



FREEDOM

A MOVIE BY
MÉLANIE LAURENT

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FREEDOM

Inspired by the daring exploits of a legendary outlaw in France in the late 1970s and early 1980s, *Freedom* follows the electrifying story of Bruno Sulak (Lucas Bravo), a suave and daring criminal who stole hearts alongside riches. Known for his charm and finesse, Sulak masterminded daring heists without firing a single shot. But as his infamy grew, so did the relentless pursuit of George Moréas (Yvan Attal), a tenacious police commissioner with a knack for outsmarting criminals. As Moréas closes in, Sulak's escapes from prison become legendary, fuelled by a lust for freedom and a burning desire for his lover Annie (Léa Luce Busato). Amidst the chaos of their criminal spree, Sulak and Annie become the ultimate symbols of defiance in the most exhilarating game of cat and mouse that gripped the nation.

A film by **Mélanie Laurent**

Starring **Lucas Bravo, Léa Luce Busato & Yvan Attal**

Produced by **Alain Goldman**

Run Time: 109 Minutes



Exclusively on Prime Video on November 1, 2024

Interview with Mélanie Laurent

Director / Co-writer

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When did you first hear about Bruno Sulak?

I am a very big fan of the writer Philippe Jaenada. I'm still looking forward to his next book. Ten years ago, this "next book" was called *Sulak*. I dove into Bruno's story, which I didn't know at all. Philippe has this talent for telling stories by putting himself on the character's side. It starts from childhood until death, and it goes through all the characters, their whole lives, with so much detail. While reading *Sulak*, it was difficult not to imagine a film.

What triggered your imagination about the life of Bruno Sulak?

First of all, I was very excited about the idea of making a male-driven film. There was also this great love story that I was very drawn to. What I liked about Bruno was that he had a very loyal woman by his side, the woman of his life, with whom he robbed. However, he never used violence. He also shares this story with the police officer after him, Moréas, so there was something very 'Catch Me If You Can' by Steven Spielberg about it all. There were a lot of cinematic elements, if only in the structure of the story.

Where did you start when you chose to tell this life story?

The question we immediately asked ourselves was "when do we start?". We did not adapt Philippe Jaenada's book. I haven't re-opened it in ten years. It's funny to write with your memories and your feelings, which have been distorted a thousand times in the meantime. Instead, we started our research again. We obviously changed lots of little things and then it was almost liberating to say that it was "inspired by his life". It leaves more room for the imagination.

Has organized crime changed a lot?

The late 70's and early 80's was also the time of the notorious French gangster Mesrine, who was very violent and didn't respect women that much. Bruno was so different... He was almost 'Robin Hood' in comparison. What was interesting about this project and that symbolizes the history of humanity well, is that we remember Mesrine and all the violent gangs but we don't all remember Sulak. However, he was a public enemy number one, he was on all the news at the time! However, he's not someone that history has remembered, we don't remember the "nice guys".

Sulak had a pretty strong ideology...

What was interesting about this film – and period films in general – was figuring out how to reflect something from today. Bruno says that as a citizen, he expects nothing from politicians. In one scene of the film, there is this great debate around the arrival of François Mitterrand to power, the return of hope. At the time, there were debates because there were leaders. There was something to get angry about, something to get excited about, something to dream about, something to want to change, there were great left-wing resolutions with real ideals. It didn't turn into action, of course. But without saying that there was carelessness – because it was also the AIDS years – there were crowded nightclubs, people went out and danced all night until dawn. When I see today's Paris, I wonder where young people go out, where they have fun and how. There was no screen, there was no cell phone. And we could still escape from prison! I learned this during filming: this should no longer be the case today, but when you were arrested and put in prison before being judged, escaping was not considered as fleeing, but as right. I love this idea of freedom... The film is ultimately called *Freedom* because I believe that unconsciously or consciously, I wanted to tell a story that I would like to relive a little. Something romantic, strong and political.



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When you worked to reconstruct the 80s, did you do scrupulous research?

