

WHY NOT PRODUCTIONS
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present

SOUFIANE
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CANNES

A BRIGHTER TOMORROW

A FILM BY
YASSINE QNIA

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A BRIGHTER TOMORROW

A FILM BY YASSINE QNIA

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Photos and press kit can be downloaded from <https://www.wildbunch.biz/movie/a-brighter-tomorrow/>



SYNOPSIS

30-something Mehdi is a small-time safecracker. He and his partners in crime are just trying to get by, but industrial estate robberies aren't paying like they used to, and the alternatives on offer aren't appealing. Reassessing his life and his future, he decides to try and win back Sarah, the mother of the one-year-old son he adores.



**INTERVIEW
WITH
DIRECTOR
YASSINE
QNIA**

***A Brighter Tomorrow* opens and closes on the eyes of a man in love, announcing from the onset that this is a love story...**

A Brighter Tomorrow is the story of a man as much in love as he is proud, and very uncomfortable with the situation he is in. Giving Mehdi this character trait was essential, it allowed me to redefine the way he undertakes his romantic relation by trying to separate his self-respect and his love for Sarah. Realising the process of reassessing his life and his relationship throughout the film through the way he looks at her was for me the most telling idea. Between the beginning and the end of the film, his gaze has changed. And this difference is considerable.

How did the film come about?

I was inspired by a situation that a friend of mine found himself in a few years ago. He lived with his mother and had a long-standing romantic relationship. One day, his girlfriend became pregnant. They decided to keep the child but couldn't afford to settle down on their own. They lived with his mother – temporarily, they thought at the beginning – but the situation lasted longer than expected which damaged their relationship a bit. Their story resonated with me, because at one point I found myself in the same situation, without the pressure of welcoming a child. This inability to be financially independent and take charge of my own home drove me to tell this story.

What is your background?

I'm a surveyor. I started working on construction sites at the age of 18, my technical certificate in my pocket. I quickly felt I'd been robbed of part of my youth. To stay in touch with my childhood friends I participated with them in a film workshop organised by Aubervilliers city Youth Club. There was a cine-club there, run by film professionals, including a number of filmmakers. It opened things for me. I was able to discover films that stimulated me and made me want to try to make films in my own self-taught way.

***A Brighter Tomorrow* is a continuity of your earlier short films, whose protagonists often find themselves facing failure...**

Family or friends, I grew up surrounded by people who had failed in what they were doing. For many of them the experience was shameful. For me, depicting

a character confronting failure is to show that he has experienced something strong, which not only is absolutely not shameful, but which also deserves not to be forgotten. It's my way of paying tribute to these people. Shedding light on their failure is a way of telling them that their story is interesting and that it is a gateway to learning about life. For me, Mehdi is a teacher: through his mistakes, he teaches us something. I like the idea that cinema, through its narratives and characters is a school of life.

Mehdi seems to have the need to control everything....

It's a spiral: the more the doors close around him, the more he needs to control everything, starting with Sarah. The fact that she slips away from him makes him even more possessive; he is unable to love her, she becomes the image of his failure which makes him want to dominate her further. The antithesis of Mehdi is M'Bareck's brother, and the attention he pays his dog. This man appears softened by life because he has learned to let go. Or rather, he has learned how to serve what he loves with the very modest means at his disposal without entering into a relationship marked by dominance. I was very keen on this key scene, where Mehdi meets him as he is walking his Weimaraner: it shows, I hope, a way of grasping life different to Mehdi's.

How did the characters of Mehdi's and Sarah's parents take shape?

Their presence was necessary, it underlines the situation of failure in which Mehdi finds himself. In fact, it's difficult for him to face them. He feels he has disappointed them and finds this unbearable. I wanted these characters to be as simple as possible and to feel their benevolence and their helplessness in the face of the situation in which Sarah and Mehdi find themselves.

At heart, Mehdi isn't a crook. Still, he seems to master the art of cracking safes. The sequences showing him in action take on an almost documentary quality.

It was important for me to film this misdemeanour, because it was in perfect harmony with my image of Mehdi's character. The technical skill and composure with which he applies himself clearly show that he could justifiably hope for better than what life has offered him. At the same time, this choice that he has made

to improve his life is proving to be a dead end: the scarcity of cash, as well as increasingly sophisticated security systems have gradually got the better of his activity.

You have consciously decided to omit the spectacular, in the robbery scene for example, which owes its originality precisely to the fact that it's a non-event...

