XILAM ANIMATION

PRESENTS

J'AI PERDU MON CORPS

A FILM BY

JÉRÉMY CLAPIN

PRODUCED BY

MARC DU PONTAVICE

FRANCE | 2019 | RUNTIME 1H21

FORMAT : CINÉMASCOPE | SOUND: 5.1 | VISA IN PROGRESS

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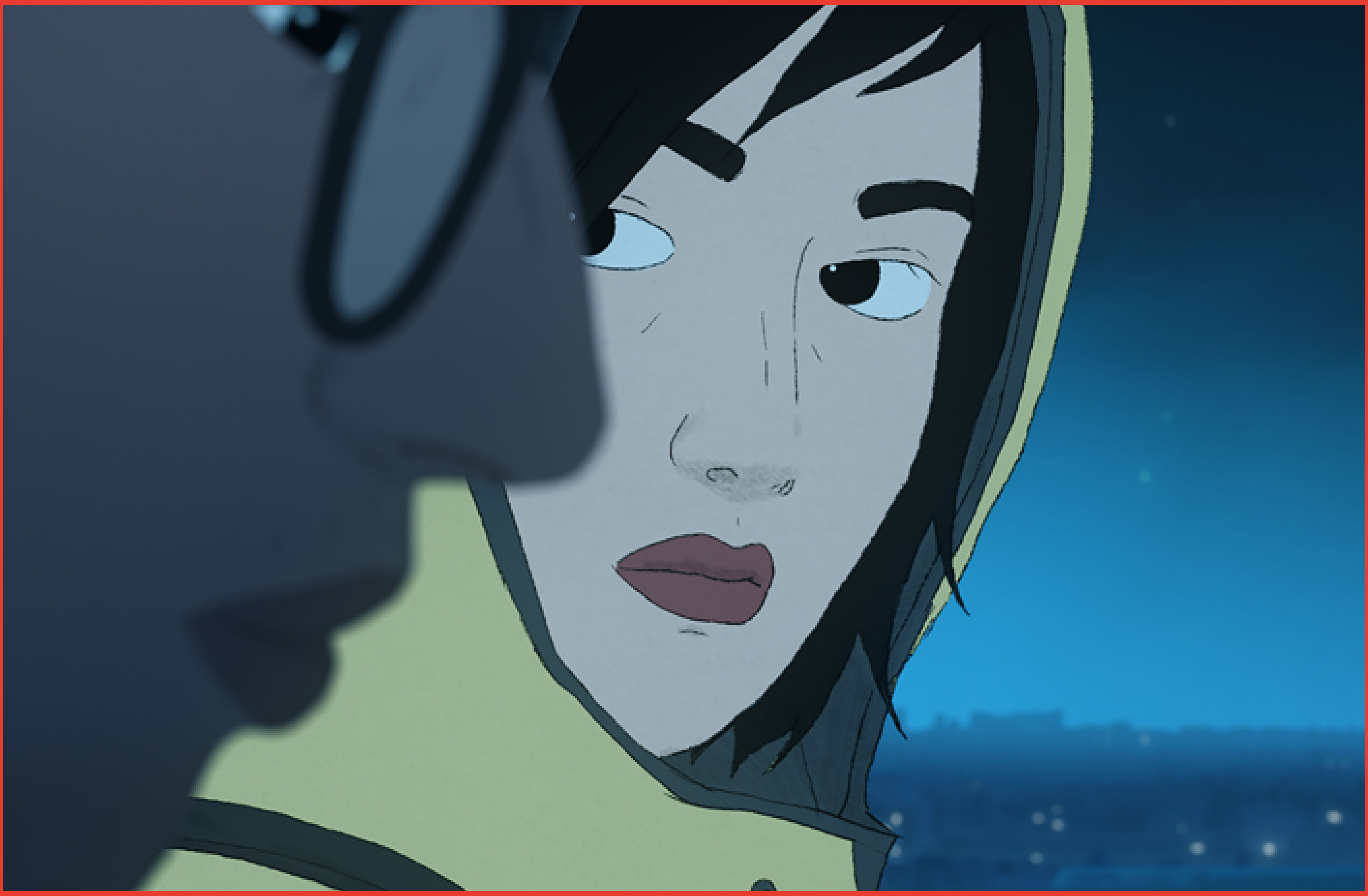
J'AI PERDU MON CORPS

SYNOPSIS

J'ai perdu mon corps is een liefdesverhaal naar het boek Happy Hand van Guillaume Laurant, vaste co-scenarist van Jean-Pierre Jeunet (Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amèlie Poulain).