I didn't make a documentary; when I make films, I like to bring modernity. Here, I constantly searched for what the film says about today's world. Supermarkets, overconsumption... All this makes us reflect on the madness into which we have fallen in forty years. My set designer Mathieu Junot and I had a lot of fun going back to those years, because the big brands inevitably reminded us of the cult films that we loved. The universe is very strong. So visually, artistically, what do we do? Should we choose a light that's a bit 70's – 80's? Do we choose the right filter that immediately immerses us in the era? I didn't want to. So, we're not looking at typical 80s hairstyles because they're on the run and while on the run, we don't have time to get a perm! I told the costume designer that my characters needed three costumes, no more, because they never have time for anything. Each time, they leave everything behind and leave. There is nothing in their bag, Annie will buy a beach dress later... They are going to challenge overconsumption but they consume nothing, they need nothing, they live on love, on fresh water and freedom. It was there, modernity.

In your soundtrack, we find *Visage* and *Sparks*, music from the period but still very popular today.

The score is composed by Sébastien Tellier: he is the musician of melancholy, of an era that we want to relive. It takes us back to something always very sexy, very catchy, "feel good", which takes you into these modern loops, and at the same time very vintage. When he took over the film, with this magnificent music, I knew that we could remain very discreet about the big hits.

You are making a noir film, a criminal film however it is colorful, rhythmic and very sunny. Why this bias?

Bruno is a man from the south. He suffocates when there is no sun, his skin does not burn and he cannot dive into the water. Bruno is the Mediterranean, he needs the sun and freedom comes with the sun. He's a luminous character, their story is luminous. The tone of the film is based on what the characters are. The staging is based on what they want to say. There needed to be a film to make people beautiful and sexy. And for that, nothing better than a dodger or a sunset. I wanted to make a film that was initially very bright but then became darker and darker. This is perhaps the film that I had the most fun putting together. I felt good about my characters. I loved finding them every time. That's always the most exciting part of being a director: creating an atmosphere. I loved all these actors. I was a little scared because I deeply love filming women. I had a hard time considering not doing it. But I find that Bruno is a very feminine character – Annie is almost more masculine than him. There is something sexy in their smiles, in their complicity. This is very complicated to achieve in films about robbers and "bad guys". I really wanted to make this film so that we could have

a debate: why is this man, who acted differently from other criminals, the one we have forgotten? What does this say about our life and our society? Why do we forget those who are not violent?

How big a part does fiction play in *Freedom*?

We obviously invented all of the dialogues, all the life scenes. For the rest, I took inspiration from a rather kitsch little documentary on YouTube... That's when I told myself that we shouldn't tell the story of Sulak's childhood, that we had to keep it a mystery. In this documentary, we heard from the real Commissioner Moréas and I worked with him to create a lot of realism in the way the police behaved at the time. There really is a very strong friendship story between them. Once I had spoken for a long time with Moréas, we were able to reinvent a lot of things. But all the anecdotes about the heists, about the Cartier robbery disguised as a tennis player, about Fleury's escape, are true. I know that Bruno did not drink, that he was very healthy in body and mind. And I extrapolated from that. I liked the image of a robber reading a book. What excited me was reinventing the traditional criminal. To romanticize it.



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This is Léa Luce Busato's first role; Lucas Bravo is known in particular for the series *Emily in Paris*. What does it mean to choose lesser-known performers as headliners?

This is my favorite thing in the world: having Yvan Attal facing Lucas Bravo; to have great experience, an absolute mastery of the game facing an actor who, for the first time in his life, must carry a character on a set every day. Léa Luce had never acted in front of a camera, not even in a short film. This is his first experience on a film set. When someone offers me a young woman who comes from the theater, who has never worked in cinema, I absolutely want to see her! I wanted to know what was going through her head, if it was going to scare her. I found her very mature, ready, strong. I had no doubt. As for Lucas, I had met him three years before at a party – I hadn't seen *Emily in Paris* at the time. I just remember seeing this very handsome man with this quality, which very handsome people don't always have, of being very funny. I really liked his energy; then we lost touch, and when I started writing *Freedom*, I said to myself that since no one really knew Bruno Sulak, we could look for an actor who was less obvious than the actors we think about all the time. This is also the freedom that Thomas Dubois gives me at Amazon. There was a desire among my producers to make a real proposal with this film.

