



A FILM BY VEIT HELMER

THE BRA





Pluto Film presents

THE BRA.

A film by Veit Helmer
Poetic comedy, Germany/Azerbaijan, 90 minutes



PRESSBOOK



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SYNOPSIS

A goods train rolls through the broad, grassy plain that stretches away below the Caucasian mountains. In the driver's cabin: Nurlan, the train driver. Day in, day out he steers his train along the route that runs through a cramped suburb of Baku, where the train tracks are built so close to the houses that Nurlan's train chugs through what passes for the residents' entrances and gardens. It clatters past men drinking tea, and women hanging out the washing. With the approach of the train, Aziz the young orphan boy runs down the tracks blasting a warning on his whistle, and the residents seize their belongings and jump inside their houses. Whatever is not carried to safety, Nurlan plucks from his train at the terminus: chicken feathers, children's balls and even bed sheets. On the last day of work before his retirement, a rather unique souvenir becomes entangled on Nurlan's train: a lacy, light blue bra. Nurlan spontaneously decides to take this precious item back with him to his village. The mere thought

of whom this lovely thing might belong to gives him sleepless nights. Overwhelming loneliness finally propels Nurlan to set off in search of the bra's rightful owner. THE BRA is a masterfully told tale of the search for love and belonging.

After ABSURDISTAN (2008) and BAIKONUR (2011), director Veit Helmer transports us to the mountain landscape of Azerbaijan. Helmer's remarkable and inventive visual vocabulary further establishes his well-deserved reputation as a modern teller of fairy tales. THE BRA is crafted as a poetic comedy without the need for dialogue, and it is precisely this element that further serves to captivate its audience.







CAST

Nurlan	Predrag 'Miki' Manojlović
Apprentice	Denis Lavant
The Point Switcher	Chulpan Khamatova
The Boy	Ismail Quluzade
Cheater	Maia Morgenstern
Forgetful Woman	Paz Vega
Dancer	Frankie Wallach
Bride	Boriana Manoilova
Village Girl	Sayora Safarova
Mother with a Baby	Manal Issa
Widow	Irmena Chichikova
Sleeping woman	Ia Shugliashvili

CREW

Director	Veit Helmer
Screenplay	Leonie Geisinger, Veit Helmer
DOP	Felix Leiberg
Editor	Vincent Assmann
Original Score	Cyril Morin
Sound	Julian Cropp, Robert Jäger
Costumes	Mehriban Effendi
Set Design	Batcho Makharadze
Make up	Adelia Mamedova
Casting	Lisa Stutzky, Nathalie Bialobos, Pep Armengol, Dominica Circiumaru, Antonia Vladimirova, Anastasia Kononova
Line producer	Shirin Hartmann, Tsiako Abesadze
Producer	Veit Helmer





STORYLINE



Train driver Nurlan lives in a village in the mountains of Azerbaidjan. Every day he drives his train through the suburb of a city where the tracks are built so close to the houses that it passes within a hair's breadth of the walls. Every day he greets Nesrin. She switches the points – not a terribly eventful job. So now and then Nesrin allows herself the pleasure of scaring the daylighters out of her colleagues with some sudden, unexpected point-switching. And every time the signal changes from red to green, the little boy Aziz interrupts his work at the teahouse to run down the tracks with his whistle, warning the residents to clear the tracks.

Because between the passes of the train, the residents all use the tiny amount of free space available on the train tracks to drink tea and hang out their washing. And while no one has ever been run over by the train, thanks to Aziz, there is always some item or other of laundry that is snagged by the engine.

The conscientious train driver collects all of these and personally returns them to their owners on his way home. He won't allow his airheaded apprentice to do this job. However, Nurlan is shortly to retire, and must now pass on his intimate knowledge of 'his' route.

And so the day of his last trip finally comes, and this time too Nurlan finds a stray piece of clothing stuck to the front

of his engine. It's a fine, delicate bra, light blue and edged with white lace. As Nurlan's eyes light on the bra, he recalls catching a glimpse of it and its owner during a night-time run. A recurring dream that makes him painfully aware of his loneliness. Nurlan longs for a wife and family. He asks for the hand in marriage of a woman in the village, but is rejected by her parents.

