



GFF INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY GALA

Happening (L'Événement)

+ pre-recorded Q&A with director Audrey Diwan

I got knocked up like a poor girl. This is the story of Anne, a young woman who decides to abort to finish her studies and escape the social constraints of a working-class family. France in 1963: a society that censures women's desires. And sex in general. This simple but cruel story follows the itinerary of a woman who decides to go against the law. Anne has only a little time before her. Her exams are just around the corner, and her baby bump is growing fast...

A letter from author Annie Ernaux

I came out of the screening of *Happening* very moved. The only thing I could say to Audrey Diwan was: 'You've made a truthful film'.

By truthful I meant as close as possible to what it meant for a girl to become pregnant in the 1960s, when the law forbade and punished abortion. The film does not argue, judge, or even dramatise. It follows Anne's everyday life as a student from the moment she waits for her period in vain until her pregnancy has been terminated. In other words, it is told via Anne's point of view; her gestures, her behaviour with others, the way she walks, her silences, all convey this sudden crisis in her life, as her body grows heavier, and she craves foods that will only disgust her. It conveys the unspeakable horror of time passing – as posted on screen in terms of weeks – and the disarray and discouragement when every other solution fails. But it also shows determination to see things through to the end. And when all is said and done, and Anne is once again surrounded by other students, her serene and luminous face reflects her conviction that the future once again belongs to her.

I cannot imagine anyone but Anamaria Vartolomei playing Anne and, in a certain sense, playing me at 23. She is overwhelmingly true and spot-on, as I recall things.

But I do not think that I would have found the film so absolutely true to life, if it had obfuscated what women had recourse to before the passage of the 'Loi Veil', the 1975 law decriminalising abortion in France. Audrey Diwan had the courage to show it in all its brutal reality: the knitting needles, the probe introduced into the uterus by an abortionist. Only such disturbing images can make us aware of the horrors that were perpetrated on women's bodies, and what a step backwards would mean.

Twenty years ago, at the end of my book, I wrote that what happened to me during those three months in 1964 was my body's 'total experience' of the times and its morals... The prohibition of abortion and then the new legislation. That is just what Audrey Diwan shows and conveys in her film.

An interview with director Audrey Diwan

What prompted you to adapt Annie Ernaux' novel Happening?

I've known Annie Ernaux' work for a long time now: the power of her thought and the purity of her style. But I came late to *Happening*. I was impressed by the dichotomy between the hackneyed formula: back-alley abortion, and the concrete reality of the procedure. My first thoughts were for the body of this young woman, what it must have suffered from the moment she was told she

was pregnant. And the dilemma she was faced with. Risk her life and abort, or have the baby and sacrifice her future. Body or mind. I would not have wanted to choose. All those questions were raised concretely in the initial text. I tried to translate them into images: a carnal process that would let me turn the narrative into a physical experience. In a voyage that I hope is possible beyond considerations of period or gender.

Did you discuss your approach to the novel with Annie Ernaux?

Yes, from the start. I wanted both to respect the book and find my own place in it, a narrow but essential path. First, we spent a day together, during which Annie Ernaux agreed to revisit those days in detail. She shed light on the blind spots in the text to give me a more precise idea of the political context, so I would understand the fear that took hold of women the moment they made up their minds. When Annie Ernaux arrived at the precise moment of her abortion, her eyes welled with tears, as she remembered what society had forced on her as a young girl. I was unsettled by the intensity of her grief. I often remembered this, while writing. And then I asked her to read the various drafts of the screenplay. She helped me to find the most honest approach. And that approach guided me throughout the entire making of... Each post – art design, costumes, makeup – respected those guidelines. And then just before the shoot, Annie Ernaux sent me this quote from Chekhov: ‘Be accurate, the rest will come in due course.’

Why adapt this novel today?

I suspect that this question will be raised regularly, which I must say astonishes me. I doubt that the same question is systematically asked of people who decide to do a period film, to deal with a social issue or past politics. And when I use the word ‘past’ I am leaving out all the countries in which the law does not yet permit abortion. *Happening* dwells on a period in our history which is rarely depicted. But as I see it, a film cannot confine itself to its subject. Otherwise, why not make a documentary? With *Happening*, I wanted to probe feelings, to focus on the intimate suspense that increases as the story goes on. As the days go by, the horizon shrinks, and the body becomes a prison. But abortion is not our only subject. My protagonist Anne is a social renegade. She comes from a working-class family. She is the first to go on to university. The faculty ambience feels more bourgeois, with stricter codes and morals. Anne moves back and forth from one world to the other while keeping a secret that could dash all her hopes. At twenty, you are already searching for your place in the world. How do you do that when your own future is permanently at risk?