In deze animatiefilm volgen we de afgehakte hand van Nafouel die op zoek is naar zijn lichaam. Terwijl de hand zich een weg door de stad baant, en allerhande obstakels moet overwinnen, haalt hij herinneringen op aan het leven met Nafouel met als hoogtepunt de wonderbaarlijke ontmoeting met zijn grote liefde Gabrielle.

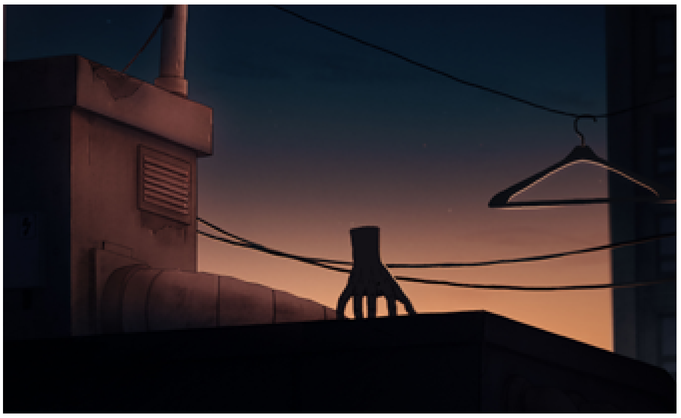


NOTE FROM THE PRODUCER

MARC DU PONTAVICE

The *I lost my body* project was born from reading Guillaume Laurant's novel *Happy Hand* back in 2010. First, I was surprised by the capacity of the text to embody this lonely limb, then I was fascinated by this sort of separate consciousness. I was deeply moved by his longing for completeness. I immediately thought that this was a cinematic challenge that only animation could face. As if the very word "animating" (giving a soul) could come true in this endeavor. Representing a character with no eyes, no mouth, no face, only five fingers, and generating empathy for him from the audience, seemed like the height of my job.

And yet, the challenge was not just an artistic one. Because I sensed that this story had a powerful metaphorical level that could take the audience way beyond the show, inside themselves. In this experience of separation, I saw that it was not so much about alterity as it was about our relation to memory – to our intimate memory – and more specifically about our childhood memory. By reversing the point of view, the text gave this memory a form of autonomous power, that could be altogether destructive and liberating. *I lost my body* could thus make a subtle reverse echo to the Proustian attempt.



These dizzying questions were the ones that Jérémy Clapin answered in an equally singular way. His quirky and poetic universe as I have discovered it in his short films – and particularly with *Skhizein* – offer an obvious key to understand his enthusiasm for this book.

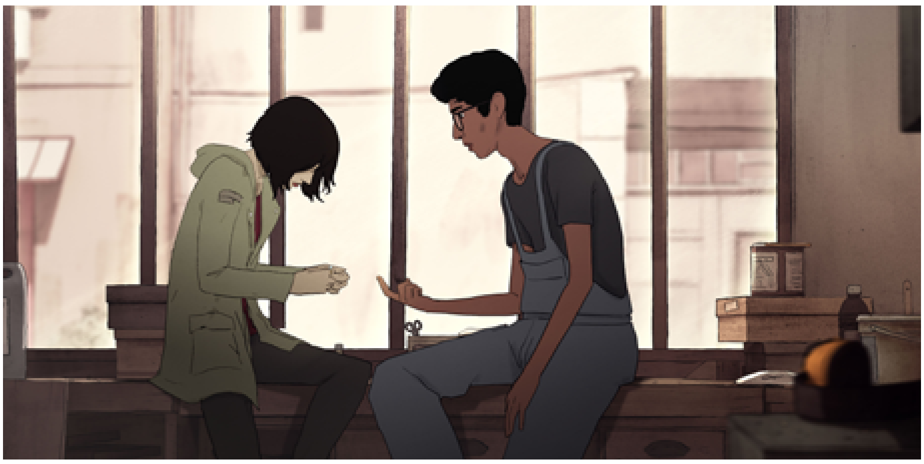
We have had long and passionate debates about the artistic and technical process that would do this story justice. And I loved the idea he suggested that the imaginary world be treated as bursting into the real world. For the hand to keep its poetic significance, the world (into which the hand bursts) had to be inhabited by reality. Which is a paradox for an animated film. Jérémy had this idea to "simulate" reality through the use of a filmic grammar that would be very close to live action, but also (and mostly through the choice of animating characters with computer graphics, just like the set), that would then be "dressed" with traditional drawings. This process is quite unusual in a feature film and blurs the borders between animation and live action and creates a visual confusion that is both magnetic and poetic. And surprisingly, it quickly makes us forget that we are in an animated fil.

