

Music Box Films Presents

# THE BLACK BOOK OF FATHER DINIS

Directed by Valeria Sarmiento

Starring Lou de Laâge, Stanislas Merhar, Niels Schneider



103 MIN | FRANCE, PORTUGAL | 2017 | 1.78 :1 | NOT RATED | IN FRENCH WITH ENGLISH SUBTITLES

Website: <https://www.musicboxfilms.com/film/the-black-book/>

Press Materials: <https://www.musicboxfilms.com/press-page/>

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## LOGLINE

A picaresque chronicle of Laura, a peasant maid, and Sebastian, the young orphan in her charge, against a backdrop of overflowing passion and revolutionary intrigue in Europe at the twilight of the 18th century.

## SUMMARY

THE BLACK BOOK OF FATHER DINIS explores the tumultuous lives of Laura (Lou de Laâge), a peasant maid, and Sebastian (Vasco Varela da Silva), the young orphan in her charge, against a backdrop of overflowing passion and revolutionary intrigue in Europe at the twilight of the 18th century. An unlikely adventure yarn that strides the continent, from Rome and Venice to London and Paris, with whispers of conspiracies from the clergy, the military, and the gentry, this sumptuous period piece ponders the intertwined nature of fate, desire, and duty. Conceived by director Valeria Sarmiento as an appendix to the expansive literary maze of her late partner Raul Ruiz's landmark MYSTERIES OF LISBON, this picaresque chronicle both enriches the earlier work and stands on its own as a grand meditation of the stories we construct about ourselves.

## A JOURNEY THROUGHOUT EUROPE AND HISTORY

*Interview with Director Valeria Sarmiento*

### **What was the origin of the project?**

Originally, I was supposed to make another film with Paulo Branco called *The Ice Track* (from Roberto Bolaño's novel), but we could not find funding because the rights of the novel became more and more expensive. Then, in one of Raoul's (Ruiz) closets, I found a script written by Carlos Saboga that he was supposed to direct after *Mysteries of Lisbon*. At the time, the script was not very long. Much later, Carlos reworked it and I brought it to Paulo, and told him that since *The Ice Track* was still pending, we could do *The Black Book of Father Dinis*. Paulo agreed right away because he loves Camilo Castelo Branco, the author of the novel, and he also loved *Mysteries of Lisbon*. It seemed like a nice continuation, to make a second film about another novel by the Portuguese writer.

### **Is it a prequel to *Mysteries*?**

*O Livro Negro de Padre Dinis* (the original title of the novel) is a story that, in a way, precedes *The Mysteries of Lisbon* where, using flashbacks, we witness the birth of a child. In *The Black Book of Father Dinis*, we hear about the childhood of a boy named Sebastian, as well as the very important story of the woman who raises him. Raoul was interested, as he used to say to Carlos, by the character of the Cardinal. But I was more interested in the character of the nurse. I found references, elements that are very clear to us in Latin America. I thought about these stories of initiation in some bourgeois families, where it is sometimes the young housekeeper who awakens feelings of desire, and which can sometimes lead to terrible stories, because in a certain way it is the employees of the house who introduce the adolescents to sexuality. So I decided to focus on the character of the woman rather than the cardinal.

### **How much did you work on the scenario?**

I followed the initial script of Carlos Saboga, even though I slightly reduced the importance of the cardinal's character. We had even thought of integrating a part of the *Mysteries of Lisbon* inside the film, but we would have had to shoot again, because we did not have the same photography, or the same framing or rhythm, and of course not the same actors. So I decided to skip this sequence, something that Carlos may not forgive me for...

**Is it a series?**

It is, indeed, a serie in which historical characters appear. Unlike Raoul, this was the first time I had worked on this period. After reading the novel and the script, I learned a lot about that time. An era linked to the presence of libertines, like the Marquis. I read a book that taught me a lot about it, *The Last Libertines* by Benedetta Craver.

