

PLAYGROUND

Belgium (2021) 72 minutes

Director: Laura Wandel

Cast: Maya Vanderbeque (Nora)
Gunter Duret (Abel)
Karim Leklou (the father)



Screening 1st March 2023 at Swindon Arts Centre

Synopsis

When 7-year-old Nora witnesses her older brother, Abel, being bullied by other children, she rushes to protect him. Yet Abel forces her to remain silent. This creates a dilemma for Nora who tries to find her place, torn between children's and adults' worlds.

Reviews



...As her dad (Karim Leklou) leaves her at the gates of her new school, seven-year-old Nora (Maya Vanderbeque) tentatively makes her way across the grey playground, alone and just barely holding back tears. The camera sticks close by her from behind, the frame filled with her outsized backpack while the school yard is out of focus...

...We are plunged into Nora's perspective; teachers and supervisors are pairs of indistinct towering legs, while the older children are looming gangly creatures of arbitrary violence and cruelty. *Playground* never leaves the boundaries of the school, emphasising its monolithic inescapability. It's a terrifying, disorienting world and a reminder of a universal experience that is all too forgotten in the rose-tinted remembrances of adulthood...

Christopher Machell, Cinevue

... From the start it feels like a beautifully shot documentary, and some of it kind of is — Wandel filmed so much, sometimes the kids forgot the camera was there, and just kept talking, playing. Vanderbeque is impossibly great, not a shred of artifice on show. And the film-making itself feels almost invisible, all shot from Vanderbeque's eye-level, the camera strapped to cinematographer Frédéric Noirhomme's waist. *Playground* literally does not look down on these kids, placing us right in the trenches with them, closely, intimately, meaning we're more engulfed by their world than observing it. And much of the time we barely see the bullies, the camera staying on the faces of the bullied. It is acutely empathetic film-making ...

... A claustrophobic portrait of pre-adolescent turmoil, this is an exceptionally taut drama. It's Wandel's debut feature, and it feels like she's been preparing for it her whole life.

Alex Godfrey, Empire

Film Facts

- *Playground's* director, Laura Wandel, spent five years researching primary school behaviours through visiting schools, talking to parents and teachers, before writing the screenplay for the film.
- It was selected as Belgium's entry for the Best International Feature Film at the 94th Academy Awards.

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