

THELMA

A film by Pierre-Alain MEIER

With Laurent SCHILLING, Pascale OURBIH,
Nathalia CAPO D'ISTRIA

PRODUCTION AND WORLD SALES

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SYNOPSIS

Vincent Fleury, a taxi driver in Lausanne, lives apart from his wife and son. One night he meets Thelma, a young woman who offers him a large amount of money to take her to Crete and help her get revenge on an ex-lover.

Vincent and Thelma get close during the trip, but Thelma remains a bit evasive. Vincent has trouble understanding her game, until one night, when their flirting gets slightly more serious and he finds out... that she is a man. He is shocked and pushes her away. However, when he discovers Thelma's "other" secret, he begins to see her differently...

PIERRE-ALAIN MEIER

about his film

How it all started...

"During the shooting of *Douleur d'amour*, a documentary shot in São Paulo in the late 80's, I met Thelma Lipp, a famous transsexual TV animator. It immediately brought me to another planet: fiction, lies and poetry were all of a sudden much more exceptional than reality. From then on, I was obsessed with the idea of creating a character for this person whose life was based on creation, acting and imagination. This is how *Thelma* started."

The script

"The writing process of this film was long and complex. First we had to create Thelma's universe, make her personality plausible and get to the bottom of her inner tensions. We had to show to what extent denying one's sex can generate such a unique person, and we didn't try to explain the inexplicable: the fact that one day, a man decides to lead a woman's life. Then, we created a character, Vincent, meant to show the gulf between our world and Thelma's universe. Separated from his wife, living apart from his son, Vincent is not the kind of man who should be attracted by Thelma's sexual difference. Like her, he is lonely and is able to understand her shifty ambivalence."

The shooting, the actors

"I decided to shoot the film with a transsexual woman. Pascale Ourbih accepted this part even though it meant taking personal risks. From the moment you see Pascale naked in the film, the narration no longer works in a classical way.

"The documentary truth of Pascale's body inevitably questions the fictional narration of the film. Our usual references are no longer valid. Thelma/Pascale echoes our own ambivalence, and we endlessly confuse Thelma's and Pascale's respective realities."

"The three actors, Pascale Ourbih, Laurent Schilling (Vincent) and Nathalia Capo d'Istria (Fenia) intelligently adjusted their acting in order to avoid the pitfalls of such a narrative. They had to draw strength from within themselves.

"An actor, like a transsexual person, is the reflection of the different characters that he invents at each moment. Roles are vital for both of them. My challenge was to make the three actors' heterogeneous and almost contradictory ways of acting work together. All three of them started the project at the last moment, and each of them profoundly questioned me. I also insisted upon shooting the film in the script's chronological order, because the actors brought something new, precious, light and funny every day. It was therefore impossible to predict the evolution of their relationships ahead of time, as is the case in most films. "Should they make love? How should they interpret this scene? Won't this be ridiculous? What will happen next? When does he start loving her?" We kept asking ourselves questions like this."

The film

"How can a man become a woman? I tried to answer this question by showing Thelma's naked body and unveiling her provocative and troubling being.

"The rest of the movie is filmed simply. Through Vincent's eyes, the spectator should understand, love or reject Thelma... and should be moved when discovering a part of her secret.

Pierre-Alain Meier

Born in Delémont, Jura.

National Institute of Performing Arts (INSAS) in Brussels.

Founder and director of Thelma Film in Zurich since 1988. Director of Ciné Manufacture in Paris since 1997.

Author and director of the following movies:

IKARIA Documentary, 55 minutes

DOULEUR D'AMOUR Documentary, 58 minutes, Co-directed by M. Kälin

LA FEMME ET LA SANDALE Short film, 28 minutes

LA DANSE DU SINGE ET DU POISSON Documentary, 40 minutes

THELMA Feature film, 95 minutes

LAURENT SCHILLING

VINCENT

Laurent Schilling plays the role of Vincent Fleury. Vincent is a sensitive and taciturn man. He doesn't open up easily but he has faith in life. Under his strong, solid appearance, Vincent is a romantic for whom sex and feelings go together. Fascinated by Thelma's extreme femininity, he lets himself be seduced and even breaks his own taboos. Freed from his fear of others, Vincent will discover his dark side. In some ways, he will lose his illusions without becoming disillusioned and will become more mature.

