



For A Woman

A film by Diane Kurys

*"[A] beautifully crafted historical melodrama...
Thierry is luminous in a complex yet understated role!"*
—Boyd van Hoeij, **The Hollywood Reporter**



**France / 2013 / Drama / French with English Subtitles
110 min / 2.35:1**

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FULL SYNOPSIS

Anne has a very active imagination, only natural for a writer. But in her mid-thirties, she still knows practically nothing of her own family's past. After her mother's death, Anne discovers old photos and letters that convince her to take a closer look at the life of her parents, Michael and Léna. The young couple met in the concentration camps during World War II, later moving to France to start their new life together. Soon, Anne's research into their Jewish history and their ties to Lyon's communist party reveals the existence of a mysterious uncle, Jean, whom everyone seems intent on forgetting entirely. As she gradually closes in on the discovery she didn't know she was looking for, her father grows ever more ill, and may take the secret that kept them apart for so long to his grave. In a journey that stretches from post-war France to the 1980s, Anne's destiny intertwines with her father's past until they form a single, unforgettable story.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

In her mid-thirties, Anne still knows practically nothing of her family's past. After her mother's death, Anne discovers old photos and letters that convince her to take a closer look at her parents' life after the concentration camps of World War II. Her research reveals the existence of a mysterious uncle everyone seems intent on forgetting entirely. As she closes in on a discovery she didn't expect, her father grows ever more ill, and may take the family secret to his grave. In a journey that stretches from post-war France and to the 1980s, Anne's destiny intertwines with her father's past until they form a single, unforgettable story.

LOGLINE

On the death of her mother, Anne makes an unsettling discovery: an old photo will cast doubt on her very origins, as she uncovers a mysterious uncle her parents welcomed into their lives after World War II. In revealing a family secret, Anne unravels the story that connects her destiny and her past.

FESTIVALS AND AWARDS

OFFICIAL SELECTION:
Brussels Film Festival

AN INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR DIANE KURYS

You've been considering this project for quite a long time, haven't you?

Yes, without knowing it. After *Sagan*, I wondered what would inspire and excite me enough to keep me entertained for three or four years. In stumbling upon a picture at the bottom of a drawer, I realized that I wanted to immerse myself in my childhood and the story of my family. I noticed that we had quite a bit of information, but had never really understood it all. The date written on the back of this old photograph spoke to me. I had an uncle whose name would come up sometimes in conversations. I knew vaguely that he had stayed with us for a few years, but I did not know when. Finding this photo of him and my mother, I realized his time in our home fit with when I was conceived, and a period when my parents were angry with him. There was a family mystery I wanted to dig into.

Moreover, from the broad scope of history, we plunge into your private world...

From the outset, I imagined a generic storyline composed of personal photos which evoke a family album. Towards the end of the montage, I wanted to incorporate pictures of my own films, as I am told that there is a logic entangled in the course of my characters and in my own life, all mixed up! In fact, *Peppermint Soda*, *Entre Nous*, *C'est La Vie* and *For a Woman* make up a coherent whole that could be called "my origins."

You have a fondness for the past and period films.

It is true that I cannot talk about the contemporary period - I am more at ease with the past. *Après l'amour* is the first film that I chose to situate in the present: it was in 1990 and I felt it would be outdated before its release! TV is faster than us...period films are more resilient in retaining something timeless.

Can we say that this is a fictionalized autobiography?

I don't know. I am part of characters that have existed in all my films, but I totally reinvent them by giving them goals, desires and feelings that are the fruit of my imagination. So, it's all true and nothing is true at the same time. What struck me most is that this story gave me the opportunity to meet the men and women - all missing today - and allowed me to try to understand them. Imagine their lives, their moments of weakness, their hopes and doubts. Give them hope in others to recognize something in themselves, that was my goal. Leave a trace. To make this portrait of my parents, their friends, this time - my goal was to leave a small trace of them intact. I love this quote from Alfred de Vigny in a poem, speaking of his ancestors: "If I write their story, they descend from me."

The film sometimes takes the form of an introspective investigation, even a bit suspenseful...

This is true, even though I was afraid the mystery remains unsatisfied, since after the account Anne renounces the truth. But I think it is sufficiently supported by the emotion aroused by her relationship with her father - the missed opportunities, the questions she has throughout her "investigation" may remain unanswered. She no longer needs to know, because death has finally allowed her to "meet" her father. I did not try to stretch the movie to the revelation of a

family secret, because ultimately the investigation is an excuse to explore feelings of the characters.

Talk about the relationship with the father through the film.

As *Entre Nous* was a film about my mother, so this film speaks of my father – this man I misunderstood and who, it seems, I resemble. Even if I'm told that he might not be my father, I identified with him and I felt the need to do him justice, to "know" him through a film, since I had known him so little in life. *For A Woman* is the portrait of a man betrayed. By his brother, by his woman, by the Communist party, by life...

