

MAX & LENNY

A film by
Fred Nicolas



France – HD – 2014 – 85 mins – 2.35 – 5.1

Produced by CHAZ Productions



Logline

Marseille, a multicultural city. Max is a cheerful teenager who lives illegally with her Congolese family. Lenny meets Max while she is rehearsing her rapping in secret. Rap is the language of her soul, and music will be the bond that unites the two girls.

Synopsis

Lenny is a wild and solitary 19-year-old from the projects north of Marseille. She expresses the difficulties of daily life through rap, which is also her way of escaping from it.

One evening, when she's sneaked off to rehearse on an abandoned building site, Lenny runs into Max, a young Congolese woman without immigration papers, who is blown away by her voice and the power of her lyrics. From that point on, the two girls form a special bond.



Biography and filmography of the director

Fred Nicolas has worked as assistant director for numerous directors including Erick Zonca, Arnaud Desplechin, Pierre Salvadori, Sandrine Veysset, Robert Guédiguian and Marina De Van.

He directed the short film “Vivre” (2000), which was selected for the Festival Tous Courts in Aix-en-Provence and elsewhere, and two documentaries, including “Rouge Bandit” about the extreme-left militant Charlie Bauer. “Max & Lenny” is his first feature-length movie.



Fred Nicolas ©AletteCosset.

Director's Note

Marseille

Marseille is no doubt the only city in the world where the cannons – those of the Saint-Jean fort alongside the Old Port – do not point out to sea, but towards the city and its inhabitants.

The experience of my first film gave me the opportunity to frequent the working class neighborhoods on the edge of Marseille and to witness slices of individual lives there. In these districts to the north, there's nothing pretty or picturesque. People live totally precarious lives. There's just the sun and the view of the sea from the heights of Saint-Antoine to provides an occasional distraction for the residents from their hardships. The challenge was to transcend this social realism to make a film that is more poetic and optimistic – to show the violent world of the projects, but also that of the sun-drenched creeks and the residential neighborhoods.

The cast

Casting was one of the film's main challenges. We moved heaven and earth to find the right teenage actresses and to make them a part of these neighborhoods. I wanted teenage girls who had something of the characters within them, so they could draw on their own experiences to bring feeling and emotion to the text.

Lenny: *Camélia Pand'Or* - We needed someone who – like Lenny – has a particular relationship with words, who struggles to express her emotions other than through the texts which she raps over instrumentals. We came across Pand'Or late in the day, through a self-produced music video which she had just posted on the web. She had that power in her phrasing, that animal presence and the aggressive delivery I was looking for. But my chief requirement concerned her acting ability, and she nailed it from the first screen tests.

Max: *Jisca Kalvanda* - Like Max, Jisca had this upbeat energy that I was looking for, that carefree attitude despite life's harshness. She emerged as the obvious choice during the screen tests.

The characters

Left to their own devices, Max and Lenny are two 19-year-old women who are facing hardships that are too heavy for their young shoulders. They have no concept of what an easy life would be, since theirs involve a daily combat with no clear future. Max and Lenny are both highly sensitive, yet harsh, like their social destiny. They are a mix of the fragility of adolescence and the invincibility that has its roots in what is left of their childhood. In the projects, these girls have little chance of becoming contemplative: they have to act to get by. And in this environment, adolescence is not only the age of possibilities, but also the age when one becomes aware of the dead-ends, when one feels injustices more cruelly, and when the spirit of adventure is continually coming up against the obstacles of daily life. Through Max and Lenny, I recount the point of view of a youth that is at once tough and streetwise, with a vision and awareness of the times.

The music

Lenny's real pleasure in life, and her refuge, is music, and especially rap. She has a special connection with music, like it's something sacred. Lenny has that amazing capacity to transform what she's feeling into words. That is how she exorcizes her painful past, and how she escapes from her harsh present. She has obvious talent, but she's unable to see it. She's an undercover rapper, not daring to reveal her skills. That's one of the film's main themes: how an unacknowledged talent can find ways to express itself thanks to an encounter with another person.