Conservatoire national d'Art dramatique de Paris

Feature Films

1989	LA VIE DES MORTS	by Arnaud DESPLECHIN
1990	LA SENTINELLE	by Arnaud DESPLECHIN
1991	AUX YEUX DU MONDE	by Éric ROCHANT
1992	FIORILE	by the TAVIANI brothers
1996	CAPITAINE CONAN	by Bertrand TAVERNIER
1999	MEET THE BALTRINGUES	by François GÉRARD
2001	LAISSEZ-PASSER	by Bertrand TAVERNIER

Television

1990	LUCAS	by Nadine TRINTIGNANT
1996	RAPT À CRÉDIT	by Pierre BOUTRON

Theater

1995	MÈRE COURAGE	by Jérôme SAVARY
1999	OEDIPE ROI	by Laurent GUTMAN

PASCALE OURBIH

THELMA

Pascale Ourbih is Thelma, a beautiful, 30-year-old woman who was previously a man named Louis. Since becoming a woman, Thelma can at last express her hypersensitivity. It is hard to say whether or not she puts on airs, but her mood swings are so sincere that people like her. You could say that she exaggerates, as if she wanted to convince herself that she really is a woman. But that is the way she is. In order to make her imaginary world real, a world where her urges are the only truth, Thelma needs a man. Only a man can reassure her, tell her she made the right choice and prove to her that she is a desirable woman. That is why she does not hesitate to open up to Vincent when her lover leaves her, even if she must hide a part of the truth about herself to keep him. Thelma does not lie with premeditation, but by omission. She keeps reinventing her life, and for her, lying is as necessary as breathing.

Once she is in Greece, Thelma's past as a man reappears when she sees Eleni, the daughter she had with Fenia. At the last minute, Thelma panics and wants to run away, but Vincent encourages her to confront her past. Thelma is torn between her need to be a woman and the need to be a father to her child.

Pascale Ourbih was born in Algiers, where she started to study pharmacy. She has been living in Paris since the mid-eighties. She works for the Maryline Gautier model agency. She models for fashion shows, poses for photos and takes acting lessons. She has been a consultant in psychology for ten years, and her hobby is astrology. We got in touch with Pascale Ourbih through an AIDS prevention association where she is a volunteer.

Thelma is her first role in a film.

NATHALIA CAPO D'ISTRIA

FENIA

Nathalia Capo d'Istria plays the role of Fenia Gaitanides. Fenia is 30 years old. After Louis leaves her, she goes back to Crete to take over her grandparents' guesthouse. Fenia has tried to get over her separation from Louis but has not really been able to. Seeing Louis as Thelma is going to open an old wound, and, at the same time, free her from a past that she has never been fully able to understand.

Nathalia Capo d'Istria was born in Athens in 1966.
Education: Greek National Theater Dramatic Arts classes.
Classical and modern dance.

She has been continually acting in the theatre since 1986, alternating classical plays by Ibsen, Strindberg and T.D. Molina, and contemporary plays by Crommelynck, Cocteau, Ghelderode, Berkoff and Bruckner.

Moreover, she participated in the creation of *Iphigenia in Tauris* (in English and in Greek), for a year in the La MaMa Theater in New York. She also appeared in *Andromaque* (in French), directed by Jacques Lassalle during the Avignon Theater Festival.

She also played in various Greek films, directed by V. Vafeas and P. Legaki, as well as in international co-productions.

She also collaborated on several contemporary television melodramas, literary adaptations, and documentary projects such as *The History of the Olympic Games*, an Anglo-Greek co-production directed by Mr. Holevas.

CAST

Vincent Fleury	Laurent Schilling
Thelma	Pascale Ourbih
Fenia Gaitanides	Nathalia Capo d'Istria
Pierre Forster	François Germond
Adrienne Forster	Michèle Valley
The receptionist	Philippe Duclos
Véronique Fleury	Joëlle Fretz
Thomas	Ian Baldwin
The father-in-law	Jacques Michel
The customs officer	Marco Calamandrei
Eleni	Silia Klontza
Yannis	Constantin Karvelis

CREDITS

Screenplay by	Jacques Akchoti, Lou Inglebert, Pierre-Alain Meier, Barbara Sobeck
Director of Photography	Thomas Hardmeier
Sound Engineer	Eric Vaucher
Production Coordinator	Filippo Bonacci
1st Assistant Director	Kamal Musale
Set Decorator	Monika Bregger
Make-up	Valérie Ardity
Editor	Loredana Cristelli
Sound Editor, Sound Mixer	Jürg Von Allmen
Music	Calexico, Y. Mangas
Producers	Robert Boner, Pierre-Alain Meier, Fenia Cossovitsa, Xavier Grin
Produced by	Thelma Film (Zurich), Ideefixe (Athens) Ciné Manufacture (Paris) in co-production with: Télévision suisse romande, ADR, CMS