That is where you can recognize the true animation artist geniuses – when artistic and technical direction prevails over the sole animated performance or pictorial achievement. And it helped us produce a fully-fledged film without being subjugated with the constraints of the "spetacle".

In addition there are two characteristics that take this film *Elsewhere*. The first one is related to the representation of the intimate and trivial aspect of life. This representation is almost unprecedented in the history of Western animation – which has hitherto mostly dealt with magic, fantasy or more recently politics. The Japanese were the only ones who very soon dared animating reality, daily life, intimacy. Takahata has almost theorized this singularity. It is one of Jérémy's greatest boldness; and the way the narration and staging linger on small details anchors his characters way more deeply into our imagination.

The other characteristic that is unseen in Western animation is the deconstruction of the narrative. By multiplying temporalities, Jérémy is weaving his story in a way that is both sensory and impressionistic. Actually, almost by definition, the very production process of animation favors linear narratives. Inasmuch as, due to economic reasons, you can only make useful shots, editing in animation is made beforehand and the filmic narrative turns out to be inevitably close to the main storyline. In live action, on the other hand, you have so much possibilities that you can tear the narrative away from its linearity. In the case of our film, we have enjoyed exceptional circumstances: first, the script itself was definitely unique and multi-temporal (which was surprising to most), but also and mostly, the preproduction phase was unusually long (almost three years), which gave Jérémy and his editor time to try multiple possibilities, to do in-depth research which, in the end, allowed them to weave the narrative in a very unusual way which strongly engages the audience into the experience.

Finally, I would like to emphasize the importance of Xilam studio in this adventure. They shared all their know-how with Jérémy, and they were very determined and passionate in supporting a project that no one else wanted to support. To the point where they ended up taking a huge risk, since they have had to fund over 50% of the budget themselves.



INTERVIEW WITH

JÉRÉMY CLAPIN, DIRECTOR AND CO-WRITER

In the late 90's, Jérémy Clapin studied animation and illustration at the École des Arts Décoratifs de Paris (Paris decorative arts school). After graduating in 1999, he started working in 2000 as an illustrator and directed his first short film in 2004, *Une histoire vertébrale* (*A vertebral story*), which was very well received in festivals. In 2008, in *Skhizein*, he told the story of a man hit by a meteorite who finds himself shifted 91cm from his physical body, thus rendered invisible. Jérémy Clapin then worked in advertising and in 2012 he made *Palmipedarium*, in which he chose a way to do animation that is much closer to live action.

In each of your short films, you use different graphics and technical treatments. 1

Yes. It was a way of testing and learning more about animation tools. I wanted to be as efficient as possible, in terms of both graphics and artistic treatment. The story and concept dictate my artistic choices, then the technical ones. Both are pertinent to my manner of working with animation, how I tell a story with this medium. In-depth knowledge of existing tools and their philosophy is indispensable to proposing other approaches.

The common thread between your short films and *I Lost My Body* are the characters, who are all out of phase with the world around them. 2

It's true, I have a tendency to gravitate toward characters who are at odds with the world and often translate this visually. But through their singularity, I am actually trying to reveal a more universal dimension. I have the impression that this out-of-place feeling is the starting point of many stories. If the hero were content where he was, he would have no desire to extricate himself from his condition and therefore to change. He wouldn't question the role he needs to play in order to accomplish himself and there would be no story!

