



## BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

# Girlhood (Bande de filles)

### Girlhood (Bande de filles)

Director: Céline Sciamma

©: Hold Up Films & Productions, Lilies Films, Arte France Cinéma

With the participation of:

Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée

With the support of: Fonds Images de la diversité et de l'Accés, Région Ile-de-France

With the participation of: Canal+,

Arte France, Ciné+

In association with: Pyramide Distribution,

Films Distribution, Arte Cofinova 9

Production Company: Hold Up Films, Lilies Films

In co-production with: Arte France Cinéma

Presents: Hold Up Films, Lilies Films

[Presented] in co-production with:

Arte France Cinéma

International Sales: Films Distribution

Produced by: Bénédicte Couvreur

Production Manager: Gaetane Josse

1st Assistant Director: Delphine Daull

Castling: Christel Baras

Screenplay: Céline Sciamma

Cinematographer: Crystel Fournier

1st Assistant Operator: Aurélien Dubois

Steadicam Operator: Stéphane Chollet

Special Effects: Artful FX

Editor: Julien Lacheray

Art Director: Thomas Grézaud

Costumes: Céline Sciamma

Make-up Supervisor: Marie Luiset

Titles: Laurent Sciamma

Original Music: Para One

Musicians: François Lasserre, David Patrois,

Arthur Simonini

Sound Recordist: Pierre André

Sound Mixer: Daniel Sobrino

Sound Editor: Pierre André

Stunt Co-ordinator: Gregg Loffredo

Cast:

Karidja Touré (Marieme/Vic)

Assa Sylla (Lady)

Lindsay Karamoh (Adiatou)

Marietou Touré (Fily)

Idrissa Diabaté (Ismaël)

Simina Soumare (Bébé)

Cyril Mendy (Djibril)

Djibril Gueye (Abou)

Dielika Coulibaly (Monica)

Binta Diop (Asma)

Chance N'Guessan (Mini)

Rabah Naït Oufella (Kader)

Damien Chapelle (Cédric)

Nina Melo (Caidy)

Elyes Sabyani (Abdel)

France 2014©

113 mins

With her first two films – *Water Lilies* (2007) and *Tomboy* (2011) – Céline Sciamma sought to explore the complexity and range of female experience in contemporary France. *Water Lilies* examined the sexual coming of age of three teenage girls in a Paris suburb, while *Tomboy* focused on a ten-year-old girl who passes for a boy after moving to a new neighbourhood and starts up an ambiguous friendship with another girl. But while both were clearly representative of aspects of modern teenage girls' lives, Sciamma seems intent on making a bolder claim for her latest film. 'With *Girlhood*...' she says, her eyebrow cocked as she waits out a pregnant pause, 'I decided that French young women today are this girl.'

The girl in question is Marieme (Karidja Touré), the film's central character, a Black teenager living in the banlieues beyond the rim of Paris's Boulevard Périphérique. With her single mother (Binta Diop) working nights as a cleaner, Marieme is left to parent her younger sisters and fend off her bullying older brother (Cyril Mendy), who watches over her like a hawk. She passes out of the school system, forced out by the limited prospects offered to her as much as walking away, into the company of a gang of three fiercely independent girls – the leader Lady (Assa Sylla) and her two best friends Fily (Mariétou Touré) and Adiatou (Lindsay Karamoh) – until difficult circumstances rouse her to redefine herself again. When I meet Sciamma following *Girlhood*'s UK premiere at the 2014 BFI London Film Festival, comparisons between her film and Richard Linklater's *Boyhood* seem inevitable. But since *Girlhood* doesn't share the same childhood to adulthood narrative arc and the films' similarities really begin and end with their his-and-hers epithets, it's surprising that Sciamma herself should seize on the association. 'What is *Boyhood*?' she asks. 'It's a white, middle-class young man, having average dreams, average thoughts.'

Sciamma is a calm, intelligent interviewee, if a little withdrawn to begin with. She has that French sang-froid, with languid movements that suggest absolute assurance. She responds levelly and thoughtfully, and is generous with her answers, notwithstanding the frustration of having to discuss her work in a foreign language. ('I'm sorry; I lack vocabulary,' she says. 'I was a lousy student in English, but I lived abroad for two years in Singapore as a kid, and so...') And so she clearly has an excellent memory.) When she gives a brief answer, it is because a brief answer will suffice.