Michel is an idealist who believes in the future, maybe blindly...

Men of his generation were steeped certainties: when he has his first daughter and has the sense of building a family, Michel is reassured – he is finally a part of something concrete and solid. For him, the path to freedom and love is all mapped out. He is convinced that the Communist Party is going to save the world, Lena is convinced that she will stay with him and he will make her happy. She thinks of him as something she needs to protect, enclose and water as a plant!

In contrast, Jean turns from the past with eyes wide open.

Michel and Jean are brothers, and yet are constructed in opposition. At the same time, what I liked is that they do not know each other well at all. So much so that we wonder if he is really his brother, and Michel himself has doubts. I must say that Jean is a complex character with multiplies red herrings and lies: he begins to believe he has not deserted, then later he says he works for the Red Army secret service and is responsible for returning dissidents in the West. While really, the truth lies elsewhere.

Lena seems halfway between these two men – a cheerful temperament while clear about her chances of happiness with Michel.

She is driven by a real appetite for life and a simplicity that projects into the future. Besides, I did not want to reveal much of her past: we understand she comes from the same culture as her husband and we guess she lost her family during the war. Because Michel saved her life by marrying her, she is attached to him, but there's a ten year age difference between them and a gulf separates them: she is frivolous; he would like her to read *Le Capital* while she's only interested in novels; she wants to be free and to work, and would like him at home more. They do not have the same tastes, but he loves her. This doesn't prevent him from losing her...

The film is also a wonderful story of love and struggle between two brothers for the same woman...

Instinctively, when Lena sees Michel's brother has arrived in the house, she feels that there is a danger in an almost animalistic way, and she implicitly asks Michel to prevent him from doing something irreparable. Similarly, we feel that Jean cannot resist when their hands graze or their eyes meet. What I liked was the idea of the slow progression of desire in each of them: an unbearable tension to which they nevertheless will give in to, until the climax of the scene at the hotel.

At times you play on contrasts, as in the scene on the edge of the water, the appearance of light and sun...

I like to take the viewer far along in one direction and then surprise them. This is what I like when I see a movie: situations filled with unexpected surprises. And don't make me feel the staging or the effort to get there. This is what I like to do when I turn a scene: above all, don't let them see the seams. We surprise ourselves when we write a script, how the characters come to life in spite of ourselves and as we are the first witness of the history we create, we want to be surprised above all.

The significance of communism in the postwar years, as well as Mitterand's time, plays a large role in the film.

The story takes place in 1947, when the French Communist Party has won elections and has reached its peak. When they refuse to support the war in Indochina and encourage the strike at Renault, the Communist ministers are forced to leave the government in May of the same year. They return in 1981, and history will repeat a three decades difference: "liberal" Mitterrand, the PCF with George Marchais, decides to relinquish power once again in May 1984. Thirty years separate the two periods, the famous war boom. The film is thus in two highlights of the post-war communism. It was exciting to explore this time when Stalin and Thorez made the headlines.

How did you choose Benoît Magimel for the role of Michel?

First, he looks like my father - which can be seen as soon as the credits start - with his blond hair and blue eyes. And I love it! I worked with him in *The Children of the Century* where he was a very young man, and I wanted to find someone more adult for this role. I like his fragility, and his madness, but also his sense of listening and openness. Benoît has a bright skin. I am fascinated by the way he fully engages and his constant research. When you see the daily footage, he's capable of changing his mind, starting and stopping to the point that he sometimes left his costars unbalanced.

How did he change physically for the role?

He gained a bit of weight for the role. For scenes where he is supposed to be 80 years old, I had planned to use another actor, but Benoît wouldn't have it! The long hours were particularly difficult for him because the hot makeup was terrible: I remember one night, when this kind of latex mask under which he had suffocated the whole day was removed, he sweat off all at once at least a liter of water that gushed like a geyser! He was outright drained from shooting.

Melanie Thierry plays Lena.

It was difficult to find Lena because she has already been played before - including by Isabelle Huppert and Nathalie Baye. I had a pretty clear vision for the character and at the same time Melanie quickly became obligatory: she has a lot of talent, grace and range of emotion, and incredible knowledge of cinema. She makes a very believable young woman in a post-war era and is totally believable in the couple she forms with Benoît. I love the view of her across the apartment in her red dress with white polka dots. From film to film, they are all my Lena...

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Nicolas Duvauchelle is amazing in the role of Jean

Absolutely! He surprised me with his instincts and incredible ability to concentrate. And he has an extraordinary presence. This was a real challenge because it's not easy to embody this mysterious character from the East, and he makes it credible with his anger and desire for revenge. I think it comes naturally, and the duo he formed with Clement Sibony works very well.

How did you put together this family?