Nurlan travels to the city and takes a room in the suburb, determined to find the owner of the bra. A bizarre search begins and in fact Nurlan hits on new ideas every day to convince women - complete strangers - to try on this bra. Some women are delighted by his visit, but most suspect him of dubious intent and slam the door in his face. But Nurlan is nothing if not inventive, and whether disguised as a lingerie seller or a doctor, he finds ways to eventually get all of the women to try on the bra.

Inevitably, the husbands of the suburbs get wind of his activities. They band together to chase Nurlan.

Will he succeed in finding the bra's owner? Is she the person he will take back to his village?





DIRECTOR VEIT HELMER

Born in 1968, Veit Helmer directed his first film at 14. Even before the Berlin wall came down he moved to East Berlin to study theatre directing. In 1991 he began studying at Munich's School of Film and Television. After numerous prize-winning short films he made his feature film debut with TUVALU in 1999, which was shown at over 60 festivals and gained 16 awards.

GATE TO HEAVEN (with Miki Manojlović and Udo Kier) was made in 2003, in the underground level of Frankfurt airport.

BEHIND THE COUCH (2005), about casting in Hollywood, was Veit Helmer's first step into documentary film making.

The Sundance Film Festival in 2008 saw the premiere of his third international feature film, ABSURDISTAN, which gained numerous international awards.

His next film in 2011, BAIKONUR, was set in the Russian space port of the same name in Kazakhstan.

In 2014 Veit Helmer directed the children's film FIDDLESTICKS, which was seen at over 97 film festivals and won 21 awards.

Taken together, Helmer's films have won over 180 awards.

Veit Helmer teaches ‚visual story-telling‘ at numerous international film schools..

Filmography (selection)

2018	THE BRA
2014	FIDDLESTICKS
2011	BAIKONUR
2008	ABSURDISTAN
2005	BEHIND THE COUCH
2003	GATE TO HEAVEN
1999	TUVALU





INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR VEIT HELMER

Where did you get the idea for the story?

I was inspired by a very unusual neighbourhood of the Azerbaijani capital, Baku. Where the train tracks are built so incredibly close to the houses that they also have to serve as streets and recreation areas. Life takes place on the railway tracks, where long oil trains roll through several times a day. The inhabitants call their quarter ‚Shanghai‘, although it has nothing to do with China. The place inspired me to write of a story about lonely train driver who, at the end of his working day, returns to their rightful owners the things that his train has snagged in passing. Just before he is pensioned off, he finds a bra. The film tells of the adventurous search for its owner.

How did you come across the location?

Azerbaijan fascinates me. The country lies somewhere lost between Europe and Asia on the former Silk Road, and despite its remoteness from Russia, Armenia or Iran, it's a place where various cultures and religions intersect. Muslims, Christians and Jews live here peacefully side by side. For years I wanted to shoot in Khinaliq, the highest inhabited pla-

ce in Europe. But it wasn't until I saw the ‚Shanghai‘ quarter in Baku that something clicked inside and I thought of bringing the two places together in a film within a single narrative.

I'd already been warned in 2014 that the Shanghai quarter was earmarked for demolition. By 2017 we had the project financed and I was able to shoot the film just before the suburb was demolished.

What's the advantage of not using dialogue?

Spoken dialogue is a completely non-filmic style of storytelling. Cinema is essentially stories told through pictures and sound. But as a film maker it's not a matter of simply eliminating the dialogue from the script, since then the sense of the story gets lost. Films without dialogue have to be specifically conceived. That entails a lot of elaborate and time-consuming work on the script. But I think the end result will be definitely a unique experience for the cinema-goers.

Which particular effects created by film dialogue did you want to avoid?







Dialogue is the simplest, not to say the most primitive method, of narrating a story. Alfred Hitchcock said that dialogue is like filmed theatre. The cure is visual story-telling. And on top of that, speech is what makes it hard for films to travel. Because both dubbing and subtitles are unsatisfactory from an artistic standpoint, and at times even become dreadful distortions. Film makers work for years on a script, a shoot and then in the editing room, crafting and perfecting fine sound effects. In many countries a voice-over track is later simply slapped over it, effectively flattening the sound track.