One suspects she doesn't really believe there's anything to be gained from equating *Girlhood* with *Boyhood*, that she has no real argument with Linklater. She chose her title before ever hearing of *Boyhood*, and likes it better than the French *Bande de filles*. And it isn't the first time the filmmaker has looked to the English language for a title. She did so with *Tomboy*, rejecting the French equivalent – *garçon manqué* – as too pejorative in its literal meaning: 'failed boy'.

But since she sees *Boyhood* as a fundamentally mainstream tale, I ask how conscious she is of what has and hasn't already been made, and whether her filmmaking is a deliberate corrective to absences in contemporary cinema. 'I go for a film when I feel there's a connection between something I want to tell – the fact that it has a strong fictional potential – and the fact that there's the need to look at it, a political need, a representational need... an intimate urgency, and a collective one, and it's in that order, you know?'

Sciamma has come in for criticism for inferring that Marieme's racially conditioned experience could ever be a catch-all for the general teenage experience. Sciamma is a white woman, who, in her own words, does not 'effectively' know her characters. By linking her film – conspicuous by its difference to anything else in the marketplace – to *Boyhood*, she is diminishing the singularity of this highly visible film about a low-visibility subject: 'They are not often looked at, Black girls.'

But it is clear that Sciamma means her film to be universal in the sense that Marieme's story covers all the bases – much as she hoped *Tomboy* would strike a chord with the transgender viewer and cisgendered girls uncomfortable with conventional notions of femininity, as well as audiences of all sexual orientations.

## BECOME A BFI MEMBER

Enjoy a great package of film benefits including priority booking at BFI Southbank and BFI Festivals. Join today at [bfi.org.uk/join](http://bfi.org.uk/join)

## BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

### Out of Sight

Fri 1 Sep 20:30; Thu 7 Sep 20:35; Fri 22 Sep 17:55

### Girlhood (Bande des filles)

Sat 2 Sep 16:00; Sun 17 Sep 18:30;

Mon 2 Oct 18:10

### Il bidone (The Swindle)

Sun 3 Sep 12:20; Thu 14 Sep 20:45;

Sat 30 Sep 15:40

### Hidden (Caché)

Mon 4 Sep 18:00; Thu 21 Sep 20:40;

Wed 27 Sep 17:50 (+ intro by Geoff Andrew,

Programmer-at-Large)

### Notorious

Tue 5 Sep 14:30; Sat 23 Sep 11:45;

Sun 1 Oct 15:20; Tue 3 Oct 20:30

### The Wind Will Carry Us

#### (Bad mara khahad bourd)

Wed 6 Sep 18:10 (+ intro by Shohini Chaudhuri,

Professor of Film Studies, University of Essex);

Fri 15 Sep 20:40

### Ace in the Hole (aka The Big Carnival)

Fri 8 Sep 14:40; Mon 11 Sep 20:45;

Fri 29 Sep 18:00

### The Killers

Sat 9 Sep 18:20; Tue 12 Sep 14:30;

Mon 18 Sep 20:50

### The Maltese Falcon

Sun 10 Sep 11:50; Mon 25 Sep 14:40;

Tue 26 Sep 20:55

### F for Fake

Wed 13 Sep 18:20 (+ intro by Jason Wood,

BFI Executive Director of Public Programmes &

Audiences); Thu 21 Sep 18:30

### Barry Lyndon

Sat 16 Sep 19:30; Sun 24 Sep 14:30

### The Kid with a Bike (Le Gamin au vélo)

Tue 19 Sep 20:45; Tue 26 Sep 18:05

### Au revoir les enfants

Wed 20 Sep 18:00 (+ intro by film critic and lecturer

Dr Julia Wagner); Thu 28 Sep 20:45

## SIGHT AND SOUND

Never miss an issue with **Sight and Sound**, the BFI's internationally renowned film magazine. Subscribe from just £25\*

\* Price based on a 6-month print subscription (UK only). More info: [sightandsoundsubs.bfi.org.uk](http://sightandsoundsubs.bfi.org.uk)

**SIGHT AND SOUND**

## BFI PLAYER

We are always open online on BFI Player where you can watch the best new, cult & classic cinema on demand. Showcasing hand-picked landmark British and independent titles, films are available to watch in three distinct ways: Subscription, Rentals & Free to view.