**You practically never work with actors with whom you or Ruiz have worked before...**

I was in Chile and Paulo sent me the names of five actresses selected for the role of Laura and I watched extracts of the films in which they had played. I discovered Lou de Laâge in *Les Innocentes*, and by reviewing excerpts, it convinced me that she had to play the role. She has something frail, fragile that attracted me. She seems fragile but with an inner fire. For the rest of the characters, it depended a bit on Paulo Branco, for both practical and economic reasons. It was the first time I worked with them.

**You film her with a generosity and sensuality that is new.**

One of the things I discover with age is that I can look at young people with a lot of tenderness. I saw the couple she was forming on the screen with Niels Schneider, and I thought they were very beautiful examples of human nature!

**The image and texture of this film is surprising...**

I had done the Lines of Wellington with chief operator André Szankowski, and we were supposed to work together again, but he was not available.

So I came back to my old friend and collaborator Acacio de Almeida, with whom we worked a lot, and it went very well, again. He is for me a director of photography so malleable, kind. He will soon be 80 years old ... I wanted the film not to be too realistic. And for that, we looked at the possibility of removing a color ... I discovered that after the Second World War, the Spaniards, not having the means to equip themselves in Technicolor, had invented a similar technique. They made several impressive films with this technique... with an astonishing result, where the greens turned to blues. In a subtle way, on our side, we used a filter to try to have the effect of these films. But the costume sets already had, say, one less color. Thus, we reached an impression of unreality, which is what I wanted in the film. One does not always realize how much the image, the colors, determine the vision that we can have of a film. Especially in this case of reverie, another time as fantasized. I wanted the viewer to enter the atmosphere of a tale. This seems to me more true to the script, since the main character is a legendary character. In any case, who is destined to become one?

We were looking for this effect, a kind of... fake in the color. It's very sweet, you can see it little by little. That's why we worked all the sets and costumes upstream, removing a color which is blue. It therefore became complicated, for instance regarding the soldiers' uniforms. But if we succeeded, it is thanks to the talent and the work of the teams of Isabel Branco, who makes both the costumes and the sets. I have already worked with her three times. She is a great artist because she knows how to work with few means. Thanks to her, each era had its own coherence. Imagine, we could not use blue, and yet, we did well!

The film extends from before the Revolution, say 1770 to the second campaign of Italy, in about 1800. We had a map, a kind of giant frieze in which we noted the times of the script, with historical clues. We organized the eras, and then Isabel adapted the costumes and sets. I think that thanks to her also we reach the dreamlike feeling that is characteristic of this fantastic saga.

**And how is the shooting of a film going on at different times and in different places?**

We filmed for six weeks, which is short for a costume film. We mainly shot in Portugal, around Lisbon, Sintra... Portugal is the only place where we can still find palaces available. This may be the last time, since now to shoot vintage films we are starting to pay a lot of money. The story takes place all over Europe, but everything has been shot in the same place. There are certain details that evoke different places. For Rome, for example, we have put a little sound of bells, or the well known sound of the "cobblestones of Paris": it is a fiction, and we ask the spectator to believe it.

**And you, often the editor, you entrust the editing to someone else.**

When I make fiction films, I never take care of editing. Here it was Luca Alberdi, an Italian editor working in Portugal. I asked to work with him for the *Lines of Wellington*. What is interesting is that they are two films with a very different style. Here we needed to go fast, to have this series move at a frantic pace, whereas in the *Lines* we had to settle in the tempo, follow long and complex shots-sequence, since we wanted to see how the war settles in the life of the characters. *The Black Book of Father Dinis* was designed as a series, it follows the rhythm, and you have to constantly revive the action.

I think there has to be a vertigo induced by the narrative, which does not let go of you for a second. The duration of the film must preserve this suspense, this very sustained rhythm.

**Like the number of ellipses, for example?**

This rhythm requiring ellipses is desired by the structure of a series. It was already present in the original novel: everything is linked; we go from the French Revolution to the Empire and the Napoleonic wars.