Interview with Lucas Bravo

Actor - Bruno Sulak

What did you know about Bruno Sulak before you were offered the role in *Freedom*?

I had scraps of information from an uncle who worked at the AFP and who, at the time, was against capitalism, the growth of supermarkets, etc. Through him, I realized that Bruno Sulak was a symbol of freedom and profound anti-capitalism. But I didn't know that he was a poet, that he had a beautiful pen, that he had such strong principles and values in friendship, in love or in 'work', if you can say that! (Laughs.) Then, on the set between two takes, some technicians spoke to me about Sulak to tell me that he was indeed regarded as a symbol of that time.

As he was less exposed than other robbers like Mesrine, were there enough archives and material to work on your character?

When you are passionate about cinema, the most interesting roles are always those where you have a very precise plan. When a character is this detailed, you want to dive into it. There was still plenty to do with Bruno Sulak: quite a few articles and everything he had written in prison for a magazine ("*L'Autre journal*", editor's note). Afterwards, each person talks about him differently. His lover speaks of him in a certain way. Commissioner Moréas, whom I also met – an extraordinary and very gentle character – spoke to me about him in another way. His friends, with whom he robbed, spoke of him in yet another different way. I realized that he was a chameleon, an evaporated character who was not what people expected of him and could slip across dynamics. It was the first tool that allowed me to bond with him: when I was little, I moved around a lot with my parents – my father was a footballer. I quickly had to identify group dynamics to be able to get rid of this "new" status and also be what people expected of me.

Would you say that on a daily basis, there was something of an actor about him?

Yes, completely! We see it during the Cartier robbery, for example. There was panache, it was always fanciful. When we see him at the Cannes Film Festival, disguised as Björn Borg, arriving with a whole set-up... there was something very cinematic! I think he was passionate about these kinds of films.

Did you have video or sound clips to work on the physicality of the character?

There are two schools. I, who am quite method about this, wanted to imitate it to the millimetre. I found a recording of him, where he is on the phone with Moréas – it was the latter who recorded it, except that the tape is not good, it comes from a small tape recorder from the 80s. But it's a recording that we used in the film – the moment where he says 'If you stop me, you'll see that I don't have a weapon.' I am never armed. When you study the person for several months and come across their voice like that... it was overwhelming. Afterwards, there is another school. I once spoke to Benoît Magimel and asked him what his approach to his character in *La French* was, and how he prepared for such a role. And he said to me: 'You know, my character was a bit like Sulak: people know him but many others don't remember him.' He therefore advised me to make the character my own, while remaining faithful to what he represents.

Tell us about your first days on set?

Between the filming of *Women on the Balcony*, by Noémie Merlant, where I played a sociopath rapist in the Marseille heatwave, and that of *Freedom*, where I was to become a symbol of freedom and panache, I had five days of break. It was the first time that I had such little time between two projects and I realized the importance of giving myself time to "land" after a shoot, to "clean up". Because the first week on *Freedom*, I felt like a rapist pretending to be a robber. Mélanie led me towards this, subtly, delicately. Then, the more I progressed in the film, the more I recognized myself in Bruno's sentences. In his writings. In all objectivity, what he wrote was extraordinary. He had a fantastic pen. It's another era. I too have a love of words, of writing. There was a certain gentleness and poetry about him that I recognized myself in quite quickly. Also, in his principles and his values, like when he promised his friends that he would go get them from prison – and he did it.

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Interview with Lucas Bravo

Actor - Bruno Sulak

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How did you free yourself from the clichés of the criminal genre? It's a type of film that has a long and heavy history, including in France.