How is this different to a silent film?

I never wanted to make a silent film, I love sound far too much. I'm dreaded by sound designers because I listen to each of the individual 240 audio tracks before the mixing process starts. The absence of dialogue actually demands that you have to make even more of an effort with the sound. It is almost an unleashing of something, since the acoustic space has to be recorded from beginning to end. All at once the audience really listens, because the actors are not constantly gabbling!

Where does this interest in modified narrative forms come from?

At the end of the silent film era there was already competition amongst film directors to use as few title cards as possible. Films like PEOPLE ON SUNDAY were visionary. But with the advent of the 'talkies' the art of film-making suffered a significant set-back. Nevertheless, telling stories in pictures spurs you on as a film maker, sort of trying to create cinema in its purest form.

In this context what role does the film's music play, and what criteria did you use in choosing it?

If you wanted to do things simply, you could clap music over everything in a film without dialogue. But people have become far too carried away with using too much music - look at television, for example. Music is at its most precious when used sparingly.

I first became aware of Cyril Morin's music in the films Samsara and The Syrian Bride. I'd already spoken to Cyril about doing music for other films of mine, but he was always booked out. This time I approached him long before shooting started and we exchanged ideas. When we laid the first music down we were both surprised to find that sounds from Eastern Europe and the orient simply didn't work. Because the images already had made it clear that the story took place in an unusual





location. It was more important to underline the feelings and emotions of the protagonists. For the female characters, for example, I unearthed old Azerbaijani pop songs, which we hear coming from the radio or the record player.

THE BRA comes across as fairly jaunty, and also rather melancholy at times. Can the film be regarded as a comedy?

Slotting a film into a genre is like squashing a piece of clothing into a drawer, and having all the buttons and decorations fly off when you try to close it. Until I get some distance and watch it in the auditorium with the audience, I probably won't know what I've actually made. The film certainly begins as a comedy. Then the train driver experiences some tragic setbacks. But the film is also a love story. With an unexpected ending.

The film is full of colourful characters - how did you go about finding these actors, who would have no dialogue?

It was very important for me that with every woman he encounters the train driver enters a completely different universe. The narrative challenge was to find coherent reasons why women from a traditional background would let this perfect stranger of a man into their home, and even go so far as

to try on the bra. Securing these striking actors, with so much personality, definitely helped.

What sort of challenges did you face during shooting?

We had absolutely no chance of getting an official permit to shoot in the 'Shanghai' quarter.

The government in Baku is tearing down the city's old and poor quarters. In their place, they are constructing high-rise buildings, which glitter colourfully at night as if the capital was a giant nightclub. There was utter incomprehension at official levels that I find the picturesque suburb of 'Shanghai' interesting. My producer tried to bribe the police sergeant in charge. This didn't work, since the railway police are also responsible for this quarter. The shoot was stopped and I was told in no uncertain terms to film elsewhere. Except that this was inconceivable, given the whole nature of the story. So I just kept on shooting without a permit, which is why my Baku producer and a section of the team ended up quitting. We often had to break off filming because the police were threatening my team. For several weeks, we filmed as if we were underground government opponents. Once we had the outdoor shots in the can, we moved production to neighbouring Georgia, where we were able to finish the film undisturbed.





And where we could also film with trains, which we weren't allowed to do in Azerbaijan.

Was it difficult to find the right actors?

With non-dialogue films you're obviously not limited to actors who speak a particular language. It was clear to me very early on that I wanted Miki Manojlović to play the main character. Miki, with his angelic eyes, could persuade women to open their doors to him, without being afraid he was up to no good. Miki committed to the role even before we had the financing in place. And he never looked like jumping ship, even when we up to our necks in trouble and the police were knocking on the door.

In casting the women's roles I visited a lot of different countries and asked my favourite actresses. Everyone was enthusiastic about the project. But some turned down the three or four days of work I was offering in favour of bigger roles. It was a huge blessing for me that in the end Paz Vega, Maia Morgenstern and Chulpan Khamatova all had time to come to Baku.

How did you prepare the cast for the shoot?