**Have you found some of your usual collaborators?**

Yes. For example, for the music, we worked with the composer Jorge Arriagada, from the beginning of the editing. We sent him edited sequences and he proposed music, and then we could, thanks to that, resume the editing process.

**In his collaborations with you, he is a true chameleon.**

I know Jorge well, I edited a good part of Raoul's films with his compositions. Sometimes, as was the case for *Telenovela Errante*, he "lends" me some music.

**The *Wandering Telenovela*, an unfinished project of Ruiz, which you have just edited. And by the way, you have just finished a series for Chilean television. What is the transition to an 18th century adventure film set in Europe like?**

My project in Chile is also a period film. It is the year 1952, when women have for the first time the right to vote in Chile, after terrible moments of communist persecution. This is the historical background of the series, told in ten episodes: the story of two women trying to recover their father's store. I did not have to worry about moving from low budget films to another type of economy, since I work with different teams.

One thing is very clear in my work. On one side, there is fiction. I started as a fiction director with Corín Tellado, for example, by adapting sentimental stories. But when I make documentaries in Latin America, I make documentaries on very difficult themes. Like a kind of split personality. For the moment, before returning to shoot documentaries in Europe, I have to finish another unfinished project of Raoul, *El Tango Delviudo*.

**And that famous Black Book, then?**

This is typical of a series, and this is what the Cardinal, played by Stanislas Mehrar, says. It is always better that the mystery remains...



## VALERIA SARMIENTO

Born in Chile in 1948, Valeria Sarmiento studied Philosophy and Cinema before starting her career as a filmmaker. Exiled in Paris after the 1973 coup, she kept sending political messages to Latin American leaders through her films and documentaries. She is also the privileged collaborator of Raul Ruiz, for whom she edited most of the films, and with whom she lived.

EL HOMBRE CUANDO ES HOMBRE (1981), filmed in Costa Rica, tackles Latin American machismo by its least harmful and most sympathetic sides (romanticism, sentimentality, courtesy), before progressively unveiling the worst aspects of everyday oppression. Popular songs and Mexican mariachis serve as commentary or counterpoint. Both in documentaries and in fiction, Valeria Sarmiento pays attention to dramaturgy and weighs her suggestions carefully. THE PLANET OF CHILDREN (1991), filmed in Cuba, plays on ambiguity to better describe an institution for children which is supposed to encourage professional vocations and leads them towards the end of the Castro era. Fiction films confirm her attachment to popular culture and her willingness to play with conventions and stereotypes. OUR MARRIAGE (1984), her first feature film, is selected in many festivals and received the Young Director Award in San Sebastian. AMELIA LOPES O'NEILL (1991) was selected at the Berlin Film Festival in 1991 and received the Gan Foundation Award. Filmed in Chile, this film is part of the melodramatic universe of the bolero, and Valeria Sarmiento develops a look at the mentalities and behaviors that persist, beyond transgressions. In her next films, ELLE (1994) and ROSA LA CHINA (2002), she continues to reflect on the couple. The UNKNOWN of STRASBOURG (1998), with a paradoxical aesthetic, will also stand out. In 2012, she takes over from Raül Ruiz, who dies during the preparation of the film, and directs THE LINES OF WELLINGTON, a great historical fresco and choral film about the Napoleonic debacle in Portugal in 1810.

In 1988, she received an endowment from the Guggenheim Foundation.

In 2008, Stanford University organized a retrospective of her work.

In 2010, she shared with Raül Ruiz the Art Critics Circle's Bicentennial Award for Cinema.

