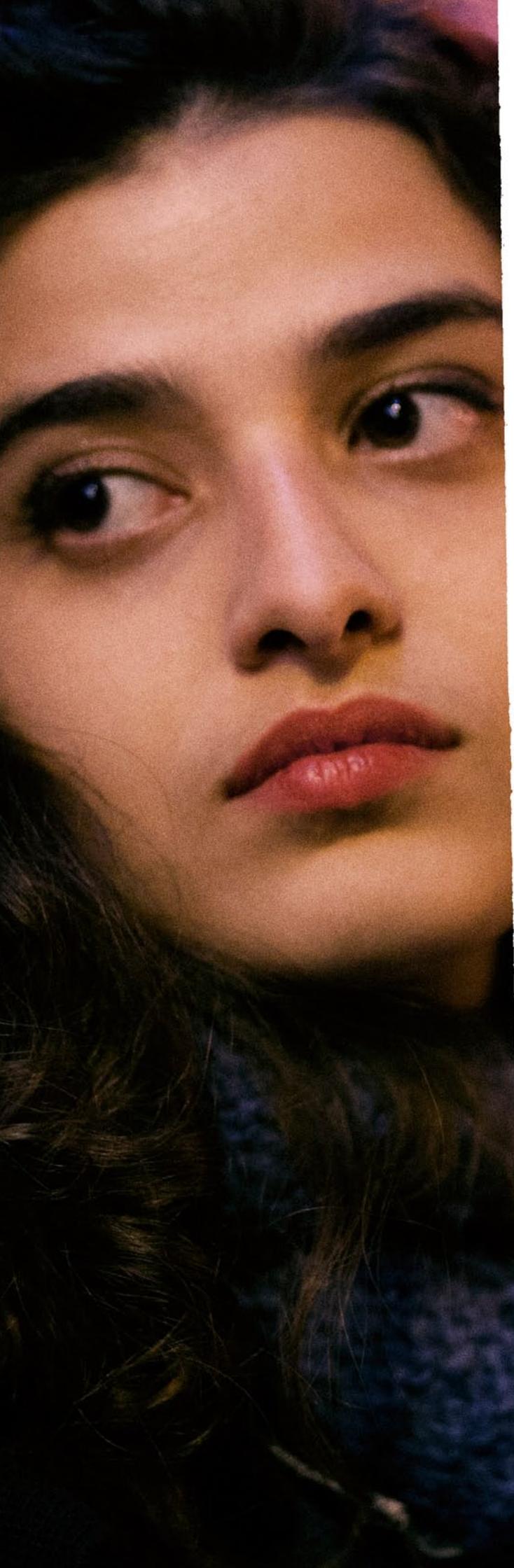
Danielle Arbid: I don't find that so corny (laughs). Lina and Julien discover each other at a moment in their lives when they are independent of everything and everyone. Julien has an itch to travel constantly; he's a wounded spirit, a poet. He has something of the actor who plays him, Damien Chapelle. Even though Julien leaves, we can imagine him coming back some day.

Annie Ernaux: Was it hard to find an actress who corresponded to your idea of Lina?

Danielle Arbid: Three months before filming began I was still looking for a young girl who had that special something I was looking for and who reminded me of myself at that age. I suppose all directors are looking for that. I threw myself into a vast casting process, both in France and Lebanon, and received 700 applications. I met with 100 or so actresses and was struck by Manal Issa. She was 21 and had an enigmatic personality. She came from a Lebanese family of Muslim origin who had been in France for five years, and she was somewhat withdrawn. Manal was not used to socializing with young French people because her parents were afraid that she would drift away from her roots and become westernized. I filmed the sex scene between her and Paul Hamy the first week of shooting and Manal broke down in tears. She confided that she was crying because she finally felt that she was free! Experiencing the growth of her character was a visceral experience for Manal; she watched Paul, and then Damien and finally Vincent, with the same intensity as Lina. She told me that her father had forbidden her from going to the casting because I have a bad reputation in Lebanon, where my films are banned by censors. And it's because Manal's father didn't want her to come that she did! In that sense she was a lot like Lina. And this film was a liberating experience for her in many personal ways. She had just finished her engineering studies but did not want to return and live with her parents.

Annie Ernaux: The emancipation of Lina, and that of Manal as well, is very moving. It brought back memories even though what I lived through and wrote about was very different. I was 18 in 1958. This desire for freedom was strongly felt but couldn't be expressed as easily. The revolution came with contraception, the pill and abortion. In my day, we thought we only had two options: virginity and marriage; the idea that women could have pleasure was not recognized. That said, having lived as I have in another France doesn't prevent me from feeling empathy and understanding for a young woman like Lina, because aspirations haven't changed. They were also the same, for example, in Marivaux's time: his heroines had the same desire for life, emancipation and curiosity. Only the obstacles change, depending on the time period.

Danielle Arbid: What I find moving is that there is a real



connection between us in that we both escaped from a sealed universe to spread our wings. In my case I left behind a country, Lebanon, with its war and its religious strife, while you broke free from a narrow provincial life.

Annie Ernaux: Yes, you could have said godforsaken hole (laughs). But sometimes creativity and imagination can be fueled by a feeling of captivity.

Danielle Arbid: Hence the dream of freeing ourselves from our physical limitations and eliminating geographical and social boundaries. There is this need to escape that drives people to re-invent themselves – to do everything not to be stifled by these constraints. When you make that decision to leave, you have to be ready to put up a fight, first and foremost with your family, which can be a prison in and of itself...