I improvised scenes with all the actors. Many of them found

working without dialogue a welcome challenge, even something of a liberation. Nevertheless, it was already clear in casting sessions that some actors just weren't suited for this style of film. Once I'd cast the roles, I am happy to put full responsibility for the character in the hands of the actor, only intervening where it is necessary or if the actor wishes.

What will the audience take away from this film?

I hope that they see the film as a small treasure chest that contains a lot of precious jewels, which sparkle magically when the box is opened. My films divide opinion. The greatest compliment for me is when people watch the film a number of times and discover things that even I hadn't noticed. Then the film in a sense develops its own 'personality', like a child that has learned to walk and leaves its parents. That is the moment to let go, and begin a new film!



MIKI MANOJLOVIĆ, THE TRAIN DRIVER

Predrag ‚Miki‘ Manojlović was born into an acting family in Belgrade in 1950. After finishing school he studied at Belgrade’s Academy of Performing Arts. At a very young age, he became one of the most well-known actors in the former Yugoslavia, winning all the awards for dramatic arts in his country.

From the mid 70s he became well known to national audiences as Miki, in the hugely popular television series *Grlom u jagode*. Rajko Grlić casted Miki Manojlović 1981 as main actor for his movie *The Melody haunts My Memory*, which was selected for Cannes. Miki Manojlović has worked a number of times with director Emir Kusturica during his career, including the 1985 international success *Father is Away on Business*. The film was awarded the Golden Palme in Cannes as well as the FIPRESCI prize, and nominated best foreign film at the Golden Globe Awards and the Oscars.

He featured in director Nicole Garcia’s debut, *Every Other Weekend* in 1991, which was nominated for two Césars. In 1995 Manojlović played the main character Marko Dren in Emir Kusturica’s masterpiece *Underground*, which was awarded the Golden Palme for best film in Cannes. Manojlović also acted in the cult film *Black Cat, White Cat* (1998). He was cast by Francois Ozon for *Criminal Lovers* (1999) and by Jean-Luc

Beneix for “*Mortal transfer*” (2001). 2007 Manojlović was the male lead alongside Marianne Faithful in the tragicomedy *Irina Palm* by director Sam Garbarski, which gained Manojlović a nomination for the European Film Prize. In 2016 he worked again with Emir Kusturica in *On the Milky Road*, which was in competition for the Golden Lion award in Venice.

Manojlovic has worked on stage, with some of the most acclaimed theatre directors, such as Peter Brook *Mahabharata* (1987).

Filmography (selection)

- 2018 THE BRA
- 2016 ON THE MILKY ROAD
- 2008 LARGO WINCH
- 2007 IRINA PALM
- 2001 MORTAL TRANSFER
- 1999 CRIMINAL LOVERS
- 1995 UNDERGROUND
- 1990 EVERY OTHER WEEKEND
- 1985 WHEN FATHER WAS AWAY ON BUSINESS
- 1981 THE MELODY HAUNTS MY MEMORY, RAJKO GRLIĆ



DENIS LAVANT, THE APPRENTICE

French actor Denis Lavant gained his first acting experience with improvisation and street theatre, before he started taking acting lessons with Jacques Lassalle. From the early 80s he also had roles in cinema productions, for example, with Charlotte Rampling in Claude Lelouch's Viva la vie! 1984 marked the beginning of a fruitful association with director Leos Carax, with Boy Meets Girl. Their third production together, The Lovers on the Bridge in 1991, saw Denis Lavant nominated for the European Film Prize for his portrayal of Alex alongside Juliette Binoche.

In 1999 he portrayed the main character Claire Denis' Beau Travail, as well as in Tuvalu, by Veit Helmer.

In 2004 he acted alongside Audrey Tatou, Marion Cotillard and Jodie Foster in A Very Long Engagement. In the French-Romanian drama, My Little Princess, Eva Ionesco's directing debut in 2010, he played alongside Isabelle Huppert. The following year he was featured in Marina de Van's fairytale film Le Petit Poucet. Leos Carax' Holy Motors appeared in 2012 and won 25 international awards. For his portrayal of the main character Denis Lavant was nominated, among others, for the César and for best actor at the Chicago Film Festival.

