

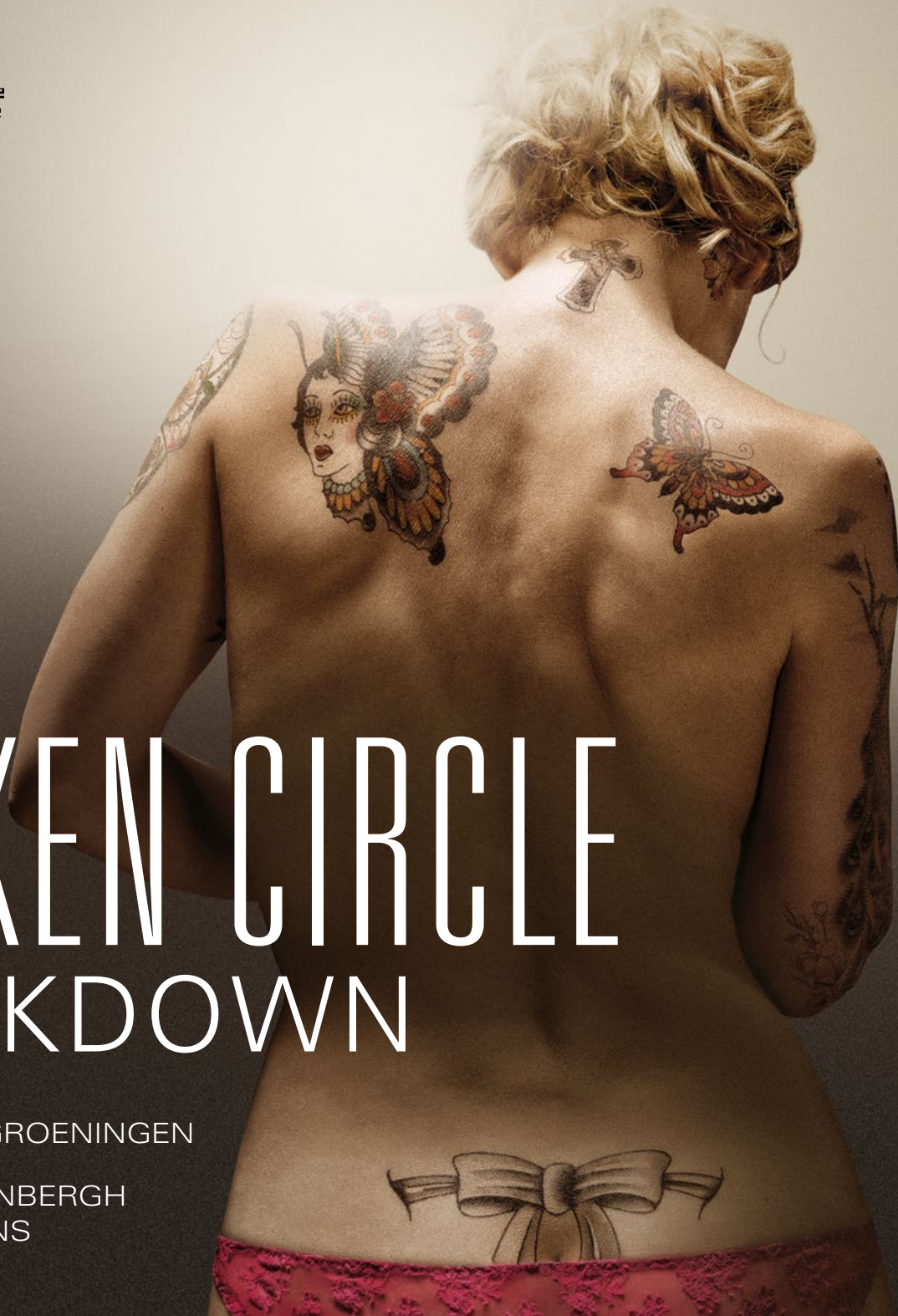


63rd Internationale
Filmfestspiele
Berlin
Panorama


THE BROKEN CIRCLE BREAKDOWN

a film by FELIX VAN GROENINGEN

with JOHAN HELDENBERGH
and VEERLE BAETENS







Elise and Didier have been together for seven passionate years. When their little girl Maybelle must face a serious illness, all the turning points in their intense and moving relationship seem to flash by.

They remember their love at first sight, courtship and passion, coming closer through their bluegrass music band, braving marriage, unexpected pregnancy and eventually the joy of parenthood after the birth of beautiful Maybelle. A complete circle of happiness for this very unconventional couple...

But as the stress and sorrow of Maybelle's treatment takes its toll, Didier and Elise begin to respond in different ways. They fight together for their child, as they hope love will not let them down when they need it most. Love can conquer fate, but sometimes not.



