

**OUR
STRUGGLES**

**NOS
BATAILLES**



SEMAINE
DE LA CRITIQUE
CANNES 2018



Synopsis

Olivier does the best he can to fight injustice at work. But from one day to the next, when his wife Laura abandons the family home, he is left alone to juggle between the children's needs, life's daily challenges and his job. Faced with these new responsibilities, he struggles to find a balance. Because Laura's not coming back.



Director's biography

Guillaume Senez, who is French and Belgian, was born in 1978 in Brussels where he currently resides. He has written and directed several short films selected for a number of festivals.

LA QUADRATURE DU CERCLE [Squaring the Circle] (2005), **DANS NOS VEINES** [In our blood] (2009) and **U.H.T.** (2012). His first feature film, **KEEPER**, released in 2016, was chosen for more than 70 festivals (including Toronto, Locarno, Angers – Grand Prix Jury prize, etc.) and received over twenty awards.

OUR STRUGGLES, chosen for Critics' Week (Cannes 2018), is his second feature film.



INTERVIEW WITH GUILLAUME SENEZ

How did the project for *Our Struggles* come about?

While I was preparing my first feature-length film, *Keeper*, the mother of my children and I separated. I learned, much as Olivier (Romain Duris) does in the film, to live alone with them, watch them, listen to them and understand them. This was a fundamental phase in my life, as a man, but also as a filmmaker. I wondered how things would have been if I had been completely alone – widowed or deserted. The answer is simple: I wouldn't have managed

to find the right balance between my work life and family life. I know quite a few couples for whom it's hard to make ends meet at the end of the month. They both work but their situation remains precarious, fragile – just like a house of cards, if you remove one, the entire thing collapses. I felt that I needed to write about this. *Our Struggles* tells the story of a mother's vanishing and the father's efforts thereafter to prevent the household from falling apart. A father who'll have to struggle to find a balance between his professional and personal commitments.



The film's structure is made of two interwoven stories: the vanishing of the wife and mother, Laura, and the social struggle Olivier is involved in. In either case, there's something of a reversal: on the one hand a man who has been dumped with his two children by his wife, not commonly seen in movies, and on the other the gradual devaluing of the human element in the 2.0 version of capitalism.

I'm not someone who makes theoretical films; I try to remain on a human level, to keep it real and connect with people's feelings. Our Struggles proposes a perspective on the world of work as it is today and more specifically the repercussions it has on families. This angle seems more human and empathetic to me. I wanted to show a character who is abandoned by everyone and can't quite figure out how to help the people he loves. He's a kind and caring team supervisor, but whenever things touch upon a more private sphere, it becomes more difficult for him. I recognize myself in Olivier in many respects: I'm much better at explaining a math problem to any kid other than my son, with whom I lose patience in no time. And the notion of always having a hard time helping the people that you love is something that I understand all too well.



Did you choose Romain Duris early on?

Yes, very quickly it was him. Before I even finalized a script with full continuity and dialogue, I offered it to him. I'm lucky that he'd really liked *Keeper*, and thus agreed after reading the treatment – without even seeing the screenplay since it wasn't written yet. He trusted me. We discussed methodology a lot, as well as the fact that I don't supply the dialogue. This entails a risk for the actors, a bit like freefalling, and I understand the apprehensions they may have. Romain had never worked that way before. He's very creative and enjoys renewing his work approach, so this challenge was exciting for him. Before the film shoot, we discussed the character a lot. While shooting, all the lines of dialogue are meticulously written, of course, but I don't

give them to the actors. We go and find the lines together. This is what gives the film this singular texture (of truthfulness), the moments when the characters seem to be groping for words a little, when dialogue may overlap – all the little accidents that happen in everyday life and that you tend to lose in films. In the end, this kind of method gives the actors an immense freedom, even though it implies specific constraints for the technical crew. But I've known my team for a long time; they're true partners. Everyone plays along, we're on the same quest and this is what I'm interested in promoting on a set: work, and for everyone to give of themselves in order to achieve the best film possible. Romain played along perfectly; he gave it his all, with great personal generosity. I believe he enjoyed working this way; you can feel it, and see it on screen.