Filmography (selection)

- 2018 THE BRA
- 2017 3 DAYS IN QUIBERON
- 2012 HOLY MOTORS
- 2004 A VERY LONG ENGAGEMENT
- 1999 TUVALU
- 1999 BEAU TRAVAIL
- 1991 THE LOVERS ON THE BRIDGE
- 1984 BOY MEETS GIRL







CHULPAN KHAMATOVA, THE POINT SWITCHER

Chulpan Khamatova is a Russian actress. She broke off her studies at the Institute of Economics in Kazakhstan to enrol in drama school in the same place. She was eventually accepted into the renowned Russian Academy of Theatre Arts in Moscow. Since then she has acted on virtually all of Moscow's stages.

Her debut on the big screen came in 1998 with *The Country of the Deaf* by Valeriy Todorovskiy, alongside Dina Korzun. The film screened in competition for the Golden Bear at the 1998 Berlin Film Festival. A year later she acted in *Luna Papa*, which screen in Brussels, Tokyo and Tiflis, among others. The same year, this time alongside Denis Lavant, she was seen in Veit Helmer's feature film debut, *Tuvalu*. She won the Best Actress award in Nantes. In 2003 Khamatova was cast in the role of Lara in *Goodbye, Lenin!* The film won numerous awards, including the German film prize in the new category the César, and the Goya for best European film, and was nominated for the BAFTA and the Golden Globes.

Since then Chulpan Khamatova has appeared in countless cinema and TV productions, such as *Garpastrum* (2005) or *Under Electric Clouds* (2015) by Aleksey German Jr. This was shown in competition at the 65th Berlin Film Festival, where it

was awarded the Silver Bear for Outstanding Artistic Contribution in cinematography.

In 2006 she was a member of the jury at the Venice Film Festival alongside Jury President, Catherine Deneuve.

Filmography (selection)

- 2018 THE BRA
- 2015 UNDER ELECTRIC CLOUDS
- 2009 SLEEPING SONGS
- 2005 GARPASTUM
- 2003 GOODBYE, LENIN!
- 1999 TUVALU
- 1999 LUNA PAPA
- 1998 THE COUNTRY OF THE DEAF





MAIA MORGENSTERN, THE SWINDLER

Maia Morgenstern is a Romanian actress and Director of the Jewish Theatre in Bucharest since 2012. She has been seen in cinema productions since the early 1980s, most notably in Romanian films like Too Hot for the Month of May (1984) and The Oak (1992). For the latter she won the European film prize in 1993 for her portrayal of Nela.

From then on she was to be seen in numerous international productions. The following years she appeared in, among other things, Roger Christian's Nostradamus, Ulysses' Gaze by Theodoros Angelopoulos and the Hungarian film, The Witman Boys.

In 2004 she portrayed the Virgin Mary in Mel Gibson's The Passion of Christ. She played the role of Anne in Roland Edzard's 2011 film The End of Silence, which was selected for the Quinzaine des Réalisateurs screening in Cannes.

Filmography (selection)

- 2018 THE BRA
- 2011 THE END OF SILENCE
- 2004 THE PASSION OF CHRIST
- 1995 ULYSSES' GAZE
- 1992 THE OAK
- 1984 TOO HOT FOR THE MONTH OF MAY





FRANKIE WALLACH, THE DANCER

Born in 1994 in France, Frankie Wallach has been involved in acting since she was 12. Following a number of roles in short films she appeared in *Alive*, by Frédéric Berthe in 2004 and a year later in *Hey Good Looking*, by Lisa Azuelos. Since then Frankie Wallach has appeared in numerous cinema and TV productions, among others, alongside Sandrine Bonnaire in *Kid Power* (2007).

Frankie Wallach lives in Paris, where she also works as a theatre actress. Among other things, she appeared last year at the Théâtre National de Chaillot in *Trois; Précédé de un et deux*, by Mani Soleymanlouu.