What was the starting point of I Lost My Body? 3

Marc du Pontavice had seen and liked my short films. He wanted to produce a feature-length animation film for adolescents and adults, and I wanted to make one. We got on and Marc proposed that I adapt *Happy Hand*, the book by Guillaume Laurant.

The story in the book is different from the one in the film. How did you approach the film adaptation with Guillaume Laurant? What were the principal changes that you both wanted, and what were the ones that you brought about in your role as director? 4

This was my first four-handed writing experience and the exercise was made more delicate because I integrate the storyboard creation early on in a story's development process. And I go back and forth from the drawing to the script and from the script to the drawing. Due to this method, involving another screenwriter is not easy. Guillaume and I initially worked together, but I think I started down the wrong path by sticking too closely to the story in the novel to the detriment of the animation project. Marc and Guillaume encouraged me to make the story mine. So I went back to square one and focused on the main idea of the film. The biggest challenge for me was figuring out how to approach the hand's perspective and staging. This was the strongest and most interesting novel element. The entire story and the characters had to revolve around it. I started with the pitch – "a hand takes off in search of its body" – and rethought and reinvented everything. In the end, the story in the film became something very different from the one in the novel, and I am grateful to Guillaume for giving me so much liberty.

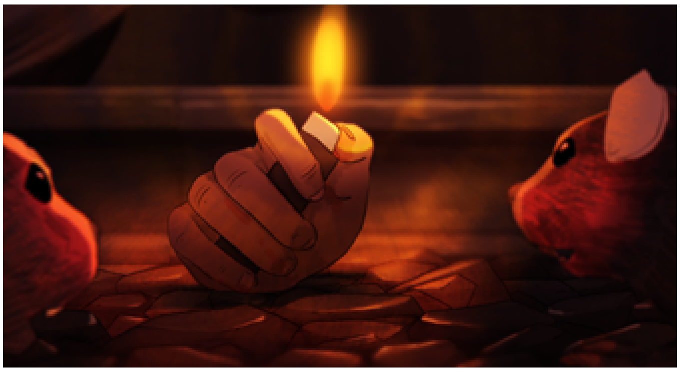
At what moment did you make the presentation trailer with the first version of the graphics and certain scenes? 5

The trailer dates back to 2014 and was used to look for partners. We made it in order to lay down the graphic bases, without searching for technical solutions or production logistics right away. I wanted a rawer, more spontaneous artistic response for the lines in the feature film, for this is often what gets lost when you move on to the concrete production phase.

Did you finalize the script while starting to create the storyboards for certain scenes in order to assess and improve them? 6

Fairly early on, we decided to make an animated rough draft of several sequences. I knew I would need this to better comprehend the nature of the hand, and to develop the graphic language and fundamentals of its movement. Besides, it was impossible for everyone to have a same vision of the project solely by reading the script. Animation can be extremely inventive and propose many things that are impossible to translate in a script with words. So, we made a 10-minute test and this threw into question certain parts of the script. Thanks to these images, and by reworking the storyboard and editing, we found certain narrative answers that were much richer. These finds were then reinjected into the script and finally led to a version that Marc, Guillaume and I agreed on. This “back-and-forth game” between the test and the script was extremely precious for me.

How did you decide upon the graphic approach, and the mixture of handmade drawings and 3D-animation with Blender? And how did you use real shots and rotoscoping, which consists of retracing and converting these shots into 2D or 3D-animation? 7



Contrary to short animation films, where the author works relatively on his own, when you make a feature animation film, your teams’ work must be rationalized as much as possible. This is indispensable to successfully complete a project on time and within the allocated budget. But I also knew that the artistic side was sometimes sacrificed for the benefit of this optimization: lines become too smooth, there are no more rough patches, and everything that makes up the charm of animation in my opinion is lost. I wanted *I Lost My Body* to be a raw, “handmade” cinematographic film for adult audiences. I wanted the fragility and the spontaneity of the lines to be its strength, and needed the technical means at my disposal that would allow me to inject or eliminate details, become more or less pictorial according to my desires. My goal was to create an animated world half-way between the tangible and the imaginary.