A man who's been dumped is somewhat uncommon in contemporary films.

Above all, I wanted to show that it's a woman's free choice to abandon her children. She isn't dead or incarcerated. She just left, that's all and that's all we'll know. I didn't want to explain or pass judgement: we understand that this woman no longer felt she fitted in this house or in this life. She keeps on existing in her absence, in the traces of her that remain behind or the memories others have of her. Our Struggles is a film about fatherhood: Elliot and Rose are the ones who are going to make Olivier grow, make him a father, lead him to settle down and think about his private life and his relationships with others and with the world.

The film avoids patronizing lectures but depicts many things.

I wanted to show the complexity and modernity of the world of work without being patronizing or giving a grand lecture. I don't like when the audience is told what is right and what is wrong. I like showing things as they are, for what they are. My feeling is that the true upcoming battles, the true struggles that we speak about in the film's title, will be waged in the private sphere, in people's personal lives. They're embedded in us. This, however, isn't something that can be demonstrated, but something we can try and share, as a feeling.



The children, in *Our Struggles*, are played by excellent actors.

Out of over one hundred children, these two stood out pretty quickly. Lena seemed incredible to us, and very inventive, right away. As far as Basile is concerned, he'd never been in a film before and he behaved so naturally it was staggering. We saw each other a lot, not necessarily just for work, but to go to the park, have an ice-cream with Lucie Debay (who plays Laura, the mother), so that they would become familiar with one another. Just as for my first feature-length film, *Keeper*, the equipment was light: a handheld camera that follows the action but never precedes or anticipates it, which leaves a lot of leeway for the actors. The lines of dialogue aren't given to the actors. We work sequence by sequence, first improvising and then, through gradual nudging, we eventually find the dialogue. This puts everyone on equal footing and it works particularly well with children.

There's no musical score for this film, aside from a scene where the characters dance to Michel Berger's *Paradis Blanc*...

I looked for a song that would convey something at once nostalgic and popular, bringing about an emotion that everyone can share. I felt that this song could do the trick. *Our Struggles* is a film where people have difficulties voicing things, and speaking to one another. And I wanted a moment in the story when there would be nothing to say, for sometimes simply dancing with someone is what feels right and soothing. This scene is important in the film because it's a moment when there is no need for words. I didn't want more music or score. I love film scores, but not for my films. I'm uncomfortable with the idea of adding music to a scene, as though it weren't enough in of itself. I therefore feel that the music must be diegetic, i.e. justified in the scene by the narrative, because the characters are actually listening to or hearing a song.

Interview by Olivier Séguret

CAST

Romain DURIS • Olivier

Laure CALAMY • Claire

Laetitia DOSCH • Betty

Lucie DEBAY • Laura

Basile GRUNBERGER • Elliot

Lena GIRARD VOSS • Rose

Dominique VALADIE • Joëlle

Sarah LE PICARD • Agathe

Cédric VIEIRA • Paul

CREW

DIRECTOR • **Guillaume SENEZ**

SCREENPLAY • **Guillaume SENEZ & Raphaëlle DESPLECHIN**

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY • **Elin KIRSCHFINK (SBC)**

SOUND • **Fabrice OSINSKI**

EDITOR • **Julie BRENTA**

SET DESIGNER • **Florin DIMA**

PRODUCERS • **Isabelle TRUC (IOTA PRODUCTION), David THION & Philippe MARTIN (LES FILMS PELLEAS)**

CO-PRODUCER • **Bart VAN LANGENDONCK (SAVAGE FILM)**

TECHNICAL DETAILS

Sound Format • **5.1**

Ratio • **Scope**

Running Time • **98'**

Original Version • **French**

Year of Production • **2018**

Country • **Belgium, France**

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