

VISA/VIE

Production Notes

BIG WORLD CINEMA, AND NU? and BRAVE BUNNY

PRESENT

VISA/VIE

A Film By Elan Gamaker

Mélotie Abad

David Isaacs

Charles Tertiens

Keren Tahor

Distributed by
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SYNOPSIS

Anna Ronquillo (29), a French-Moroccan émigré working illegally in a trendy Cape Town restaurant, is busted by Home Affairs in the middle of a shift. They tell her she has 48 hours in which to gather her possessions and return to France. In an ironic twist of colonial fate, this child of the First World is now not allowed to stay in the Third World.

For Anna this is a living nightmare. Having fled a terrible domestic situation she has nothing to go back to in France. Desperate, she has one option: she must get married. The trouble is, she's something of a loner. She knows no-one prepared to tie the knot, even if it's just a 'visa marriage'. With her bags half-packed, she makes a radical decision.

She broadcasts a personal announcement on a local radio station to Cape Town's bachelors: anyone interested in marrying her should meet at the restaurant the following day. There they will have five minutes in which to charm her, and at the end of the day she will make her decision.

The day comes. She interviews dozens of random men. Of all the initial guys, none is suitable and Anna grows despondent. Finally, a 'man with no number', a citizen of the world and 'revisionist cartographer' for whom maps and nation-states are a myth, comes in and is perfect. He recognises in her a bit of himself: someone living in a fantasy land where one can run away from problems.

He whisks her off and they spend a day of pure joy and freedom. For a moment, Anna forgets her predicament. But there is one problem. He does not have a South African passport.

Now Anna must choose: between marrying for the sake of personal freedom, or loving even if it means having to leave.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Visa/Vie is a comedy-drama that marks the feature directing debut of Elan Gamaker and stars up-and-coming French starlet Mélodie Abad and David Isaacs (*SOS, Meet Joe Barber*) with Charles Tertiens (*Disgrace*).

A Truly Independent Film

Shot in two breathtaking weeks in Cape Town with a budget that combined freebies, deals, several favours, gifts from equipment companies, and only €15 000 in cash, the film uses innovative techniques and modes of narrative storytelling, as well as a highly stylised aesthetic untypical of South African films. It's in its production that *Visa/Vie* is particularly groundbreaking.

It was shot in sequence and more or less in real time. Four actors were cast in the key roles of men who come to audition to be the husband of main character Anna Ronquillo, who announces in the media that she is searching for a suitable husband. Members of the public were encouraged to come to set and audition for the role. Those who were particularly interesting or answered the list of questions in an intriguing or amusing way, ended up in the final footage of the (entirely fictional) film. The question for South African men was: do you have what it takes to be a South African husband?

This technique is a blurring of fiction and reality indicative of the role of entertainment in this era of voyeurism and suspicion. It's a method dubbed 'superimposed reality', or 'superreality' by writer/director Elan Gamaker.

"We're living in an age where not only is reality TV omnipresent, we're now seeing the emergence of drama shows, and even films, that follow a reality TV look and feel," Gamaker says. "This is pop culture cannibalism of the highest order."

"I've always been fascinated by the trickery, indeed dishonesty, of the camera, the frame and the edit. I feel we need to take this a step further. Whether the men who come to see if they are suitable husbands for Anna know that this is for real or not, is irrelevant. As long as they know cameras will be rolling, we have to question their motives. And, of course, record them."

The filmmakers did not want participants to know whether or not the character's name was indeed Anna, nor if the actress (or the character) needed to marry or not to save her visa status. At one point, they even kept from the actress who they had decided she should end up with.

"The film was a group effort," continues Gamaker. "And it was risky. It's certainly audacious to trick people like this and blur the lines of what they're used to, or what they're entitled to know. But it's no less than we all deserve, or expect."

A Natural Evolution of Style

The method is part of what Elan Gamaker calls 'The Third Wave': combining the ethos of the French New Wave with the emergence of Third World cinema. It is a cinema about defining identity from within and producing stories that resonate on a level that is personal as well as collective. It's also about craft.

"The Nouvelle Vague was about developing voices. We paid homage to this movement in the way we shot it, and in the playful pop-culture references that come up. Every cigarette the character smokes is a nod to another Godard film."

"And, similarly, this was a self-generating project and a product unlike anything this country has seen in terms of cinema. It will excite and alienate in equal measure. But it's a project that breaks away from traditional notions of filmmaking in general and what it means to be an African filmmaker," says Gamaker. "It's wholly South African but distinctly international in its outlook and themes. It's guerrilla filmmaking without the gorillas."