It was necessary that everyone looks a bit alike for us to believe in it! It was the small Tania who becomes the bubbly Julie Ferrier that settles all questions. They all have blue eyes and a little family resemblance. Sylvie Testud, that's supposed to be me in the film. I immediately thought about her when I was writing the scenes. First, because our meeting on *Sagan* gave birth to true friendship, and also because she's a great actress and she is funny and smart. I could see that!

And Clotilde Hesme?

Madeleine is fantastic, this character who heralds the post-war woman who's emancipated and wants to live and love without constraint. It was fun to have her play the wife of Podalydès, and that she was his teacher at the Conservatoire, because we find some of these reports from teacher to student in couple relationships. I liked the idea that Madeleine and Lena, who have this desire for freedom and youth, face two men who are ten years older than them.

This is the third time you directed Denis Podalydès.

He reads even more scenes than I send him! He manages to be available, no matter what. It was not an obvious role as he had to unite all these Lyon communist activists around him. I needed a very generous "troop leader" who knows how to galvanize his entourage. He really aided the film.

How did you direct everyone?

I don't direct them! I think that ultimately the method is adapted to the actors, not the reverse. You just organize a few readings in advanced to address all the issues. Thereafter, the director, for me, is a "vampire" with an obsessive efficiency, because she wants get something from her actors at all costs. I just want the best result at the end of the day. And most importantly, I want leave nothing to chance and not to let anything go along the way--not a reply, or intonation, or an accessory, or decor...

Do you make an effort to differentiate the eras visually?

We toured the past, in film! Some colors were eliminated, because some colors we think of in the 1950s only exist in the collective imagination. So, in the apartment and the store we favored wood, beige, green, and brown which correspond to the period after the war. For the 1980s, we went to more colorful hues. It is important to be that accurate when you make a period film. Extras who don't have their look masked and costumes of the period are the least accurate, but accuracy lies in the choice of extras and especially in their enthusiasm on the day of shooting. We would give a sheen to their clothing and give particular attention to hair and makeup. All these "details" are essential and participate in the veracity, the authenticity of the film.

In what direction did you want to take the music?

This is my second collaboration with Armand Amar after *Sagan*. The music is always a stressful time, because it lets another creator, who is neither an interpreter nor a technician, inside the film. And it may happen that all his personal readings of your images, as brilliant as they are, aren't what you like, or don't have an effect on you. Unlike *Sagan*, I didn't give Armand Amar direction, and I did not use a model, and still I found amazing results. It was Armand who proposed the final song to me – spoken by the Jews during the Spanish Inquisition – and it finds its place beautifully in the film.

You shot entirely in Lyon.

Yes, around the city and in the Lyon region. The tavern at the water's edge, this is the Inn of the Golden Pheasant, a gem in Villefranche-sur-Saone, that was found after weeks of research. The same for the house of Michel Ardèche – we ended up discovering it in Beaujolais. We had a team in Lyon and one in Paris, so filming was very happy for me. I was surrounded by motivated people and I myself felt protected. And I loved going back to Lyon to shoot this film and rediscover the city. I found a small street with stairs resembling those from the post-war years, that wasn't tagged or massacred by graffiti...we could reinvent my father's store and my childhood apartment...we roamed Tete d'Or Park in search of a path with swings. Basically, I think this film has reconciled me with my hometown.



CREW BIOGRAPHIES

DIANE KURYS, Director and Screenwriter

Diane Kurys was born in Lyon, France in 1948. She began her career as an actress with Jean-Louis Barrault's company before transitioning into writing and film making. Her first film, PEPPERMINT SODA (1987), explored her life as a child of divorce and her relationship with her sister. The film won the NBR Award for Top Foreign Films, came second place at the NYFCC Awards for Best Foreign Language Film, while Diane herself won the Prix Lois Delluc Award.

Kurys has become known for her auto-biographical style of filmmaking as her work tends to focus on struggles that she herself has faced whether it be divorce in COUP DE FOUDRE (1983), her relationship with her sister in À LA FOLIE (1994), or the decision to move from acting to writing in A MAN IN LOVE (1987).

FILMOGRAPHY

2013 – **For a Woman**

2008 – **Sagan**

2005 – **L'anniversaire**

1999 – **The Children of the Century**

1994 – **À la folie**

1992 – **Après l'amour**

1990 – **C'est la vie**

1987 – **A Man in Love**

1983 – **Entre Nous**

1980 – **Cocktail Molotov**

1977 – **Peppermint Soda**

CAST BIOGRAPHIES

BENOÎT MAGIMEL (Michel)

Born and raised in Paris, Benoît Magimel began acting at a young age; when he was 12 when he won the role of Momo in LIFE IS A LONG QUIET RIVER (1988) by Etienne Chatiliez. At age 16 he dropped his studies to pursue acting as a career and has been performing ever since. Magimel has famously chosen roles in both low budget independent films such as TO MATTHIEU (2000) as well as wide audience feature films such as DUPLICITY (2005).