Mehdi's life and the world he moves in aren't spectacular for him, so why make them spectacular for the audience? I wanted the film to be level-headed, without histrionics. That's also why I didn't want any music.

Generally speaking, modesty runs through your film...

The modesty in my film is also mine in life! It's the modesty I observe in my loved ones, in the people around me. To show that in my film is first of all for the sake of realism. But I also think that this restraint in the relationship between the characters allows the viewer to create his or her own place in the narrative.



The light in your film, with its strong contrasts and vibrant shadows, seems to single-handedly endorse its underlying romantic element...

I owe this to Ernesto Giolitti, the cinematographer. We've worked together since my first short. His mastery of light comes from his great experience as gaffer. I like things to be suggested and we have sometimes played with the limit of what we can see, moving like tightrope walkers between shadow and light. To break the sharpness of the image, we worked with old lenses. More delicate to focus with, but it allowed to re-inject the imaginary. As far as framing is concerned, it was a question of being minimalist. I don't like close-ups, because I don't want to direct the viewers' gaze and emotions too much. I also don't like it when camera movements are too abrupt, or when the camera starts to follow the actors non-stop to make the film seem more vibrant than it is. Above all it was a question of finding the right distance to allow the actors to express their talent fully.

How did you choose your actors and how did you direct them?

This is the first time I've worked with professional actors, and it was an enormous pleasure. I found Soufiane Guerrab very affecting. I watched interviews with him and noticed a seriousness in his face that I found interesting. I wanted him to be absolutely natural in my film. I asked him to drop the gift of the gab, to be as understated as possible. Sofiane has a staggering memory. He is able to give you several acting suggestions and remember each one of his gestures. This level of skill and professionalism struck me all the more so as he's self-taught. As for Souheila Yacoub, it was her gaze that hooked me. I felt in her eyes a melancholy and a true-to-life quality I hadn't found in other actresses. Sarah, her character, is that of a young woman who is tired, and I imagined her in the part right away. Souheila is already a seasoned actress, she has a lot of experience on sets and of auteur cinema. She's a terrific actress.

How did you work on the dialogue?

I try to make the dialogue say something without saying too much. I take care to avoid witty remarks or any other form of artifice. Writing dialogue is a balancing act! Hence the fact that I don't leave too much room for improvisation. The performance and acting suggestions from Souheila and Soufiane also helped me a lot. They feel the situations very well and know how to play with the pauses, giving the film a rhythm with a great deal of weight.





As in your shorts – *Fais croquer, Molii* or *F430* – your story once again takes place in Aubervilliers. What is it about this place that inspires you?

Seine-Saint-Denis doesn't inspire me more than anywhere else. I live there, that's all. Aubervilliers is a working-class suburb; the emotional instability that I have observed there and that I have sometimes experienced myself was often related to material insecurity. It's the people who live there and embody the place that inspire me more than the territory itself.

The question of work is central to *A Brighter Tomorrow*. From this perspective, it's also a political film...

Mehdi feels that everything offered to him is a con. He watches Sarah and Thibault exhaust themselves at work. He also has a very clear take on M'Barek's plan to open a pizzeria. Mehdi is fully aware of his place and his chances of success in the society of which he is a part. His pride causes him to think he deserves better. Which is probably true. That being said, he has to compromise in order to move forward. The political nature of *A Brighter Tomorrow* is due to the fact that I tell the story of a life situation that is widespread in our society and that is no longer bearable. You only have to look at housing policies and soaring rents and their disastrous consequences. To me, the intimate character of the film is political. Even if *A Brighter Tomorrow* doesn't deal head-on with a social issue, this backdrop appears between the lines and determines Mehdi's behaviour and thought.

Why this title?

De bas étage – the French title, which means informally “of the lowest social rank” – is the first one that came to mind, and I decided to keep it. I liked the idea of taking the opposite view of this banal and derogatory expression, that means everything that is of poor quality or inferior rank, to tell the story of a proud man with noble aspirations.



