



BLUE MONDAY PRODUCTIONS PRESENTS



LOUIS ROEDERER FOUNDATION  
RISING STAR AWARD  
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# N I N O

A FILM BY  
PAULINE LOQUÈS

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RUNNING TIME : 97 MINUTES

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# SYNOPSIS

In three days, Nino will face a major challenge. But first, his doctors have assigned him two vital tasks. Two missions that will lead the young man on a journey through Paris, compelling him to reconnect with the world - and himself.

# INTERVIEW WITH PAULINE LOQUÈS



## **How did you get into filmmaking?**

I worked on radio and TV shows that featured a lot of artists. It was an excellent way to observe the industry from the inside, until the day when I wanted to express myself, too. So, I studied screenwriting, and then I directed a short film—*La Vie de Jeune Fille*—which Arte bought, giving me the chance to meet producer Sandra da Fonseca. She was the one who pushed me to write a feature film.

## **How did Nino and the constellation of characters around him come to be?**

When I met Sandra, my family was coping with the illness of a close relative who had a very aggressive form of cancer and died from it at 37. His name was Romain and the film is dedicated to him. I was overcome with immense sadness and a deep sense of injustice. So, I started writing to find hope again. Nino's character came to me by chance, sort of like a random encounter on a street corner. As if I'd bumped into this young guy in baggy clothes, with a halting speech pattern,

who is struck by the disease. He showed me the path his journey would take. I wrote as I went along, following his wandering in a very instinctive way.

## **Your story speaks directly to a generation familiar with HPV (Human Papillomavirus) and its screening process. Why did you choose throat cancer and how did you go about researching it?**

I wanted to choose a form of cancer that impacts young people and can be cured, because it was important to me to save my character. I was angry at the disease; I needed to reinvent the story, to symbolically restore what it had taken from me. I also wanted to explore any positive outcomes of a traumatic experience like this and see if Nino could somehow use it to his advantage in life—if he could find his way towards a brighter future. I did research on the disease and treatment protocols, and met with specialists, oncologists, patients, and caregivers. And what I found out was that, though it's a

rough experience, the chances of survival are actually quite good.

**Your short film *La Vie de Jeune Fille* also dealt with a reality that's hard to accept and talk about publicly. Is your focus on the initial period of shock, followed by journey towards acceptance?**

Nino's ability to talk about his experience is all the more difficult because it's his throat that's affected. He's being attacked in his very center of speech, and like in *La Vie de Jeune Fille*, there's this notion that things only become real when they're voiced to others. I find this struggle to reveal painful truths to his loved ones particularly compelling. In my short film, my heroine had crafted a flawless image of herself and couldn't bring herself to tell her friends that her future partner wanted to call off their wedding. Nino is an unassuming character confronted with something too enormous for him to handle, opening a pathway towards personal transformation.

**Why does the narrative only span the four days before his treatment begins?**

I'm interested in this timeframe because it's rarely depicted. We've seen films about fighting a disease, but few show the days of waiting before treatment starts. I'm drawn to the banality of everyday life, the mundane, and I wanted to delve into this downtime. Between these two major events—receiving the cancer diagnosis and starting treatment—there are

days and nights to get through... how does someone navigate them? Since my writing process involved shadowing him, I liked the idea of experiencing almost real-time with him. It's also a way to examine the present moment we struggle so much to inhabit when we're lost in regrets and future projections. It's deeply human to dwell in nostalgia or future desires; it's rare to be content exactly where you are. I like wrestling with these concepts.

**In *Nino*, an untethered atmosphere prevails, mirroring your character's innate disposi-**

**tion, which is interrupted by small events firmly anchored in reality...**

When Nino loses his keys, he's thrust into the reality of the city and other people, since Paris is a place where it's hard to be alone. Nino, who has always lived on the periphery, taking refuge in bathrooms and toilets, slams headfirst into reality. Referring to his birth, his mother tells him: "You seemed to be looking at everything, but not seeing anything." It's simply his nature to be in the world without truly engaging with it—until this series of minor events wakes him up.





**Your subtle time jumps reveal the comedy within the drama. What inspired the tone of your film?**

For me, the tone really comes from the rhythm. During the writing process, I was thinking about scene transitions that could bring a smile to viewers' faces. I had fun with this, and it helped give the film its pacing. The tone is directly tied to my perspective on existence, which is both funny and tragic at the same time. Generally speaking, I can never take things at face value—I seek out the absurdity within the tragedy, like a software

program glitching out during a serious medical diagnosis, for example. I love surprises, little accidents, slip-ups—that's the beauty of reality. I started from his humanity, to write the situations and dialogues..

**In the public bathhouse scene, you almost flirt with the realm of fantasy...**

It's a situation made possible because the story is set in Paris. You can meet people and connect with them instantly. There's also the charm of a stranger who says four memorable lines to you, leaving you wondering if they're

a lunatic, a sage, or an apparition. I tried to capture this kind of unusual connection. I envisioned this character with Mathieu Almaric's features, and the scene naturally developed around him.