The writing approach

I wanted to deal with adolescence, friendship and music, and also my city, Marseille, and its northern districts which I know well. I wanted to film the local faces and capture the accents, from the point of view of girls who have to fight to survive. I looked to François Bégaudeau for his experience with youth culture and his critical take on society. We have a shared liking for the work of Keny Arkana in hip-hop; the acerbic, politically engaged lyrics that Arkana was rapping from the age of 16 was our inspiration for the character of Lenny. The friendship began with an encounter, so we needed the opposite of Lenny: Max, the petite black girl, radiant and inventive. Accompanied by François on this territory with which he is so familiar, we crafted the film against this background of social realism. We built it up in successive tooings-and-froings, like a game of ping-pong that lasted more than a year, one version of the screenplay after another, each in his own corner, the internet between us.

Fred Nicolas



A story of friendship

What's left when you've got nothing, or next to nothing? What's left is friendship, which is free and within the grasp of all, rich or poor. They say we learn from our parents, our teachers, our leaders, and our artists. It's not often said that we learn a lot from our friends. It's not often said how much we owe them. To Max, Lenny owes the revelation that she is gifted and that nothing says her talent has to stay confined to her bedroom. If love can move mountains, friendship can move whole mountain ranges. Max and Lenny had to meet; their companionship has a self-evident power, in defiance of their circumstances.

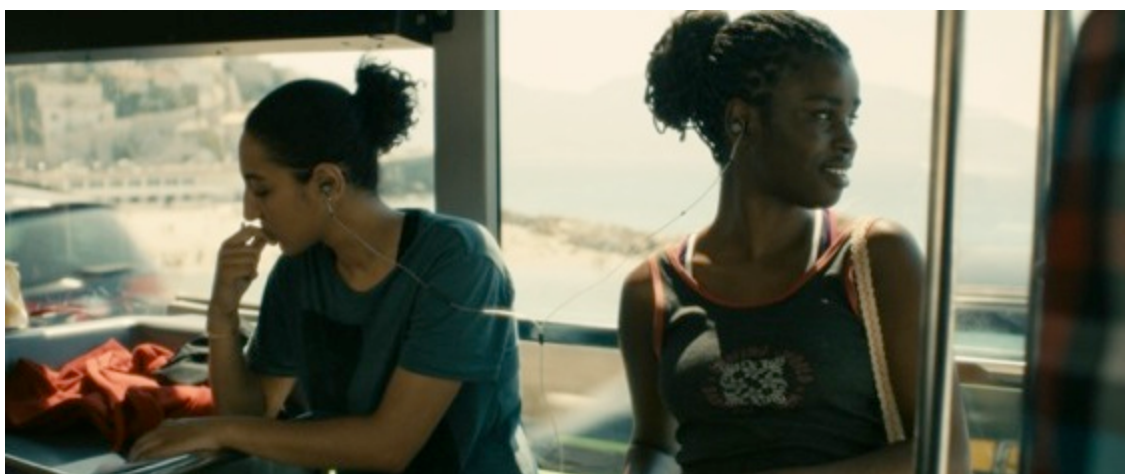
François Bégaudeau

CAST

Camélia PAND'OR	(Lenny)
Jisca KALVANDA	(Maxine)
Adam HEGAZY	(Saïd)
Alvie BITEMO MAMOUNGA	(Rita)
Norbert GODJI	(Norbert)
Martial BEZOT	(Educator)
Mathieu DEMY	(The teacher)
Pierre SALVADORI	(The inspector)

CREW

Director	Fred Nicolas
Screenplay	Fred Nicolas & François Bégaudeau
Camera	Sébastien Buchmann
Editing	Mike Fromentin, Gilda Fine
Sound	Jean-Michel Tresallet, Pierre Bariaud, Samuel Aïchoun
Assistant Directors	Luis Bertolo, Paule Sardou
Costumes	Janina Ryba
Original Music	Simon Neel, Camélia Pand'Or
Producer	Elisabeth Perez
Co-Producers	Cécile Vacheret, Philippe Akoka, Olivier Legrain



World Sales: **Alpha Violet**
14 rue Soleillet BL 64 - 75020 Paris, France
Tel: +33 1 47 97 39 84 info@alphaviolet.com www.alphaviolet.com