ORIGIN OF THE PROJECT

THE BROKEN CIRCLE BREAKDOWN is an adaptation of a theatre play by Johan Heldenbergh. Johan is a friend and I've worked with him as an actor on two of my previous films. When I saw his play I was totally flabbergasted. The combination of the personal story, the music, and the theme (reason vs religion) just blew me away. Johan is very interested in film, so he was very excited when I expressed my interest in an adaptation. He was also in favour of not collaborating on the screenwriting. So I started working on the script together with screenwriter Carl Joos, but we had to start over a couple of times, before we could really crack it, as it was a pretty complex story.

DIFFICULTIES OF ADAPTATION

I had concerns about adapting the play to the screen. The play was so perfect that I wasn't sure the film was going to reach the same high standards. I debated if it was really worth making it. That particular romantic drama genre wasn't my cup of tea either. The play also had a lot of monologues, which isn't very cinematic material. It had so many layers. I had the feeling that I would never be able to translate them into a film. But in the end it was my gut-feeling that convinced me. I was so deeply touched by this play that this would give me the energy to somehow find a way to make it work. I also felt that the fact that it wasn't going



to be easy, would make it an interesting and personal film. All the not-so-evident particularities (bluegrass, melodrama) became the challenging features of the project.

STRUCTURE

The structure of THE BROKEN CIRCLE BREAKDOWN was created during editing. It was always the idea to cross-cut between different times of Didier and Elise's life, but the concept of the script was different than how it ended up being in the final film. This however,

has been the case with almost all of my films. Longtime collaborator editor Nico Leunen is a real magician with this kind of storytelling, and my films have benefited a lot from it. The main reason, I guess, is that my films are not plotted storywise but emotion wise. And there are always a lot of things that work very different on screen (as opposed to on paper), so questioning all this

during editing has become an uninevitable part of my filmmaking process.

JOHAN HELDENBERGH AS DIDIER

Johan co-wrote the play and starred in it, and while adapting it, it never crossed my mind that he shouldn't play this role. The reason is simple: he and his character Didier are very much alike. They like to talk and don't mind being in the center of things. They have opinions on almost everything. Didier's atheist view

on life is also very much Johan's. There is a difference between theatre and film however, and during rehearsals Johan and I researched other sides of Didier's character that he didn't need to explore on stage. This was a very interesting process, and we both learned a lot from it.

VEERLE BAETENS AS ELISE

The character of Elise is an enigma. She's very strong and very fragile at the same time. She loves life, but on the other hand has been so extremely hurt by it. As the film is more explicit than the theatre play in some ways, I had to alter some characteristics of Elise, but in a lot of ways they stayed a mystery to me too, up until I met Veerle during an audition. At that moment, everything came together. She had to play Elise, and Veerle would give her the balls Elise needed. Veerle is a real pitbull, she bites and won't let go until it's over. She's a perfectionist, on every level.

LOVE

The film is about more than just parental love. It's about the love between two people who are extremely different and about loss: how you lose one another, whereas that's the very last thing in the world that you want. The film recounts how difficult it is for both our protagonists, Didier and Elise, to accept this concept when their little daughter becomes ill. Didier conceals

his sorrow with great principles and theories, Elise escapes into symbolism, religion and superstition. I understand that sorrow can be so overwhelming (the loss of a child!) that people feel the need to make up stories about a God, heaven and a life after death. I suspect that many people recognize this fence-straddling attitude. On the one side rationally convinced that there is no God or life after death, yet on the other, emotionally open to it because there is no other way.

We find the same duality in Elise and Didier. As long as things are going well, their opposite views on life are usually a source of amusement or at most they lead to a heated discussion. However, when their daughter develops a life-threatening illness, these diametrically opposed views lead to a dramatic climax, because Elise and Didier are completely torn apart in their inner selves. In the end, this causes them to lose both themselves as well as each other.

BLUEGRASS

Didier and Elise play in a bluegrass band and that is no accident. Bluegrass is integrated in a variety of ways into the story and forms the intrinsic link between all the main issues that appear in the film: live, death, birth, America, motherhood and fatherhood, finding consolation, life after death, ... Music is also what unites the couple. We have tried to let the songs find their







spot in the scenario in a more organized manner and by doing so, give them the greatest possible dramatic impact. Sometime a song is purely narrative and helps to tell the story or is even used as an ellipsis. In other places, we select a given song because it underpins the emotions.