## **FILMOGRAPHY - NARRATIVE:**

- 2018 The Black Book (film)  
Toronto Film Festival, San Sebastian film Festival
- 2017 Casa di Angeli (TV series in 3 episodes)
- 2014 Maria Graham: Diary of a Residence in Chile
- 2013 Maria Graham: Diary of a Residence in Chile (TV series)
- 2012 Les Lignes de Wellington (TV series in 3 episodes for Arte)  
San Sebastian Film Festival, FIPA 2012
- 2012 Lines of Wellington (film)  
Venise Film Festival, Toronto, New York, Londres
- 2010 Diario de Mi Residencia en Chile: María Graham (TV series)
- 2008 Secretos
- 2002 Rosa la Chine  
Venise Film Festival, Toronto, Huelva, Rotterdam
- 1998 The Strasbourg Stranger  
Montréal Film Festival - World Film Festival
- 1995 Elle  
San Sebastian Film Festival
- 1991 Amelia López O'Neill  
Berlin (Official Competition), New York, Toronto, Montréal, Bruxelles,  
Cartagena, Taiwan, Le Caire, New Delhi, Rotterdam, Huelva  
Prix de la critique à Huelva / Lauréate Fondation Gan 1989
- 1984 Our Marriage  
San Sebastian Film Festival, New York (M.O.M.A.), Locarno, Toronto,  
Montréal, Bruxelles, Rio, Miami, Seville, Rotterdam, La Havane (Semaine du  
Cinéma français), Salso Maggiore, Barcelone, Colombia, Santiago du Chili,  
Mar del Plata  
Prix Donostiarra au Festival de San Sebastian (Best young director)
- 1976 La Femme au Foyer (short)  
Belfort Film Festival – Prix Voltaire
- 1972 Los Minutereros (short)
- 1972 Poesía Popular: La Teoría Y La Práctica (Short – co-directed with  
Raül RUIZ)



## FILMOGRAPHY - DOCUMENTARY:

- 2004 To the Louvre with Miquel Barceló (Production INA, France 5, Musée du Louvre)
- 1999 My First French Cancan (Production INA, France 3)  
Festival Cinéma du réel, Paris
- 1998 Carlos Fuentes: A Journey Throught Time (Production INA, France 3)  
Festival International du film d'art pédagogique, Festival International de Famalicão (Portugal)  
Cinema and History Award (UNESCO), Prix Documentarismo à Famalicao
- 1993 El Derecho de Sonar (UNESCO)
- 1992 Latin Women Beat in California (Production Cannel 4)
- 1992 The Children's Planet (Production ZDF / VS Productions)  
Festival de Vallodolid, Semana Internacional de Cine
- 1989 90 Secondes, Une OEuvre (Production Le Louvre, Les Film D'ici)
- 1987 Music for Movies and Orchestra (INA)
- 1982 El Hombre Quando es Hombre (Production ZDF / VS Productions)  
Festival Margaret Mead de New York
- 1979 Le Mal du Pays (short – produced by the United Nations, Geneva)
- 1979 Gens de Nulle Part, Gens de Toutes Parts (Centre de l'Audiovisuel de Bruxelles)
- 1972 UN SUEÑO COMO DE COLORES (Short - VS Productions)

## **LOU DE LAÂGE**

### **SELECTIVE FILMOGRAPHY:**

2011 : 18 years old and Rising by Frédéric Louf  
 2011 : Nino (the imaginary teen of Nino Ferrer) by Thomas Bardinet  
 2013 : Jappeloup by Christian Duguay  
 2013 : People who are kissing by Danièle Thompson  
 2014 : Breathe by Mélanie Laurent  
 2015 : The Tournament by Élodie Namer  
 2015 : The Wait by Piero Messina  
 2016 : The Innocents by Anne Fontaine