And so I opted for mixed techniques, using both 2D and 3D. The characters and sets were modeled in 3D, then animated. Everything was retraced, corrected and improved by artists, decorators and 2D animators. I had one lucky coincidence only months before the film went into production, and while I was still looking for the best technical means to make it: I discovered a revolutionary tool. I’d already used Blender (a free and open source software on the web) for my short films, but now I discovered Grease Pencil, a 2D-animation tool in Blender that enables you to draw directly on 3D elements, whether character or set modelings. This new tool saved us a great deal of time and precision when we began the 2D-animation drawing. Without it, I don’t think we would have obtained the same result, or in any case, not in such a direct and rapid manner.

How did you use real shots? 8

I wanted a realistic animation film without the overplayed cartoon codes you see in the vast majority of films. We filmed the actors playing out their characters in scenes as we recorded their voices to have visual references of their movements. But since the shoot was limited to 5 days, I quickly realized there would not be enough time for the actors to make efficient gestural proposals to fuel the entire film. This was not a problem in itself, for an animator’s job consists of being inventive and creating that which needs to be animated at the right time. We were never dependent on the video references of the actors’ mannerisms. When they were interesting, I gave them to the animator in charge of those specific shots, otherwise we didn't use them: I would meet with the animator to describe my acting intentions, often by filming myself, and the 3D-model of the character was animated based on that. There was never any question of using rotoscoping for the sake of using it. It had to bring plusses to the dramaturgy.

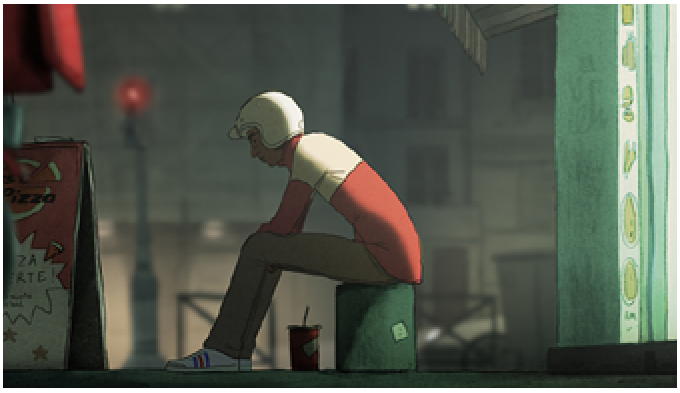
The sequences where we follow the hand are without dialogue, which 9
focuses the viewer's attention on the obstacles it must overcome and the dangers that threaten it. Likewise, the hand remembers the past solely through tactile sensations, which allowed you to create some very strong and moving moments. Can you say something about the hand's wordless universe, and the manner in which you used animation to create it?

In the book, the hand is the narrator of its own story. It speaks. When I thought about the adaptation, I wondered whether this idea should be kept or not, and the first versions of the script included voice over dialogue. But it gradually became clear that this would be a weakness: the hand could not be both the narrator of the story and at the heart of the action on screen, in the midst of the adventures it was living through. This would have been detrimental to the film and so we eliminated the hand's dialogues and reinforced its wordless universe. We ended up with two stories: that of the hand – which we nicknamed Rosalie – which escapes from the refrigerator to try and find its body, and which remembers its past life, when the two were still connected; and that of Naoufel, who wants to get closer to Gabrielle. Blending these two narrative frameworks into one story allowed me to use this sensorial approach to leap into the flashbacks. I tried to imagine how a hand would remember its life and what its memory fragments would be. I wanted the frames to be at "hand's level" and for faces to often be illustrated in pieces to suggest that the hand doesn't see the world like we do. Everything is based on anecdotes and tactile sensations. It's the mixture of all of this that brings originality and strength to these sequences.

In the second part of the adaptation work that you carried out alone, 10
did you refocus Naoufel's trajectory on his overwhelming need for love?