How did you cast Anamaria Vartolomei, who is in every sequence of the film and often in extreme close-up?

From our first auditions, Anamaria Vartolomei had the right physique for the role. And then there was something else, mysterious, and powerful: her diaphanous skin, her interiorised vision of the world, difficult to decipher and captivating at the same time. She communicates a great deal using minimal means.

She is a minimalist actor. I am very sensitive to her kind of delicacy. We began by defining the character in terms of her body. Her posture. I kept repeating: ‘Anne is a soldier’, she keeps a low profile, with her feet on the ground, staring straight ahead, ready to take on the world. She needs to live with her renegade status. With what it means to have everyone’s eyes on you, with society weighing you down. Anamaria intelligently forged the armour the character required.

Production notes

HAPPENING (L'ÉVÈNEMENT)

Directed by: Audrey Diwan

©: Rectangle Productions, France 3 Cinéma, Wild Bunch, Srab Films

Produced by: Rectangle Productions

In co-production with: France 3 Cinéma, Wild Bunch, Srab Films

With the participation of: Canal+, Ciné+, France Télévisions

With the support of: Centre National du cinéma et de l'image animée

With the support of: Région Île-De-France,

Région Nouvelle-Aquitaine Magelis

And: Département Charente

In partnership with: CNC

In association with: Palatine Étoile 18, Cofinova 17

Developed with the support of: Cofinova, Développement 16

With the support of: Procirep

Produced by: Édouard Weil, Alice Girard

Production Manager: Monica Taverna

Post-Production Manager: Mélanie Karlin

Location Manager: Gary Spinelli

Assistant Director: Anaïs Couette

Continuity: Diane Brasseur

Casting: Élodie Demey

Screenplay: Audrey Diwan, Marcia Romano

With the participation of: Anne Berest

Based on the novel by: Annie Ernaux

Director of Photography: Laurent Tangy

Gaffer: Olivier Mandrin

Key Grip: Thomas Valaëys

Editing: Géraldine Mangenot

Set Design: Diéné Berete

Costumes: Isabelle Pannetier

Make-up: Amélie Bouilly

Hairdresser: Sarah Mescoff

Original Music: Evgueni Galperine, Sacha Galperine

Sound Engineers: Antoine Mercier, Philippe Welsh

Sound Editor: Thomas Desjonquères

Mixing: Marc Doisne

Cast

Anamaria Vartolomei (*Anne*)

Kacey Mottet-Klein (*Jean*)

Luàna Bajrami (*Hélène*)

Louise Orry-Diquero (*Brigitte*)

Louise Chevillotte (*Olivia*)

Pio Marmaï (*Professor Bornec*)

Sandrine Bonnaire (*Gabrielle*)

Leonor Oberson (*Claire*)

Anna Mouglalis (*Rivière*)

Cyril Metzger (*Gaspard*)

Éric Verdin (*Jacques*)

Alice de Lencquesaing (*Laëtitia*)

Madeleine Baudot (*Lise*)

Fabrizio Rongione (*Doctor Ravinsky*)

Isabelle Mazin (*Magda*)

Julien Frison (*Maxime*)

Edouard Sulpice (*Patrick*)

Muse Céline (*Leïla*)

François Loriquet (*Doctor Guimet*)

Louis Bédot (*fireman*)

Emeline Weickmans (*student in telephone booth*)

Gabriel Washer (*student wearing cap*)

Lomane De Dietrich (*student at flea market*)

France 2021©

99 mins

IN PERSON & PREVIEWS

TV Preview: Inside No. 9 + Q&A with creators Reece Shearsmith and Steve Pemberton, and executive producer Adam Tandy

Fri 11 Mar 20:40

GFF Closing Gala: Murina

Sun 13 Mar 19:00

REGULAR PROGRAMME

Film Wallahs: The Beatles and India + intro by co-director Pete Compton and producer Reynold D'Silva

Thu 10 Mar 18:15

NEW RELEASES

La Mif (The Fam)

Continues from Fri 25 Feb

Rebel Dread

From Fri 4 Mar

Ali & Ava

From Fri 11 Mar; Tue 15 March 14:00 Seniors' matinee + discussion

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Programme notes and credits compiled by the BFI Documentation Unit

Notes may be edited or abridged. Questions/comments? Email prognotes@bfi.org.uk

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