It was on the set of one of these low budget independent films by the name of THE CHILDREN OF THE CENTURY (1999) that he met Juliette Binoche. The two actors began dating and had daughter Hana in 1999, but

the relationship ended in 2003. In 2004 he met Nikita Samaha on the set of CRIMSON RIVERS 2: ANGELS OF THE APOCALYPSE (2004), and the two had daughter Djinina in October 2011.

In 2001 he received the Best Actor Award at the Cannes Film Festival for his role in LA PIANISTE (2001). In 1997 he won Best Actor at the Prix Michael Simon Award for his part in LES VOLEURS (1996). While in 2002, Magimel picked up the Remy Julienne Award at the Valenciennes International Festival of Action and Adventure Films.

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

2013 – **For a Woman**
2004 – **Crimson Rivers 2: Angels of the Apocalypse**
2005 – **Duplicity**
2001 – **The Piano Teacher**
1999 – **The Children of the Century**
1998 – **Déjà Mort**
1996 – **Thieves**
1995 – **La Haine**
1988 – **Life is a Long Quiet River**

MELANIE THIERRY (Lena)

Melanie Thierry was born on the 17th of July 1981 in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, France. Best known for her role as Aurora in the 2008 film BABYLON, A.D., Thierry began her career as a child and teen model before moving into acting. She found work in a series of critically acclaimed French productions before hitting it big with an international crossover hit called THE LEGEND OF 1900 (1998). She has also appeared in the popular BBC costume drama CHARLES II: THE POWER AND THE PASSION (2003) as the King's French mistress, Louise de Kerouaille. She will next appear in Terry Gilliam's THE ZERO THEOREM (2013). She has been married to French singer Raphaël Haroche since 2002 and they have a son, Roman, born May 2008.

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

2013 – **The Zero Theorem**
2013 – **For a Woman**
2011 – **Unforgivable**
2008 – **Babylon, A.D.**
2005 – **Twisted Souls**
2002 – **Accidental Saint**
1998 – **The Legend of 1900**

NICOLAS DUVAUCHELLE (Jean)

Duvauchelle was born in Paris, France and was studying to become a pharmacy employee before being discovered in a boxing club. After some auditioning he went on to star in *LE PETIT VOLEUR* (1999). Thanks to his good looks and bad boy image, Duvauchelle became a male model and starred in TV advertisements for both Levi's jeans and Hugo Boss perfume. He was then brought to fame in his role, alongside Laura Smet, in *EAGER BODIES* (2003). Known for his rebellious image and fashionable good looks, Duvauchelle is fast becoming one of the most promising young actors that France has to offer. In both 2004 and 2012 he was nominated for Best Supporting Actor at the César Awards in France.

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

2013 – **For a Woman**
2013 – **Juliette**
2010 – **Four Lovers**
2009 – **The Girl on the Train**
2004 – **Right Now**
2003 – **Eager Bodies**
2003 – **Snowboarder**
1999 – **Le Petit Voleur**

CLOTILDE HESME (Madeleine)

Born in Troyes, France, Clotilde Hesme grew up in an artistic household alongside her sisters Annelise and Elodie Hesme, who became actresses as well. Clotilde studied at the Conservatoire National Supérieur d'Art Dramatique, and has appeared in films such as *LE CHIGNON D'OLGA* (2002) and *REGULAR LOVER* (2005). She was nominated at the César Awards for Most Promising Actress for her role in Christophe Honoré's *LOVE SONGS* (2008). Two years later she went on to win that very award for her role in the film *ANGELE ET TONY* (2010)

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

2013 – **For a Woman**
2012 – **Three Worlds**
2010 – **Angel and Tony**
2007 – **Love Songs**
2007 – **The Grocer's Son**
2005 – **Regular Lovers**
2002 – **Le Chignon d'Olga**

CREDITS

CREW

Director	Diane Kurys
Screenwriter	Diane Kurys
Music	Armand Amar
Director of Photography	Gilles Henry
Art Director	Maxime Rebière
Casting	Gérard Moulévrier
Production Design	Tony Egry
Costumes	Eric Perron
Editing	Sylvie Gadmer
Sound Engineers	Yves-Marie Omnes
	Guillaume Bouchateau
	Christian Fontaine
	Jérémie Chevret
Production Manager	

CAST

Michel	Benoît Magimel	Benoit Magimel
Léna	Mélanie Thierry	
Jean	Nicolas Duvauchelle	
Anne	Sylvie Testud	
Maurice	Denis Podalydès	
Tania	Julie Ferrier	
Madeleine	Clotilde Hesme	
Sacha	Clément Sibony	

