

MIRAK FILMS  
presents

# alive

a film by **KARIM DRIDI**

with LUNA, ROMANE DUBUT, JULIEN CINQUEUX  
& SÉLIM, STÉPHANIE AIT TALEB, ISMAËL AIT TALEB

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runtime  
1h38

stills and presskit  
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Day and night, two couples stand alongside  
their children with care and attention,  
as they await an organ donation.  
Their support, combined with  
the extraordinary dedication of their  
caregivers, is vital on the path to recovery.  
A celebration of hope, resilience and  
commitment - a true love story!

# Interview with Karim Dridi

## What made you want to shoot a film within a pediatric intensive care unit?

At first, I discovered the nonprofit "Le Rire Médecin" (akin to the seminal "Big Apple Circus Clown Care Unit" in New York) and met its founder, Caroline Simonds, and it made me want to make a film about the work of clowns in hospitals. I started following clowns around during their visits, and one day we walked into a room in an intensive care unit (ICU). A baby had just undergone heart surgery, and we could almost see its heart beating underneath the sheet that covered its chest. The baby had been put into an artificial coma. The two clowns gently approached and began to play music. The baby's heart rate reacted to the sound of music. I went out of the room and cried. It wasn't sad, it was beautiful, and at that very moment I knew that I would make a documentary in a pediatric intensive care unit.

## The film focuses on parents, how did you decide on this particular thread?

Initially, I intended to chronicle life in the unit, but then I had an epiphany. I saw a couple in the waiting room, their son had just been admitted to the ICU, and they knew nothing. They were just waiting, petrified with fear, for someone to give them news about their baby. I said to myself: "That could be me. What if I were in this dad's shoes,

with my wife, waiting for someone to come and talk to us, what would I do? How would I behave? How would I feel?" So it made me want to follow the parents instead.

Then I went location scouting, thinking: "You are crazy to make such a hard film, you're going to cry all day." But little by little, I fell in love with the unit, with the parents, the children, and the staff. It's just incredible!

## Tell us more about the shooting process.

Intensive care cubicles are so cramped. The machines, the massive medical appliances take up all the space. So you need as few people as possible, the smallest possible camera, and the most discreet attitude. But in the end, the real difficulty isn't the size of the camera, or the complexity of the process, but rather how to get the parents to accept you.

During the shooting, I have seen many couples waiting to be told whether their child was going to live, and if so, for how long, what medical options were on the table, whether a transplant would be necessary or not... To approach them is not easy. I was terrified at first, but then I was very surprised at how they supported the project. One mother once told me that I had been her first therapy. Overall, I filmed more than twenty families. Sometimes, they stayed for a few days, a week, or a month. This is how I met Luna's and Selim's parents.

## Could you tell us about them?

Romane and Julien, Luna's parents, agreed to be filmed straight away. They are a very young couple, and they seemed to be more comfortable with the camera, with images, but that may just be an impression.

As for Selim's parents, I first met Ismaël, the father, when he arrived at the hospital. He said yes straight away, but his wife, Stéphanie, also had to be on board. When I met her, she told me that she didn't feel like being filmed, but that she agreed

for a single reason: if the film could help other parents in a similar situation, then she was willing to do it.

I lived with these couples for several months. I was the person who spent the most time with them, more time even than the staff, or their families. I was locked up with them in these cubicles for days and sometimes for nights. I enjoy cooking, so I started to prepare meals for them. This allowed us to talk to each other off camera. I couldn't hide behind my camera all the time, I needed to put it down and to have human-to-human conversations with them. It really strengthened our bond.

## What do you think is the real subject of the film?

The film was meant to question the commitment involved by parenthood, for better or for worse. This topic runs through the film, and questions our own humanity.

The film could have taken place in a school or in a home environment. But I chose intensive care because I felt a strength, an extraordinary life drive there that I had never felt in my entire life. The film isn't about hospitals; it is not a documentary on caregivers, or on the medical field. Even if all these topics are dealt with in the background, the film is above all the story of two couples. I wanted to focus on these parents who care for their children, at all costs, throughout the adventure of high-risk hospitalization.

The film shows the sense of confinement experienced at the hospital, and the never-ending wait of the parents, who have nothing to do but worry. It also brings to light how they manage to transcend their negative thoughts and their fears, and to turn them into a positive drive to guide their children on the road to recovery.

But what I also wanted to show in the film is that the first persons who fight to live, to survive, are children themselves! And around them, around their fight, there are their parents on the frontline,



and the caregivers, the ICU doctors, the surgeons, the cardiologists, etc.