While writing the screenplay, we put in songs from the original play. But, as I got to know more and more bluegrass songs, other songs found their way into the script. Bjorn Eriksson composed the bluegrass songs and also created the score. Meeting Bjorn was very important for the film, in lots of ways. You have to know that a lot of bluegrass musicians have something nerdy, but that is not how I saw Didier and Elise. Bjorn has been a bluegrass aficionado since he was 16. But he's also a very cool guy, and so meeting him, influenced not only the sound but also the look of the film. Bjorn conducted the recordings and guided Johan and Veerle's performances to the max (they sing everything themselves!). Bjorn himself plays dobro and guitar.

ELISE'S TATTOOS

The tattoos were designed by Emy La Perla, a Brussels-based tattoo designer I interviewed for research I did during preparation. It was a marvelous encounter, I learned a lot about tattooing and I loved her drawing-

style, so I asked her if she wanted to design them. The tattoo's were mentioned in the play, but became a leitmotiv in the film. I guess it was just too nice not to actually see them and use them fully in the story.

NELL CATTRYSSE AS MAYBELLE

Nell – only 5 years old – was cast out of a hundred or so kids. She was very shy in the beginning, but she was a good listener and willing to co-operate. We had her come back, together with some other kids, to do a couple of rehearsals, and every time she returned, she improved. So we decided to cast her. Everything came together at the first rehearsals with Johan and Veerle, because Nell was immediately at ease and very much in love with her "film parents". Often, between takes, it was not me directing Nell, but Johan and Veerle, who were so close to her.



All the tough situations were explained to Nell, together with her parents. She also visited a children's hospital with her parents, our film-nanny and a child-psychologist. Nell's unprejudiced look at things also made things easier. For example: her favorite scene was when she had to play dead, because that was the easiest. Also, because during the shoot the tough situations are often very technical (e.g. the bald head which requires hours of make-up), they're not so dramatic, but fun to do.

JOHAN HELDENBERGH AS DIDIER

Johan Heldenbergh, together with Mieke Dobbels, created the 2009 stage play *The Broken Circle Breakdown featuring the Cover-Ups of Alabama*. Johan learned how to play the banjo, guitar and mandolin for his leading role as Didier, a member of a bluegrass band.

Both the public and the press were unanimous in their praise for the sold-out performances in Belgian Flanders and the Netherlands of the production by Compagnie Cecilia. The success of Felix van Groeningen's movie version is a highlight in the unique history of this play. (And Johan doesn't mind the title having been cut in half for the movie!)

Johan previously worked with Felix van Groeningen in *THE MISFORTUNATES* and *STEVE + SKY*.

Johan's other screen credits include Marleen Gorris' *ANTONIA* (1995 Oscar winner) and Tom Barman's *ANY WAY THE WIND BLOWS*.

Johan is a graduate of Studio Herman Teirlinck. He has performed in a number of much talked-about stage productions, including *Massis*, the musical, a monologue written by himself, *Ten Oorlog* (Blauwe Maandag Compagnie), *Mijn Blackie* (HetPaleis & Nieuwpoorttheater), *Allemaal Indiaan* (Victoria en Les

Ballets C. de la B.) and *Maria Eeuwigdurende Bijstand* (DasTheater & Theater Zuidpool).

DIDIER ...

is totally independent and a born fixer: practical, technical and resourceful. Didier's hallmark is his charm, to say the least. Always passionate, never aggressive.



The source of his atheism was hearing that Santa Claus does not exist. This was a true revelation to him; everything fell into place for him. Many ambiguous abnormalities that he had pondered with incredulity were, apparently, just made up. It was that simple.

Didier has many passions, but the leading one is bluegrass, a pure form of American country music. He plays in a band with some friends. Didier falls hard for Elise. She becomes the love of his life. He was wary of having children because he didn't want to play God over someone's life, let alone the life of a helpless child. But in the end, love wins him over and he becomes a loving father.

Their daughter Maybelle's illness will make Didier increasingly unreasonable...

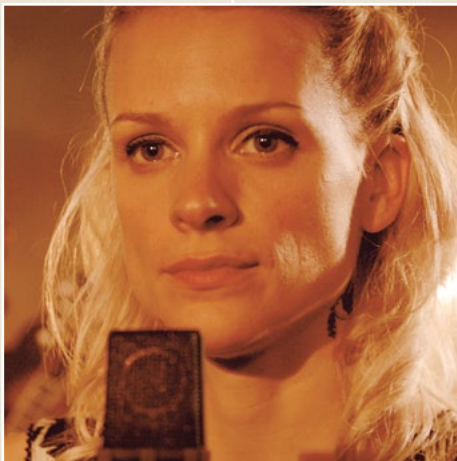
VEERLE BAETENS AS ELISE

In addition to her leading role in *THE BROKEN CIRCLE BREAKDOWN*, Veerle Baetens' other film credits include Flemish titles *CODE 37*, *ZOT VAN A.*, *LOVE BELONGS TO EVERYONE* (aka *DENNIS VAN RITA*) and *LONG WEEKEND*.