YASSINE QNIA

Yassine Qnia grew up in Aubervilliers, Seine-Saint-Denis, north of Paris. A surveyor by trade, he discovered cinema in his local youth club and took part in a number of film workshops. His three short films FAIS CROQUER, MOLII (co-directed with Mourad Boudaoud, Hakim Zouhani and Carine May) and F430 have received several Audience Awards and screened in selection at a number of festivals in France (Angers, Pantin, La Rochelle, Clermont-Ferrand...) and abroad (Milan, Kiev, Istanbul, Lisbon). Alongside making films, he continues his profession on construction sites and regularly takes part in film workshops in high schools. In 2017 he produced Maximilian Badier-Rosenthal's debut ÔNG NGOAI for the production company Nouvelle Toile. Yassine was the 2019 Gan Film Foundation Laureate. A BRIGHTER TOMORROW is his feature film debut.

FILMOGRAPHY

- | | |
|------|--|
| 2021 | A BRIGHTER TOMORROW |
| 2015 | F430
<i>Belfort International Entrevues Festival</i>
<i>Pantin Côté Court Festival – Youth Award</i> |
| 2013 | MOLII
<i>Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival – Winner Jury Award</i>
<i>Sarlat Festival – Best Short Film Award</i> |
| 2011 | FAIS CROQUER
<i>Angers Premiers Plans Festival – CCAS Award</i>
<i>Côté Court Festival Pantin – Audience Award</i> |





SOUFIANE GUERRAB

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

- | | |
|--|------|
| A BRIGHTER TOMORROW by Yassine QNIA | 2021 |
| DÉJÀ LOIN by Yvan GEORGES-DIT-SOUDRIL | |
| SCHOOL LIFE by Grand Corps Malade and Medhi IDIR | 2019 |
| STEP BY STEP by Grands Corps Malade and Medhi IDIR | 2017 |
| LA PIÈCE – LES DERNIERS SERONT LES PREMIERS
by Lamine DIAKITE | 2016 |
| TWO BIRDS, ONE STONE by Fejria DELIBA | |
| ALL THREE OF US by Kheiron | 2015 |
| THE NIGHT WATCHMAN by Pierre JOLIVET | |
| THE MEASURE OF A MAN by Stéphane BRIZÉ | |
| DHEEPAN by Jacques AUDIARD | |
| PAULETTE by Jérôme ENRICO | 2013 |
| ADOUNA, LA VIE, LE MONDE by Olivier LANGLOIS | 2012 |
| GIRLFRIENDS by Sylvie AYME | 2006 |



SOUHEILA YACOUB

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

- 2021 A BRIGHTER TOMORROW by Yassine QNIA
EN CORPS by Cédric KLAPISH
- 2020 THE SALT OF TEARS by Philippe GARREL
- 2018 LES AFFAMÉS by Léa FRÉDEVAL
CLIMAX by Gaspar NOÉ

CAST

Medhi	Soufiane Guerrab
Sarah	Souheila Yacoub
Thibault	Thibault Cathalifaud
M'Barek	M'Barek Belkouk
Alex	Jamil McCraven
Mehdi's mother	Tassadit Mandi
Mehdi's sister	Inès Melab
Leïla's husband	Majid Berihla
Sarah's mother	Maya Racha
Sarah's father	Salim Gharbi
Bar owner	Carima Amarouche
Bar waitress	Rehab Mehal
M'Barek's brother	Khereddine Ennasri
M'Barek's father	Saïd Nissia
Security guard	Majid Berhila
Hair Salon Owner	Constance Pizon
Policemen	Anis Messabi Maxime Ravillon Harry Makanga
Mehdi's son	Kasim Idriss
Mehdi's nephews	Sigui Ba Sohan Ba

CREW

Director	Yassine Qnia
Screenplay	Yassine Qnia with the collaboration of Rosa Attab
D.P.	Ernesto Giolitti
Editor	Alexandre Westphal
Sound	Stéphane Gessat
Sound Editor	Benoit Gargonne, Paul Jousselin
Mix	Johann Nallet
Production Designer	Rabeir Ourak
Costume Designer	Elisa Ingrassia
Line Producer	Martine Cassinelli
Production Manager	Laziz Belkaï
1st Assistant Director	Olivier Sagne
Casting	Christel Baras
Produced by	Why Not Productions
Coproduced by	Alba Pictures
With the participation of	CINE+
With the support of	The Centre du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée, The Gan Foundation Gan for Cinema The Doha Film Institute The Ciclic-Région Centre-Val de Loire, in partnership with the CNC
French Distribution	Le Pacte
International Sales	Wild Bunch International

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Beneficiary of a Writing Grant from the région Centre – Val de Loire: CICLIC
«Laureate of the GAN Foundation for Cinema»