Filmography (selection)

- 2018 THE BRA
- 2007 KID POWER
- 2005 HEY GOOD LOOKING!
- 2004 ALIVE



PAZ VEGA, THE FORGETFUL WOMAN

The Spanish actress Paz Vega began her career in Madrid. She gained her first small roles in the late 90s, and was acclaimed for her portrayal of Laura in the TV series *Siete Vidas*. Her break into cinema came in 2001, with *Sex and Lucia*. For her role as Lucia and that of Angela in *Solo Mia*, Paz Vega was twice nominated for the Goya prize of Most Promising Actress. She also received an award for *Sex and Lucia*. The same year she starred in *Talk to Her* by Pedro Almodóvar. From 2004 she has worked increasingly in the USA, among other things in *The Spirit* (2008) alongside Eva Mendes and Samuel L. Jackson. Today Paz Vega divides her time between Los Angeles, Madrid and Seville. In 2013 she appeared in another Pedro Almodóvar film, *I'm So Excited*, and the following year alongside Nicole Kidman in *Grace of Monaco*, the opening film of the Official Selection in Cannes.

Filmography (selection)

- 2018 THE BRA
- 2014 GRACE OF MONACO
- 2013 I'M SO EXCITED
- 2002 TALK TO HER
- 2001 SEX AND LUCIA



MANAL ISSA, THE MOTHER WITH THE BABY

Manal Issa is a French-Lebanese actress, born in France. She was only three years old when her family moved to Lebanon. Following the war she moved back to France in 2006 to study industrial engineering at Istia University in Angers. There she was spotted by director Danielle Arbid who gave her the main part in her film *Peur de Rien* alongside Vincent Lacoste, Paul Hamy and Dominique Blanc. Her interpretation earned her an award for best actress at the Festival des Arcs, the Angela Award in Ireland, and the Lumiere Award as Most Promising Actress (France's equivalent to the Golden Globes). She was also in the pre-selection for best revelation at the Cesar Awards.

In 2017 director Bertrand Bonello chose her for his film *Nocturama* with Finnegan Oldfield, Vincent Rottiers and Adèle Haenel. The film has been screened in many international festivals such as Toronto and San Sebastian. Her last film *My Favorite Fabric*, directed by Gaya Jiji was selected for the official selection *Un Certain Regard* at the 2018 Cannes Film Festival.

Filmography (selection)

- 2018 THE BRA by Veit Helmer
- 2018 MY FAVORITE FABRIC by Gaya Jiji
- 2018 ULYSSE ET MONA by Sébastien Betbeder
- 2017 DEUX FILS by Félix Moati
- 2017 UNE JEUNESSE DORÉE by Eva Ionesco
- 2016 NOCTURAMA by Bertrand Bonello
- 2015 PEUR DE RIEN by Danielle Arbid



IRMENA CHICHIKOVA, THE WIDOW

Irmena Chichikova is a Bulgarian actress, born in Plovdiv. Irmena graduated from the National Academy for Theatre and Film under the tutelage of professors Margarita Mladenova and Ivan Dobchev. She quickly became one of the most promising young theatre actresses, winning the prestigious AS-KEER award. In 2012 Irmena was chosen for the leading role in I Am You, by Peter Popzlatev, winning the Golden Rose Award for Best Actress in 2012. A year later, Maya Vitkova cast Irmena for her award winning film Viktoria, in competition at Sundance 2014 and garnering recognition in more than 40 film festivals.

Her latest success was Touch Me Not by Adina Pintilie winning both Best First Feature and Golden Bear at the 68th Berlin Film Festival.

Filmography (selection)

- 2018 THE BRA by Veit Helmer
- 2018 A DOSE OF HAPPINESS by Yana Titova
- 2018 LETTERS FROM ANTARCTICA by Stanislav Donchev
- 2018 SOUND HUNTERS by Petar Odadzhiev
- 2018 TOUCH ME NOT by Adina Pintilie
- 2017 THE OMNIPRESENT by Ilian Djevelevkov
- 2014 VIKTORIA by Maya Vitkova
- 2012 I AM YOU by Peter Popzlatev
- 2010 THE GLASS RIVER by Stanimir Trifonov





BORIANA MANOILOVA, THE BRIDE

Boriana was born 1996 in Sofia, Bulgaria. She is student of National Academy for Theatre and Film Arts, Sofia, Bulgaria

Her first appearance in front of the camera was in the TV series Gomorrah.

Filmography

2018 THE BRA by Veit Helmer

2017 GOMORRAH by Claudio Cupellini

