



PREVIEW

La Mif (The Fam)

+ Q&A with director Fred Baillif, and actors Anaïs Uldry and Claudia Grob

Written and directed by Fred Baillif, *La Mif* is an intimate, naturalistic drama that offers a glimpse of life within a residential care home for at-risk teenage girls. The powerful and moving film received its world premiere at last year's Berlin International Film Festival, where it won the Grand Prix for Best Film in the Generation 14plus competition. At the Zurich Film Festival it won the Golden Eye in the Focus Competition and the Ecumenical Film Prize of the Zurich Churches.

La Mif (mif is the French slang word for family) is set in a residential care home in Geneva, where a group of teenage girls from difficult backgrounds live as a community with social workers. Sharing joy and pain, the forced 'family' experience creates unexpected tensions and intimacies. When an incident arises, the fall-out reveals the weaknesses of the outdated contemporary social care system.

The film was developed over a period of two years by Fred Baillif, a former social worker, with the collaboration of non-professional actors made up of residents and staff of a children's home. The ensemble cast includes Claudia Grob, Anaïs Uldry, Kassia Da Costa, Joyce Esther Ndayisenga, Charlie Areddy, Amélie Tonsi, Amandine Golay and Sara Tulu, who deliver moving and dynamic performances.

Exploring its characters' stories individually and collectively, *La Mif* is an empathetic and emotional examination of the juvenile care system, ploughing the line between documentary and fiction.

Director's statement

In search of natural performances and undiscovered talents, I have developed a direct cinema style based on real people and improvisation. This process started here with individual interviews with each of the residents and the employees of a children's home. We then carried out improv workshops over two years, which progressively allowed characters to emerge. I gathered all the elements that had come out and wrote a script. It didn't have dialogues, but a general plot, an outline and some punchlines. The director of the children's home, Claudia Grob (Lora), shared with me her strong frustration towards the youth protection system and doing so, she extremely inspired me.

Most of the scenes take place within the real children's home, which allowed us to work in a flexible way in an environment that was familiar to them. With this choice, the boundaries with documentary were blurred and made the setting an essential aspect of the story. After two years of preparation, the lack of written dialogue prevented us from getting classic funding options but the girls were becoming adults so we decided to shoot the film anyway. In just over two weeks, the film was shot with 20,000 CHF [Swiss francs] of mine, which made me the producer.

All the dialogues were improvised and our flexibility allowed us to adapt the story to the actors' performances. In the editing phase, like in a documentary, the story evolved again based on what was captured. A first edit made the local fundraising possible, reaching RTS, Cinéforom and BAK with around half a million CHF.

Even though Claudia Grob was to be the lead character, my desire to show various points of views pushed me in the direction of a hyperlink film.

The young girls all had equal opportunities to occupy the story, depending on their desires and their inspiration in the moment while shooting. Alongside, the social workers also agreed to be part of the film and to interpret characters that would be close to their reality.

This is what I tried to achieve artistically. Moreover, this film is a social work project. These girls with intense backgrounds had to be heard, whether they had suffered abuse or not. Therefore, I trusted them through the process of being part of the film from the beginning.

Production notes

Fred Baillif describes his Berlinale award-winning docudrama as 'a hyperlink film'. The term may sound clinical and impersonal, and it belies the turbulent intimacy he and the young cast of *La Mif* – residents and staff of a Swiss children's home – bring to the material. He's actually referring to how the film's action is replayed across its individual sections, spooling consecutively through seven girls, with their specific traumas and troubles, and finally Lora (Claudia Grob), the home's director, battling her own demons. Events gradually reveal different perspectives and motivations. But this is no puzzle to solve; there is no ultimate truth around which to coalesce. It's a mosaic whose pieces only reveal how fractured and fragile is the system within which they all exist.

Baillif, himself a former social worker, collaborated with his non-professional cast over two years, encouraging discussions about their lives, facilitating improvisations and then designing an outline (alongside co-writer Stéphane Mitchell) from which they can extrapolate on camera. It's a bold, patient approach that pays off handsomely. None of these young women play themselves – each uses a fictional name. But the nuances in slang dialogue (*la mif* is a quasi-reversal of *famille*), in rough-hewn attire – spiky, lovelorn Alison (Amélie Tonsi) sports socks with an 'I Don't Give a F***' logo – or in the hair-trigger physicality of combative Brazilian Novinha (Kassia Da Costa), ground us in the veracity of the world depicted.