2011's box office hit *CODE 37* is a feature film based on the TV series in which Veerle played character Hannah Maes, the tormented chief of the Ghent Vice Section. The successful series recently completed its third season.

In 2008, Veerle won the Flemish TV-Star Award (Flemish equivalent of the Emmy Award) for Best Actress and Most Popular TV Personality for her work as the title character in the popular TV series *Sara*.

Veerle recently released her debut CD as the singer of the group *Dallas*. She is a graduate of Brussels' Academy of Dramatic Arts, and she played the leading role in the 2005 Dutch stage musical adaptation of *Pippi Longstockings* for which she earned awards for "Best Leading Actress" and "Best Emerging Talent".



ELISE ...

crackles with lust for life. But sometimes she lets life take control. She is pure emotion. If she is happy, she is ecstatic. If she is sad, she is inconsolable. She is exceedingly sexy, and at the same time mature and intelligent.

From an early age, she has had to be independent, taking over her father's tattoo shop. Her body is a testimony to her love life. Every time she falls head over heels in love, she tattoos the name of the lucky man. When they break up, she replaces it with a cover-up tattoo.

When Elise gets pregnant, she remains the same fun-loving person, but she wants to do everything as good and naturally as possible for her child. Her world falls apart when six-year-old Maybelle falls sick...



FELIX VAN GROENINGEN

THE BROKEN CIRCLE BREAKDOWN is Felix Van Groeningen's fourth feature film. It has been a box-office hit in Belgium and the Netherlands.

Felix's 2009 film THE MISFORTUNATES (De helaasheid der dingen) received international attention after making its world premiere in Cannes (Directors' Fortnight). This movie was a number one Flemish cinema hit and also successful abroad, collecting awards like Istanbul's Golden Tulip.

Felix graduated in 2000 from KASK (Royal Academy of Fine Arts) in Ghent with a Masters of Audiovisual Arts. He has also written and directed theatre plays with Ghent's theatre group *Kung Fu*. All four of his feature films have been collaborations with producer Dirk Impens (Menuet).



FEATURE FILMOGRAPHY

2012 THE BROKEN CIRCLE BREAKDOWN

2009 THE MISFORTUNATES

(De helaasheid der dingen)

2007 WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE

(Dagen zonder lief)

2004 STEVE + SKY



CAST | CREW

Elise Veerle Baetens
Didier Johan Heldenbergh
Maybelle Nell Cattrysse
William Geert Van Rampelberg
Jock Nils De Caster
Jimmy Robby Cleiren
Jef Bert Huysentruyt
Koen Jan Bijvoet

director *Felix van Groeningen*
 screenplay *Carl Joos*
 and *Felix van Groeningen*
 producer *Dirk Impens (Menuet – Belgium)*
 co-producer *Topkapi Films (Netherlands)*
 line producer *Johan Van den Driessche*
 photography *Ruben Impens*
 editing *Nico Leunen*
 sound *Jan Deca*



sound design *Michel Schöpping*
 production design *Kurt Rigolle*
 costume design *Ann Lauwerys*
 make-up *Diana Dreesen*
 original soundtrack *TBCB BAND*
 directed by *Bjorn Eriksson*

a MENUET production, in co-production with TOPKAPI FILMS, with the support of THE FLANDERS AUDIOVISUAL FUND, FLANDERS IMAGE, NEDERLANDS FILMFONDS, EURIMAGES, VLAAMSE FILM.BE, KINEPOLIS FILM DISTRIBUTION, LUMIÈRE, VTM, BELGACOM, THE TAX SHELTER OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT OF BELGIUM, CASA KAFKA PICTURES, BELFIUS, BTECH, CONNECTIMMO, VANDEN AVENNE IZEGEM, KINEPOLIS MULTI, FREE RECORD SHOP BELGIUM, G. DE WILDE, GAME MANIA, TUX, SALTOO



TECHNICAL DETAILS

title *The Broken Circle Breakdown*
original version *Dutch*
location *Belgium*
shooting period *18 July – 8 September 2011*
support *ARRI Alexa @*
print *DCP*
running time *110 minutes*
sound *5.1*
format *1/2:35*

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RICHARD LORMAND
FILM PRESS PLUS
www.FilmPressPlus.com
tel: +33-9-7044-9865
email: intlpress@aol.com

At the Berlin Film Festival (Feb 7-17):
+49-152-38 01 77 33

WORLD SALES

THE MATCH FACTORY
Balthasarstraße 79-81
50670 Cologne
Germany
Tel: +49-221-53 97 09 -0
Fax: +49-221-53 97 09 -10
info@matchfactory.de
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