**Physical contact is a central element to your film, without always being tied to desire...**

There's undoubtedly the idea that, as Nino struggles to speak, body language takes over. I also imagined him as being somewhat numb, as if energy wasn't flowing properly throughout his body; but as events unfold, he wakes up. I found it interesting that the characters touch each other much more than they talk to each other. Since Nino's body will undergo heavy treatments, perhaps he needed to experience this first.

**During the party scene, his dancing takes on a trance-like appearance...**

This is the tipping point of the film. The first part closely follows what's going on in his mind; then, something inside him leads him to realize that he needs to take a different path forward. It's actually right after this sequence and the injection scene in the bathroom that he manages to talk to his friend. I'm also depicting a generation of highly intellectual urban youth whose social ties are primarily formed through verbal exchange, and who remain largely disconnected from nature and physical sensations overall.

### **What was your approach to filming the hospital scenes?**

Initially, when we see very little of the exteriors, it's unclear whether Nino is in a hospital, a police station, or some municipal building. By the end, I wanted to establish that the hospital was going to be a part of his ongoing reality, and that he was fully integrated into the city, the surrounding buildings, and the life around him. Nino is sick, and will be treated while continuing to live in his usual environment. We designed the room where he stays to look like one from a maternity ward, because I wanted to subvert the anxiety typically associated with hospitals and move away from the negative impressions we usually form.

### **The notion of lineage permeates the film, from the mention of Nino's deceased father to the small specimen cup he has to fill in order to ensure his chances of someday becoming a father...**

Nino goes around with this little cup without managing to fill it. No doubt this issue brings him back to thoughts about his own father. I didn't analyze this too deeply during the writing process, but I imagined that if his father were still alive, he'd surely accompany him to his first chemo session. I envisioned that this "designated support person" mentioned by the doctor was this now-absent father, which forces Nino to turn to someone else. I also wanted to portray a man faced with the issue of the biological clock. I found this



amusing, since it never happens to a guy! His struggle to ejaculate into this little cup to preserve his chance of future fatherhood is a central theme, and similar to a time bomb. This dilemma forces him to grow up.

### **As a woman, is it easy to portray a male character? How did you go about depicting male friendship?**

I definitely asked myself this question, but then I thought about all the male directors who have depicted women without much hesitation! As for friendship between guys, I simply imagined that Nino's connection with

Sofiane wouldn't be that different from the one between my best friend and me. What I'm interested in is the resilience of this bond, which transcends gender, in my view. When filming this male character study, it turns out that my technical crew was primarily made up of women—DP, casting director, editor, art director, script supervisor, first AD, production manager—and it came together naturally. They were chosen for their talent, their work ethic, and their intelligence. So, Nino is also the outcome of a female gaze carried forward by a team consisting mostly of women.

**A genuine tenderness comes through in the way you portray your characters, and most of the scenes have a warm quality to them...**

That probably stems from my relationship with my actors and crew, which was very gentle and caring. My work method is built around my love for the people I work with, and I truly adore actors. This influences the atmosphere during filming and inevitably comes through on screen. All of my actors are sensitive people who are highly attentive to

one another. The tenderness also comes from the film's lighting and color palette, which I wanted to be soothing and slightly stylized. Since the characters' inner lives are what truly matter, I didn't want the lighting to overpower them. So, we went with something light and cottony, bright but with a powdery quality, so the indoor spaces could serve as a refuge from the hostility of the city outside.

**How did you go about casting the film?**

It was the casting director, Youna de Peretti, who had the incredibly strong intuition I needed to meet Théodore Pellerin. Beyond being a prodigious actor and a genius performer, Théodore embodies a multitude of fascinating contrasts: he's both sensitive and strong, intelligent and primal, reserved yet generous. He captivates without ever seeming to try, which was crucial since he's on screen for the entire hour and a half. I was also drawn to his distinctive face and commanding build. I wanted this character's vulnerability to be entirely internal, with the disease attacking an outwardly strong body.

When casting Nino's social circle, we looked for actors who were not only talented, but also kind. They needed to be willing to come for just a few scenes, and they all loved Nino so much that they wanted to be there for him. They all share a uniqueness and a strong personality, which was essential for making an impact in their limited screen time.

Salomé Dewaels is small in stature with a youthful appearance, but she actually exudes great power. I liked that she impressed Nino with her life experience.

Camille Rutherford, who plays his ex, manages to switch from sorrow to comedy in the blink of an eye. She embodies everything that comes with an old flame: tender memories alongside enduring resentment...

Estelle Meyer embodies both wife and mother simultaneously. She was exactly right for



the scene where her character gives herself hormone injections. Her presence exudes a maternal essence completely devoid of all sexuality, which was invaluable to me in this scene.

William Lebghil radiates tremendous tenderness; he can express every emotion, even the least noble ones, while remaining irresistible. This quality was essential for us to forgive his character's clumsy reaction when Nino tells him about his illness.