## **STANISLAS MERHAR**

### **SELECTIVE FILMOGRAPHY:**

1997 : Dry Cleaning by Anne Fontaine  
 1999 : The Letter by Manoel de Oliveira :  
 1999 : Furia by Alexandre Aja  
 2000 : Franck Spadone by Richard Bean  
 2000 : The Captive by Chantal Akerman  
 2000 : Workers of the good lord by Jean-Claude Brisseau  
 2001 : Nobel by Fabio Carpi  
 2001 : I cavalieri che fecero l'impresa by Pupi Avati  
 2002 : Almost Peaceful by Michel Deville  
 2002 : Thank you Docteur Rey by Andrew Litvack  
 2003 : Adolphe by Benoît Jacquot  
 2003 : The Childhood of Catherine by Anne Baudry  
 2005 : The art of brooking up by Michel Deville  
 2005 : Code 68 by Jean-Henri Roger  
 2006 : Like a Black cat at the bottom of a bag by Stéphane Elmadjian  
 2006 : Muetter by Dominique Lienhard  
 2006 : The Legacy by Géla Babluani and Temur Babluani  
 2011 : In town by Valérie Mréjen et Bertrand Schefer  
 2011 : The art of loving by Emmanuel Mouret  
 2012 : Almayer's folly by Chantal Akerman  
 2014 : Rosenn by Yvan Le Moine  
 2015 : The Shadow of women by Philippe Garrel  
 2015 : Left Foot Right Foot by Germinal Roaux  
 2017 : Madame by Amanda Sthers

## **NIELS SCHNEIDER**

### **SELECTIVE FILMOGRAPHY:**

2007 : The Taste of nothing by Pascal Robitaille  
2008 : Everything is perfect by Yves Christian Fournier  
2009 : I killed my mother by Xavier Dolan  
2009 : Ready, set... party! 2 by Frédéric d'Amours  
2010 : Heartbeats by Xavier Dolan  
2011 : Hurlements 8 by Joe Nimziki  
2012 : The atomic age by Hélène Klotz  
2013 : You and the Nights by Yann Gonzalez  
2013 : The mess by Étienne Faure  
2013 : Opium by Arielle Dombasle  
2014 : Gemma Boverly by Anne Fontaine  
2014 : Quantum Love by Lisa Azuelos  
2014 : La Voz en off by Cristian Jimenez  
2015 : The Art Dealer by François Margolin  
2016 : Kokoro by Vanja d'Alcantara  
2016 : Dark Diamond by Arthur Harari  
2016 : Polina by Valérie Müller and Angelin Preljocaj  
2016 : Sleeping Beauty by Adolfo Arieta  
2017 : Dalida by Lisa Azuelos and Jean Sobieski  
2018 : One Nation, One king by Pierre Schoeller  
2018 : An impossible love by Catherine Corsini

## **JENNA THIAM**

### **SELECTIVE FILMOGRAPHY:**

2013 : Smart Ass by Kim Chapiron  
2014 : We Love you, you bastard by Claude Lelouch  
2014 : Next Year by Vania Leturcq  
2014 : Wild Life by Cédric Kahn  
2015 : Anton Tchekhov -1890 by René Féret  
2016 : Daydreams by Caroline Deruas  
2017 : A Paris education by Jean-Paul Civeyrac

## CAST

**Lou De Laâge** - Laura / Lelia  
**Stanislas Merhar** - Cardinal Rufo / Young Rufo  
**Niels Schneider** - The Marquis of Lusault  
**Jenna Thiam** - Suzanne de Montfort  
**Fleur Fitoussi** - Gervaise  
**David Caracol** - António  
**François Debblock** - Prince of Parma  
**Joana Ribeiro** - Charlotte Corday  
**Gregoire Leprince** - Ringuet - Bonaparte

## CREW

A film by Valeria Sarmiento  
Screenplay - Carlos Saboga  
Original music - Jorge Arriagada  
Cinematography - Acácio de Almeida  
Sound - Carlos Mota, Miguel Martins  
Film Editing - Luca Alverdi  
Art Direction - Isabel Branco  
Assistant Directors - Paulo Mil Homens, António Pinhão Botelho  
Executive Production - Ana Pinhão Moura  
Co-Producer - Carlos Bedran  
With special participation by  
Grégoire Leprince-Ringuet  
And a friendly participation by  
Victoria Guerra  
Joana Ribeiro  
Catarina Wallenstein  
Produced by Paulo Branco  
A co-production Leopardo Filmes  
Alfama Films Production  
In association with  
CB Partners  
APM Produções  
And participation of  
Ciné+  
RTP  
With the support of  
La Procirep  
Câmara Municipal de Lisboa  
Lisboa Film Commission