The film doesn't shy away from its residents' more problematic behaviour. And given that the spectre of sexual abuse by adults haunts several of the girls, it shows up the inadequacies of the care system's handling of cause and effect. Ultimately, though, this is no mere hand-wringing exercise but an ebullient, creative, often very funny and tender slice of life. Baillif's elegant linking of his raw vignettes by excerpts from Bach and Mozart points towards an emphasis on drama as much as documentary, invested as much in its vibrant young performances as in its indignant exposé of social care.

Leigh Singer, *Sight and Sound*, March 2022

LA MIF (THE FAM)

Director: Fred Baillif
©: Freshprod
Production Company: Freshprod
In association with: Luna Films
In co-production with the: RTS
With the participation of: Cinéforom
and the support of the: Loterie Romande, Freestudios – Genève
Presented by: Freshprod
Producer: Fred Baillif
Screenplay: Fred Baillif
in collaboration with: Stéphane Mitchell
Director of Photography: Joseph Areddy
Editor: Fred Baillif
Art Director: Mary Villars
Costume Designer: Lucy Mann

Cast

Claudia Grob (Lora)
Anaïs Uldry (Audrey)
Kassia Da Costa (Novinha)
Joyce Esther Ndayisenga (Précieuse)
Charlie Areddy (Justine)
Amélie Tonsi (Alison)
Amandine Golay (Caroline)
Sara Tulu (Tamra)
Frédéric Landenberg (Sébastien)
Merlin Landenberg (Charles)
Blaise Granget (François)

Switzerland 2021©
110 mins

A BFI release

IN PERSON & PREVIEWS

A Tribute to Roger Michell: Preview: The Duke + Q&A with actor Jim Broadbent and producer Nicky Latham
Thu 24 Feb 18:00
BFI Expanded: World Premiere: UNIQUE
Fri 25 Feb 19:00 and 20:30
Woman with a Movie Camera Preview: Ali & Ava + Q&A with writer-director Clio Barnard
Mon 28 Feb 20:20
Preview: Rebel Dread + Q&A with Don Letts
Thu 3 Mar 18:00
Doctor Who: Revelation of the Daleks
Sat 5 Mar 12:00
Mark Kermode Live in 3D at the BFI
Mon 7 Mar 18:10
Woman with a Movie Camera Preview: a True Things + Q&A with director Harry Wootliff
Mon 7 Mar 20:35
TV Preview: Gentleman Jack Series 2 + Q&A with writer Sally Wainwright and actors Suranne Jones and Sophie Rundle
Wed 9 Mar 18:10
TV Preview: Inside No. 9 + Q&A with creators Reece Shearsmith and Steve Pemberton, and executive producer Adam Tandy
Fri 11 Mar 20:40

REGULAR PROGRAMME

BFI Future Film Festival
17-20 Feb
Seniors’ Free Matinee: The Night of the Hunter + intro by BFI programmer David Somerset
Mon 21 Feb 14:00
Member Picks: Close Encounters of the Third Kind
Wed 23 Feb 17:50
Terror Vision: The People under the Stairs
Thu 24 Feb 20:40
Relaxed Screening: Keep the Change + discussion
Mon 28 Feb 20:10
Projecting the Archive: A Question of Adultery + intro by BFI Curator Josephine Botting
Tue 1 Mar 18:20
Member Picks: Evita
Fri 4 Mar 17:50
African Odysseys: From the Caribbean to West Africa: Edric Connor’s Travelogues
Sun 6 Mar 14:00-16:30
Silent Cinema: The Joker (Jokeren) + intro by BFI Curator Bryony Dixon
Sun 6 Mar 15:00
Experimenta: Ticket of No Return + pre-recorded intro remembering Tabea Blumenschein with Ulrike Ottinger
Tue 8 Mar 18:00
Film Wallahs: The Beatles and India + intro by co-director Pete Compton and producer Reynold D’Silva
Thu 10 Mar 18:15

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