It's true that we can quickly fall into the cowboy cliché because we want to stick to what the collective unconscious dictates. But what I really liked was that Mélanie had a very specific approach: she didn't want to make the heists the central point of the film. She took the story of this robber and made it a story of love and friendship. Once you are guided in this direction, it becomes quite easy. I didn't often have a gun on me - as soon as it could be taken away from me, we did, because we wanted to remind people that he didn't use weapons. On the one hand we had to see that he was gentle, attentive, charming and, on the other hand, we had to feel danger. Because, when I talked to him about it, Moréas reminded me that Bruno was still a thug. I had to find the danger in the eyes. One day, after two weeks of filming, we were filming the heist in the supermarket and Mélanie came to see me between the shelves and she said to me: "The charming one, the sweet one, the funny one, the little doe eyes, the smile, we saw all that and you know how to do it. Now we must see the danger. This is a robbery. So we found Sulak together, Mélanie and I.

Freedom was also a band film. How does it work with your partners?

I was propelled by my previous ensemble experiences (*Emily in Paris*, editor's note).

I understood quite quickly that the main actors set the tone on a set - for the technicians, for the general atmosphere of the set, for the newcomers, for the smaller roles... *Freedom* was my first "leading role", and I wanted to take it on with great seriousness and responsibility. For me, being a leading role is not only about doing your job and being good, it is about creating a dynamic of solidarity, belonging, empathy, respect and that each person who enters this bubble feels immediately invited and loved. I believe that what happens on set comes across on screen. When a shoot goes very well, you can feel it on the screen. From my short experience, I can say that it was the most extraordinary shoot I have experienced. It was fun and at the same time very serious. There was a margin of error, of unknowns, of confidence.

Have you done any research on the 80s? Does it influence your performance?

Yes. I did a lot of research into the political climate of the time. I got even closer to my uncle - I immersed myself in his wardrobe, his photos, his state of mind at the time, etc. What did we say to each other when we were in our twenties? I don't think it's played out strictly speaking, because once on set, it has to be natural. But we tried to get a certain vocabulary in mind, in particular. [Co-writer] Christophe Deslandes gave us whole pages of sentences, words, insults, very 80s metaphors and other words that, on the contrary, we couldn't use.

Interview with Lucas Bravo

Actor - Bruno Sulak

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Once you put on the jeans, the moccasins and the bomber jackets, not to mention the little mullet cut... everything falls into place. Period filming is really the closest thing to a time machine. If we concentrate and squint, we say to ourselves that we have never been so close to knowing what it must have been like to be in a supermarket in the 80s, for example. It's intoxicating, it's dizzying.

Back then, bandits sometimes had things to say. Today, there are no longer any "stars" of banditry. Things have changed in this area...

Moréas told me the same thing. He is a very calm person, he has small narrowed eyes, always smiling. He said to me: "That's why I withdrew". Back then, there were rules. It was almost a game. We existed because of each other. There was a form of respect. There were codes. Overnight, things changed. For no reason we started shooting at each other. Whereas for me, guns were the last resort. From the moment we used weapons to apprehend, it changed the rules of the game. And it was a game I wanted no part of. Even in a robbery, even in situations like those in the film, there was still the possibility of showing empathy, consideration, respect.





Interview with Lea Luce Busato

Actress - Annie



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This is your first film role. What is your training?

I discovered theater as a teenager in Metz where I grew up, through workshops, then the conservatoire at the end of high school. At the time, I was very intrigued by the weight of words, their impact, but also the transformation of oneself when one embodies a word, a voice, and the path towards its truth. It was as if I understood that we could be but also become. I discovered the poetry of living and sharing it. After the Baccalaureate, I lived briefly in Paris before joining the National Theater School in Strasbourg, where I stayed for three years. My training there was very revealing, because not only did I acquire many tools but I was able to benefit from a real time of research and abandonment where I learned to use everything we have. oneself, one's experience, one's questions and one's fantasies. Before *Freedom*, I had already played roles in the theater but never in the cinema.

Did you know the story of Bruno Sulak before working on *Freedom*?

No not really, he was much less known than Mesrine, for example. He was trying to escape violence, he was not a killer, but a discreet robber, a gentleman. His actions could escape the newspapers. Before getting the role, I did my research on the Internet: who was he? Why did we talk so little about him? What immediately struck me was that his quest for freedom did not come at the expense of the freedom of others. Maybe that's why he was little known... Once I got the role, I had more documents at my disposal.