Jeanne Balibar was another obvious choice. She and Théodore slightly resemble one another. I love the quirkiness that Jeanne brings, which mirrors what I had in mind for this character of an affectionate mother who's nevertheless completely out of touch. For me, she distills all the conflicting emotions one can harbor for their mother.

As for the mysterious, eccentric man Nino meets by chance, I kept telling my casting director: "We need to find someone like Mathieu Amalric!" He's so unique that we ended up asking him directly... I count myself lucky that he said yes. Mathieu has a child-like gaze, always amazed by stories, characters, the filmmaking process...

### **What was your vision as a director for this film?**

I didn't want an entirely realistic style shot with a handheld camera. We needed to find a way to be both very close to Nino yet also maintain some distance so that viewers could get the



feeling he wasn't alone in this city. Something happens to him, but seen from a distance, it's just one story among many. This shaped the rest of the filmmaking decisions: we were constantly asking ourselves if we were with him alone or with him and the others. The film is a journey without a fixed destination, so it was about determining whether or not Nino was feeling something in different situations in order to find the right distance. My DP Lucie Badinaud and I worked intuitively, without any fear of mixing genres.

### **How did you approach the sound design and music?**

Between episodes of drifting, the same city routes carry different soundscapes. This mirrors the experience of being in Paris, where you can block out all the commotion around you when focused on a conversation at a sidewalk café, or let yourself be consumed by the surrounding noise. I wanted the audience to experience the city in two ways—sometimes as a friend who comforts and embraces you, and at other times as an unbearable presence. We played with these



contrasts by creating surreal sound environments in some scenes while amplifying real urban soundscapes in others. For the music accompanying the wandering scenes, I drew from the cinematic repertoire of a Quebec artist I love, Flore Laurentienne. We selected soft, somewhat ethereal pieces to accompany Nino in his meanderings. And we decided to punctuate the film with three tracks from the groups You!, The Foals, and Fontaines D.C. to capture the bursts of energy and vitality that Nino occasionally experiences.



## BIOGRAPHY OF PAULINE LOQUÈS

Following her studies in literature and law, Pauline sought to satisfy her thirst for writing in journalism. After working as an editor for cultural programs, she began training as a screenwriter. For her first attempt, she favored simplicity and humility by choosing to portray those around her as sincerely as possible by directing *La Vie de Jeune Fille*. Continuing with the same enthusiasm, Pauline wrote and then directed her first feature film, NINO.

# CAST LIST

<b>Nino</b>	Théodore Pellerin
<b>Sofian</b>	William Lebghil
<b>Zoé</b>	Salomé Dewaels
<b>Nino's Mother</b>	Jeanne Balibar
<b>Camille</b>	Camille Rutherford
<b>Lina</b>	Estelle Meyer
<b>Oncologist</b>	Victoire Du Bois
<b>Solal</b>	Balthazar Billaud
<b>Man from bathhouse</b>	Mathieu Amalric
<b>Chloé</b>	Nahéma Ricci
<b>Raphaël</b>	Alexandre Desrousseaux
<b>Aries Girl</b>	Lola Felouzis
<b>Man in the waiting room</b>	Maël Besnard
<b>Procreation Nurse</b>	Lison Daniel

# CREW LIST

**Director** Pauline Loquès  
**Scriptwriter** Pauline Loquès, avec la collaboration de Maud Ameline  
**Producer** Sandra da Fonseca  
**Cinematographer** Lucie Baudinaud  
**Editor** Clémence Diard  
**Casting director** Youna de Peretti  
**Production manager** Cécile Remy-Boutang  
**Associated producers** Bertrand Gore et Nathalie Mesuret  
**Assistant Director** Elodie Roy  
**Script Supervisor** Iris Chassaigne  
**Sound Designer** Nassim El Mounabbih  
**Sound Editor** Claire Cahu  
**Dialogue Editor** Amaury Arboun  
**Sound Mixer** Simon Apostolou  
**Production Designer** Aurette Leroy  
**Costume Designer** Jenn Pocobene, Martin Barré  
**General stage manager** Thomas Gache  
**Accessories** Clément Debève  
**Make-up Artist** Paloma Zaïd

**Hair Stylist** Lou Gimenez  
**Assistant Cinematographer** Alexis Cohen  
**Gaffer** Cyril Bossard  
**Grip** Carl Demaille  
**Post-Production Supervisor** Delphine Passant  
**Music Supervisor** Thibault Deboaisne  
**Produced by** Blue Monday Productions  
**In co-production with** France 2 Cinéma  
Belleville Production  
**With the support of** Ciné+ OCS  
**With the participation of** Disney+  
**With the participation of** France Télévisions  
**With the support of** Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée  
**With the support of** La Région Île-de-France  
**In association with** Cinémage 19  
**Developped with the support of** Cofinova Développement, Procirep-Angoa  
**Distributor** Jour2Fête  
**World Sales** The Party Film Sales