Annie Ernaux: Religion, as I experienced it, is another potent prison. This need to break free is hard to explain: it doesn't just miraculously hit you when you wake up one day; it's more a feeling, a conviction within you pushing you to escape. I felt it at the age of 12.

Danielle Arbid: I had the same feeling, even though I wasn't thinking about France in particular. This certainty that I had to leave only grew stronger as time passed. It was an obsession!

Annie Ernaux: My parents never encouraged me to leave but my mother did represent an opening to the world. Writing only entered the picture much later...

Danielle Arbid: I was trying to find out how I could leave. And where to go. When I was a little girl, I saw on TV in Lebanon, during the war, foreign journalists coming and going, so I chose this path. It was a purely strategic decision (laughs).

Annie Ernaux: Studying was the key for me! Throughout my life I've always looked for the best way to get myself out of seemingly inextricable situations. At times this is done somewhat unconsciously or in fairly convoluted ways. For example, I wrote the book *A Frozen Woman* because this was the only solution I found to escape from the marital cocoon (laughs). Desire is the most powerful of engines to fully live one's life.

Danielle Arbid: It also takes courage to accept that one is driven by such desire. The bill can be steep. But in my view liberation has no price, and artistic creation becomes a great way of expressing yourself to appreciate the road travelled.

The conversation was transcribed by Philippe Paumier

DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Born in Beirut in 1970, Danielle Arbid left her country at the age of 17 to study literature in Paris. In 1997 she started making films. Selected by the most important festivals in France and around the world (Cannes, New York, San Francisco, Locarno, Pusan, Tokyo, etc.) her two first feature films *In the Battlefields* and *A Lost Man* have successively been selected for the Quinzaine des réalisateurs at the Cannes film festival in 2004 and 2007 and won numerous prizes including Director's Fortnight-Europa award and Le Grand prix de Milan. Her films like *Alone with War* or *On Borders* and the series *Living Room Conversations* have received both critical and public acclaim as well as several awards including the Golden Leopard and Silver Leopard at the Locarno film festival as well as the Albert Londres prize and a grant from the Villa Medici. Her work has been the focus of several retrospective screenings, notably the Bastia festival in 2006, Paris Cinéma in 2007, the 2007 Gijon festival, and at La Rochelle festival in 2008. In 2011 Danielle Arbid directed her third feature *Beirut Hotel*, produced by the french television channel Arte. The film was premiered in the official competition of Locarno film festival, and was a great public success.

DIRECTOR'S FILMOGRAPHY

FEATURE FILMS

Beirut Hotel [2011 - 35mm, 1h39']

Un homme perdu / A lost man [2007 - 35mm, 1h37']

Dans les champs de bataille / In the battlefields [2004 - 35mm, 1h30']

DOCUMENTARIES

Aux frontières / On Borders [2002, Beta num, 60']

Seule avec la guerre / Alone with war [2000, Beta num. 60']

VIDÉO ESSAYS

This smell of sex [2008, Beta num, 21']

Nous / Nihna / Us [2004, Beta num, 13']

Conversation de Salon 1, 2 et 3 [2003/04, Beta num, 3x10']

Conversation de Salon 4, 5 et 6 [2009, Beta num, 3x10']

SHORT AND MEDIUM LENGTH FILMS

Étrangère [2002 - 35mm, 46']

Le passeur [1999 - S16mm, 13']

Raddem [1998 - S16mm, 17']



PROFILE PRODUCTION COMPANY **LES FILMS PÉLLEAS**

Les Films Pelléas was set up in 1990 by Philippe Martin with the allowance granted by the Hachette Foundation. In 1996, the Georges de Beauregard Prize for Young Producer was awarded to him. The company now regroups two producers : Philippe Martin and David Thion. Les Films Pelléas focus on feature films directed by young (Mia Hansen-Løve, Serge Bozon, Axelle Ropert,...) or experienced filmmakers (Pierre Salvadori, Nicole Garcia, Christophe Honoré,...). Les Films Pelléas have produced more than 60 feature films to date.

CAST

Lina	Manal ISSA
Rafaël	Vincent LACOSTE
Jean-Marc	Paul HAMY
Julien	Damien CHAPELLE
Mrs. Gagnebain	Dominique BLANC
Mr. Lermenier	Alain LIBOLT
Antonia	Clara PONSOT
Victoire	India HAIR
Arnaud	Bastien BOUILLON
Julien's friend	ORELSAN
The immigrant	Elina LÖWENSOHN
Frédérique	Mathilde BISSON
The uncle	Waleed ZUAITER
The aunt	Darina AL JOUNDI

CREW

Produced by	David THION and Philippe MARTIN
Director	Danielle ARBID
Script	Danielle ARBID and Julie PEYR
Cinematography	Helene LOUVART
Production Design	Charlotte DE CADEVILLE
Editing	Mathilde MUYARD
Sound	Emmanuel ZOUKI and Jean CASANOVA
Music	Bachar MAR-KHALIFE
Costume Design	Claire DUBIEN
Soundtrack	Etienne DAHO, Frank BLACK, NOIR DÉSIR, SIOUXSIE AND THE BANSHEES, Bachar MAR-KHALIFE and Damien CHAPPELLE

