



NEW RELEASES

Silver Haze

Silver Haze

Directed by: Sacha Polak

Production Companies: Viking Film, EMU Films

Executive Producers: Eva Yates, Frank Klein, Clea De Koning, Sacha Polak, Vicky Knight, Jim Mooney, Walli Ullah

Produced by: Marleen Slot, Michael Elliott

Line Producers: Lee Groombridge, Chris Jorna

Casting: Lucy Pardee

Written by: Sacha Polak

Director of Photography: Tibor Dingelstad

Editor: Lot Rossmark

Production Designer: Elena Isolini

Composers: Ella van der Woude, Joris Oonk

Sound Designer: Jan Schermer

Sound Recordist: Job Michel

Cast:

Vicky Knight (*Franky*)

Esmé Creed-Miles (*Florence*)

Charlotte Knight (*Leah*)

Archie Bridgen (*Jack*)

Terriann Cousins (*Jenn*)

Angela Bruce (*Alice*)

Netherlands-UK 2023

102 mins

Digital

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'Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle,' runs the quote – usually misattributed to Plato – that pops up in email signatures, motivational posters and countless memes. It's a sentiment that runs through Sacha Polak's remarkable new film *Silver Haze*, her follow up to *Dirty God* (2019).

Vicky Knight plays Franky, a young nurse from a rough working-class family; her mum's an alcoholic and her sister Leah (played by Knight's real-life sister Charlotte) is in a relationship with an abusive partner. Franky is consumed by her own demons. As a child she was badly burned in a fire in her father's pub; she's convinced the fire was caused by the woman her dad has since started a new family with, but there's no evidence to prove it. It's a trauma Franky handles by smoking weed and nurturing thoughts of revenge – that is, until Florence (Esmé Creed-Miles), a disturbed young woman who has just attempted suicide, turns up on Franky's ward and the two find themselves drawn to each other.

Polak, who also wrote the screenplay partly based on Knight's own experiences, captures the humour, tone and rhythms of working-class life without condescension or Dardennesque dourness. While never forsaking the grit, Tibor Dingelstad's camerawork stays alert to moments of beauty and invests moments with a sensuous immediacy, whether it's a rave in the park or a moment of kindness in a hospital ward, grace notes amongst the radio noise of mundane reality. No character seems like a cipher; if anything, Polak runs the risk of cramming in too many subplots in an attempt to ensure all her characters are fully fleshed out. The lives of everyone in *Silver Haze* are fractured and stumbling, and if the film loses track of Franky and Flo's relationship, it's because it is busy taking in the world around them.

The excellent supporting cast keep the overlapping stories vivid, with veteran TV actor Angela Bruce deserving special mention as Flo's wise but ailing grandmother. And Vicky Knight, following her breakout performance in *Dirty God*, once more impresses. It's the kind of performance that often gets stamped with that backhanded adjective, 'raw'. But it's more than that. It's complex and nuanced, and it gives the film its heart. At one point Franky asks a patient to rate their pain on a scale of one to ten. Polak's film reminds us that even the person asking that question might be on the higher end of that spectrum.

John Bleasdale, *Sight and Sound*, April 2024

Sacha Polak on 'Silver Haze'

You worked with Vicky Knight before, on 2019's Dirty God. But this time, you are actually referencing her own story.

When we did *Dirty God*, she loved it so much. We were travelling the world, presenting the film at all these different festivals, and we got to know each other so well. I started to think we could easily do it again, but I wanted to make it more about her. *Silver Haze* is loosely based on her own experiences [as a child, Knight survived an arson attack], but I also wanted to feel free as a storyteller. Some of our financiers expected this film to be more of a documentary – instead, I opted for a minimal crew and just started exploring. At first, I wrote 20 pages, but it wasn't even a real script. Later, I realised I really needed one [laughter]. During the shoot, everyone would wear their own clothes and do their own makeup, and even if they lacked experience, they gave it their all.

You never show the fire that changed Franky's life. It's just mentioned here, with everyone remembering it a bit differently. Why?

We just didn't need it. I thought we needed this mystery at the beginning. I wanted people to wonder about what really happened to her. Make them wait, for as long as I could. The trauma is real, but a lot of what we are showing here is fictional. Franky has created this whole narrative in her head, but it hasn't been solved yet.

NEW RELEASES

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Wed 24 Apr 20:30

Summer Vacation 1999

1999 nen no natsu yasumi + intro

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screening Baibai rabu + intro

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For Vicky, it has been very similar. She was a child when it happened. Later, when you are looking back at such early memories, it's hard to tell what's real and what's not.

You are not focusing on her scars in the film. Instead, other characters keep praising her beauty, she seems confident. Was it something you both discussed?

We talked about it, but I also noticed that this time around, Vicky was much stronger. She was much more comfortable in her skin, in front of the camera. In *Dirty God* – where she played the victim of an acid attack – she would get angry when we were filming her scarred hands, for example. She wouldn't complain, but she felt insecure. Now, it wasn't the case at all. Also, we were shooting in her hometown, she was surrounded by family – her brother and sister both play in the film. I think she felt safe.

Do you think you will continue to explore this relationship between reality and fiction?

There is something about it I have always found very interesting. My father was a documentary filmmaker, so is my stepmother. In *Silver Haze*, Vicky's sister Charlotte plays her character's sister too – I thought their relationship was quite special and she turned out to be a natural. But we didn't film inside Vicky's own house, as we didn't want to put too much pressure on her. Still, I have to say that my upcoming project *The Doll Factory*, a TV series for Paramount+, will be completely different. In that story, everything is so heightened.

That show will reunite you with Esmé Creed-Miles, Vicky's co-star in Silver Haze. Do you like to return to the same actors or other collaborators? What does it give you?

It will mark the third time we are working together with Esmé after [Amazon Prime Video show] *Hanna*. When we were filming it, I actually said to her: 'Would you like to be in this crazy film? I don't even know what it's going to be about.' [laughter] She was used to much bigger budgets, but she was really up for this challenge. I might work with Vicky again, too. When you know each other, you can easily dive into things, explore deeper topics. It can be very lonely, making a film. But on a small production like ours, you really start feeling like a family.

Speaking of families – you show very different relationships here, including one between Franky and Florence. Do you see your film as a love story?

I wanted to see what could happen if these girls, coming from two different backgrounds, would finally get together. I feel that Florence is using Franky at first. She wants a girlfriend, or maybe just an accessory. She is narcissistic and it's hard for her to have real relationships – the exact opposite of Franky, who is very caring. But she does give her something, and it means more than she could have even expected. They are both searching, figuring out what they need in life. Not to mention dealing with very different problems.

Everyone is searching for something in Silver Haze. Also your supporting characters.

It's true – it can be religion, love, it can be family. What Franky finds at the end is something I can relate to as well: this idea that you can always create your own community. There is a happy ending, with all these strange people coming together somehow. There is hope for the future. In this film, I wanted to avoid what is usually described as 'poverty porn'. Yes, there is illness and alcohol, there are people who for various reasons are simply not taking care of themselves. But when I was spending time with Vicky or with her family, I noticed so much more. They all live in the same house – where I am from, which is Amsterdam, you move out when you are 18 years old. For them, it's not possible, but I am not even sure it would make them happier. There is a lot of love and warmth there, and light, and I certainly wanted to show that.

Production notes