I want to give hope to the viewers, but especially to the parents who will watch the film. It is important to know that 95% of the children admitted to intensive care units make it out eventually.

### **How do parents cope with this ordeal?**

They are fully committed to the long-term hospitalization process. Each and every day, their children's lives are in jeopardy, until they finally "come to life" ... or not.

Getting through this requires a strength these people didn't even know they had in them. It is a matter of self-transcendence, the ultimate trial, a perilous and extraordinary adventure. What I have seen are superheroes - not the ones they sell on TV series, but actual, ordinary people who show incredible strength and power, as individuals and as couples.

I wanted to show how these parents find the strength to keep on fighting to keep their children alive. I have also noticed that the more resilient couples were those who kept their sense of humor. They need laughter and lightness; they use this as a weapon to face the more painful moments.

### **Now that the film is about to come out, what are your expectations?**

My producer Emma Soisson and I would like the film to start a conversation on our state hospitals, on the crisis of pediatric units, and on the still taboo subject of child organ donation. Without organ donation, Selim and Luna would not be alive today.

I had never made a film that was at once a tool, a medicine, and a companion film for all the parents who have gone or who will go through this incredible experience. I need to let this film go, it is not mine any longer, it is there for parents and caregivers to use.





Born in Tunis to a Tunisian father and a French mother, Karim Dridi made his first short films as a child. It was *ZOÉ LA BOXEUSE* that got him noticed. In 1995, he made his first two feature films, *PIGALLE*, in competition at the Venice Film Festival, and *BYE-BYE*, selected in Un Certain Regard at Cannes where it received the Youth Award. He then made two documentaries, one about Johannesburg, *IMPRESSJON D'AFRIQUE... DU SUD*, and one about Ken Loach. He then shot *CUBA FÉLIZ*, a musical road movie selected at the Directors' Fortnight in Cannes. In 2003, *RAGE* was selected at the Berlin Film Festival. In 2007, *KHAMSA* was presented in Locarno. In 2009, he directed Marion Cotillard and Guillaume Canet in *THE LAST FLIGHT*, shot in the Sahara desert. His latest feature film, *CHOUF*, shot during the summer of 2015 in the popular neighborhoods of Marseille, was amongst the Official Selection at the Cannes Film Festival and reached 300 000 admissions in French cinemas.

## Karim Dridi

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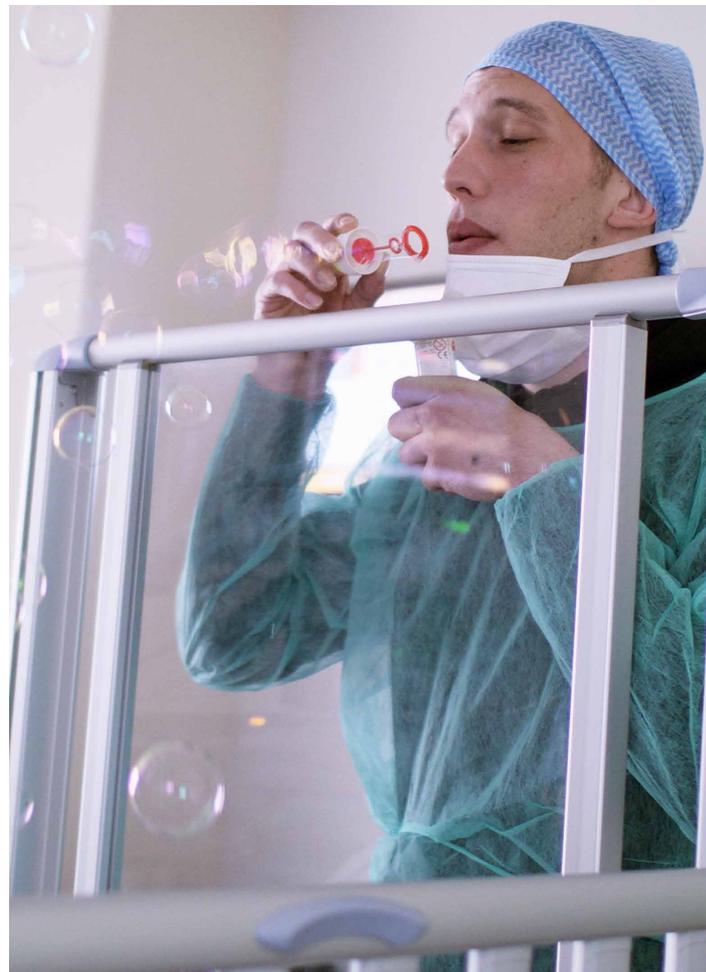
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