CAST

MÉLODIE ABAD (Anna)

Following a drama degree at the University of Cape Town, South Africa, Swiss/French actress Mélodie joined a street art company. Following her return to France, she has shared the stage with the likes of Ariane Mnouchkine, Augusto Boal and Stéphane Auvray Noroy. She currently works in theatre, television and cinema, in English and French.

DAVID ISAACS (Number One)

David is one of South Africa's most celebrated actors and performers. He found fame as part of the Joe Barber duo, a long-running stage hit that made him a household name. He has also enjoyed considerable success on the small and big screens, with comedy turns in TV-series *SOS* as well as dramatic roles such as Cape of Good Hope. He lives and works in Cape Town.

KEREN TAHOR (Italia)

Actress, writer and playwright, Israeli-born Keren Tahor sprung to national recognition with her role as the villainous Nirvana in local TV drama *Scandal*. Her play *Jutro*, in collaboration with writer Elan Gamaker and Fresco Theatre Company, was recognised as Best Play in the *Beeld* Awards for 2007. She continues to be active on stage and screen.

CHARLES TERTIENS (The Man with No Number)

Multi-talented Capetonian Charles is trained as a circus performer, magician and stand-up comedian. He brings his varied talents to the screen as the enigmatic 'man with no number', who has everything Anna wants except a passport.

CREW

ELAN GAMAKER (Writer/Director/Co-Producer)

Elan was born in Johannesburg, South Africa in 1974. Following bachelor degrees in English, Linguistics and Drama and Film, he has worked in the film industry in Cape Town and London for several years. He twice attended the prestigious Binger Filmlab in Amsterdam, where he is now based. His recently completed first novel, *Wayward Nature*, was shortlisted for the 2008/9 European Union Literary Award, and his second feature-length script, *Swart Gevaar*, is being supported by the Development Fund of the National Film and Video Foundation. *Visa/Vie* is his first feature film.

STEVEN MARKOVITZ & PLATON TRAKOSHIS (Producers)

In 1994, Steven Markovitz and Platon Trakoshis established Big World Cinema, which has produced a number of award-winning fiction, documentaries, commercial, music videos and music specials in southern Africa and in other parts of the World. Steven is the co-Director of Encounters – South African International Documentary Festival and the Close Encounters Documentary Laboratory, now in its 11th year. The Festival and Lab have played an important role in developing audiences for South African films and providing training and support for emerging South African filmmakers.

CHRIS WESSELS (Cinematographer)

Chris's graduation short *Ongeriewe* was selected in Competition at Cannes 2006, setting up the career of one of South Africa's most dynamic screen talents. Chris has shot several prominent pieces throughout the world, most recently in South Africa, Finland and Nigeria.

JULIA ROSA CLARK (Production Design)

Cape Town-based Julia Rosa Clark is one of the country's most prominent fine artists. Her work is eclectic and powerful, ranging from literary pieces to highly complex assemblages and installations. She is currently a gallerist with What if the World? gallery in Cape Town.

BRIDGET BAKER (Costume Designer)

Fine artist Bridget Baker rose to prominence in the South African art world with her series of Blue Collar Girl works in the late 1990s and early 2000s. She is now internationally renowned for her meticulous attention to detail, originality and ambition.

KESIVAN NAIDOO (Music Supervisor)

Jazz musician, composer and producer Kesivan Naidoo is one of South Africa's greatest musical talents. He spent time studying in India after being the youngest person to win the Samro Overseas Scholarship and went on to found several ventures in South Africa, including award-winning groups such as Babu, Reality Radio and Closet Snare.

CREDITS

Directed by
Elan Gamaker

Produced by
Steven Markovitz and Platon Trakoshis
Co-Producer
Elan Gamaker

Screenplay
Elan Gamaker

Director of Photography
Chris Wessels

Production Design
Julia Rosa Clark

Costume Design
Bridget Baker

Music Supervisor
Kesivan Naidoo

Mélotie Abad	Anna
David Isaacs	Number One
Keren Tahor	Italia
Charles Tertiens	The Man with No Number
Leon Clingman	Number 22
Karabelo Mokoena	Number 34
Siddique Motala	Number 25
Koketso Sachane	DJ
Madineyah Isaacs	Female DJ
Edgard Dziki Minkala	Car Guard
Françoise Davoine	Dominique
Mathieu Montanier	Nikola
Joz Malherbe	Number 25
Gary Green	Manager
Gabi-Lee Smit	Waitress
Nathaline Arendse	Waitress
Elan Gamaker	Asshole Director
Niyaaaz Jainoodien	Nightclub Singer
Oscar Petersen	Home Affairs Officer
Sonia Esgueira	Home Affairs Officer
Odeon Wood	Tango Dancer

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