How did Mélanie Laurent introduce your character to you?

Mélanie spoke to me about Annie, my character, as a sunny, go-getter person who formed a unity with Bruno. Both shared a certain propensity towards marginality. Hearing Mélanie, I told myself that it was going to be very important to me that Bruno always felt understood by Annie. But unlike him, she was not totally disillusioned with the system. She still wanted to believe it again. What we also wanted to highlight was her solidity and her loyalty to Bruno.

How did you construct your character Annie?

There were documents about her run with Bruno. I immediately told myself that we had to move away from the cliché of the robber couple and how the adrenaline of robberies transforms into violence within the relationship. What united them for me was their gentleness, their light, despite the vice that closed in on them – and particularly on Bruno. I noted all the little clues: his relationship with money which was very different from the usual representations of robbers. She had little on her, that's why she didn't take part in the robbery. What interested her was being able to share this life on the margins of society with Bruno... until she no longer felt in agreement with his ambitions. As with the theft of the Cartier lighter – which we see in the film – because the risk incurred was disproportionate for her.

Interview with Lea Luce Busato

Actress - Annie

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Did you find it useful to find out about the atmosphere of the 1980s, particularly social and political?

Yes, it was really necessary because Bruno's reaction was completely political. In any case, for me, it is essential to know in which era the characters are set: it helps to define them – knowing what they are fighting against, are they going against the grain or not. It gives weight to their choices. The 80s represented a change of era, politically, with the hope of the arrival of the left in power and soon enough, disillusionment. What was interesting about Bruno was that he was already disillusioned even before the failure of Mitterrand's policies. He felt very strongly how money would become a dream of freedom and how collective interest would slowly disappear in favor of individualism. This notion was really important because it's also what leads Annie to follow Bruno and understand him. At the same time, the 80s were also years of carelessness, excess, freedom – in the way of dressing, of doing one's hair; sexual freedom, which had begun before, but which continued. It was truly a time when we felt a general movement in art, music, culture, fashion, technology and which gave birth to the good... and the less good. Knowing this helped us because we knew that we were entering a form of excitement, it was a great period of exploration.

Did you adapt Annie's phrasing, physicality, demeanor, spirit and energy to this era? Or would you say it is timeless, both graphically and emotionally?

It's true that, for me, the rhythm of a character is defined according to their inner state. So I worked on her more from the inside: how she looks, how she waits, how she addresses others. But at the same time, there was a relaxation and a delight in this life which was possible then. A life that we wouldn't imagine living today.

So even if I didn't work on Annie from the outside, I tried to understand the era to make her look and listen in that atmosphere.

How did you work with Mélanie on set?

Mélanie gave me her trust from the start. She offered me a lot of creative freedom, especially in acting. At the same time, she had a very precise image of Annie. She wanted her to be seen as a positive character. We took a take and refined it. It turns out that Mélanie was in the frame so she was very close to me. She made me move, live, intuitively, based on what she saw on camera. Anyway, Annie is quite a mysterious character. We didn't have any prerequisites that were too pre-defined - it wasn't like for Bruno, for whom there were elements that they couldn't deviate from. We kind of invented Annie as we went along. We talked a lot and it was very free.

How would you describe your first experience in front of the camera?

Mélanie's sets are joyful. It was enjoyable but it was also very intense. Everything was a first time for me so it made every day special. Mélanie loved living it with me. It was very galvanizing to be able to enjoy and delight myself. Especially since we filmed in very beautiful places, in the South. That was the big difference compared to the theater: I had never played in front of landscapes. The projection surface, when it's there, in front of us, and we can let ourselves go, it's very powerful for the game. I loved it.



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TECHNICAL/ARTISTIC SHEET

Director : Mélanie Laurent

Writers : Mélanie Laurent & Chris Deslandes

Cast : Lucas Bravo, Léa Luce Busato, Yvan Attal, Rasha Bukvic, Steve Tientcheu, David Murgia, Léo Chalié, Slimane Dazi

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