See something different today on [player.bfi.org.uk](http://player.bfi.org.uk)

But in the case of *Girlhood*, Sciamma doesn't seem interested in detailing the reasons why a Black girl from a low-income family should be able to speak for all girls her age, turning the argument on its head by saying, "Why shouldn't she?"

Sciamma writes out of 'strong identification' with her characters, scripting from start to finish alone, and as the focus of all her films is on the female, 'girlhood' would serve as an apt umbrella-banner for the films she's made: a trilogy only in retrospect, because she is adamant that this is the last film she'll make about adolescence with a non-professional cast: 'I don't know what I'm going to do next. I just know that I'm going to stop... I have to be a grownup now. I want to work with actors – I mean, actors who chose to be actors.'

If the triptych was unpremeditated, Sciamma is at least sympathetic to the term: '*Water Lilies* was about the beginning of teenage-hood; *Tomboy*, the end of childhood; and this one is about the end of teenagehood.' In these transitional phases in the young life of a girl she has found her 'strong fictional potential', and feels the visual medium of film is particularly suited to their expression. Her films are fairly muted – *Girlhood*, the most talkative to date – and their focus, as she's stated before, is on the 'how' rather than 'why' of her characters' behaviour.

Cinema befits her subjects in still another way. Marieme, like *Tomboy's* young protagonist Laure/Mickaël, observes the world attentively in a way that encourages audiences to look closer and more meditatively at Sciamma's characters. Their looking is, in part, a condition of their marginality, and inexorably connected to desire. Marieme wishes to be assimilated into the freethinking, free-acting girl group she admires. In a key scene in which the girls mime to Rihanna's pop-track 'Diamonds' – 'The scene I most fantasised about,' says Sciamma, admitting that it was 'very choreographed' despite its apparent freeness – Marieme, islanded on the hotel-room bed, watches her friends adoringly as they dance in front of her, before, in a pivotal moment, standing up to join them.

Sciamma's films show us that looking – in spite of the prevalence of the male gaze – is a feminine proclivity, and with *Girlhood* she takes the idea one step further. In a memorably charged night-time sequence, Marieme stalks with intent to the home of her boyfriend Ismaël. Waking him up, she has him take off his clothes, and turn over in the bed at her bidding. He does as he's told as she watches. 'It's powerful because we never see it,' Sciamma says. 'But it's crazy that we never see it. People tell me it's an inversion. I say, "Yeah, it's an inversion – of how we represent heterosexual sex onscreen." But it's not an inversion of how it actually happens, I hope. It would be so sad otherwise. I'm not a pro at heterosexual sex, but come on!'

If representing heterosexual sex is a first for Sciamma, so is shooting in CinemaScope with an all-Black cast in a tech-literate setting, with mobile phones and viral video. But it's through these firsts that *Girlhood* becomes the crowning culmination of the three films, whose common concern is the multiplicity of what it is to be female. *Girlhood's* girls are complex, capable of seemingly contradictory behaviours: innocent and adept at intimidation, playful and violent, loyal and competitive, juvenile and maternal. Was the film meant to be a comment on cinema's apparent need for female characters to be consolidated or archetypal? 'It's absolutely the centre of the project – to try to make plural portraits of the same girl, being in contradiction, in paradox, and not being one thing. [In other films] with girl-characters there's one energy, one language. I wanted them to speak several languages, because they do.' The motive of the film, its 'political project', is to 'fight this idea of assignation'.

Marieme, more than any of Sciamma's other characters, positively embodies this resistance. By the film's open-ended conclusion, which sees Marieme exit the screen – not by walking away from us into an affirmative future, but laterally across the frame – she is wearing 'the braids of childhood, the make-up of womanhood, and the [masculine] clothes of boyhood, and she's everything and nothing. She has to become.'

Thirza Wakefield, *Sight and Sound*, June 2015