Yes. In the book, the meeting with Gabrielle happens much later on and not at all in the same circumstances. Knowing that the hand's quest was at the center of the film, Naoufel's had to be equally strong, and so I made it "implicit." Naoufel is an uprooted character. He had a luminous childhood filled with hopes and dreams, but destiny was cruel to him after his parents' accidental death. When we see him in the present, he leads a bleak existence, accommodated by an uncle who takes part of his meagre delivery-boy earnings. Naoufel is overcome with lethargy, nothing makes him want to pick himself up. I wanted his meeting with Gabrielle to be a trigger, a tiny spark in the dark that would inspire him to take control of his destiny. And since I also wanted to establish links between the hand's sensitivity and Naoufel's, I had the idea of doing this through sound. This is why young Naoufel records the ambiances of his environment with his tape recorder, and that he preciously keeps all his cassettes. In the cinema, sound is very tactile, it directly evokes our sensations, our interactions with the world. Likewise, the initial meeting between Naoufel and Gabrielle is based on sound: it takes place over an interphone after a small accident that ruins Naoufel's pizza delivery. But during this dialogue a small bond is already created, a hint of complicity, 35 floors apart.

This scene is not in the book... 11



No. When Naoufel was a young boy, sound and recordings were his relationship to the outside world.He listened. At age 20, he is a young man who's cut off from everything. When he meets Gabrielle, he undertakes a love quest and reconnects with his past. He listens to his old cassettes again. He rediscovers the pleasure of these sound sensations, like in the scene where he shuts his eyes and the screen goes black. The recordings did not exist in the book, nor did the themes of the fly, the igloo, the crane, the pizza deliveries, etc. It was all created to reinforce the characters' bonds amongst themselves and their place in the story.

When transposing this adaptation into animation, did you go back to the script again and modify it or cut things out? 12

Yes, this was inevitable. Moreover, Marc and I warned the whole team that the animation would continue to move until the very last moment. This method enabled me to determine which scenes worked best, and of course those were the ones we launched first in the animation process, to give me time and perspective to rework the others.

The animation was prepared and produced in three different studios in Paris, Lyon and Reunion Island. How did you organize yourself to follow and validate the work of three teams? Where were you based? 13

Fellow directors had told me stories about losing partial control of their films when co-producers imposed teams or studios they'd never worked with before. Since I wanted to avoid finding myself in this kind of situation, I thought up a way of dividing the production work to guarantee that I would keep control over my realization. What greatly simplified the task was that there were no co-producers, and everything had been intelligently thought out in advance. So, in chronological order, the artistic preproduction, storyboard and animation were carried out in Paris at Xilam. Next came the 3D-layout design, which was done at the Xilam studio in Villeurbanne near Lyon. Here, the film was broken down, shot by shot. We chose the angles and camera movements, and put the characters in place in the sets. After this, the preparation shot layouts were sent to Gao Shan Studio on Reunion Island, where they were animated in 3D. I went there twice to supervise the teams' work with David Nasser, the 3D-director there. Then it was back to Xilam in Lyon, where the 2D-animation drawings were made. And lastly, the compositing – which enabled us to obtain the final image of the film – took place at Xilam in Paris.

The original music by Dan Levy is extremely beautiful. 14
How did you work together?

I wanted electronic music for this film and my assistant director Matthieu Garcia told me about Dan Levy's cinema work. I knew Dan's work with his group, The Dø, which he'd founded with Olivia Merilhati. During the course of our discussions, Dan confessed that he hadn't always had good experiences with film music, that he often felt dispossessed of his creations. He had practically given up the idea of composing for movies, but since he liked the project, he said, "Ok, I'll give it a week. I'll watch your film non-stop and work on proposals." He wanted to explore what the entire musical universe of the film might be rather than stick to a few precise scenes. At first, I had selected two sequences, which had also been sent to another composer, but Dan quickly called to say he wouldn't work like that. He preferred to compose more music for the test and present me with a broader proposal. I liked this pictorial approach, and one week later he sent me 10 pieces that convinced me.

It is indeed a global emotional sensation that comes through in the 15
music rather than the specific accompaniment of the adventure in a scene, like there is traditionally a tendency to do in animation...

In effect. Dan is a true artist and I accepted and welcomed him as an author. I opened the doors to the film to him so that we could enter it together. He exalted the romantic dimension of the story and gave amplitude to the emotions in the film. Overall, this project federated lots of positive dynamics in all departments, and everyone went beyond what I'd asked for: decorators, animators, entire teams. They threw themselves into the project with pleasure, and this pleasure multiplied the quality of the film. Above and beyond the incredible artistic and human encounters I made, this strong involvement was a fabulous support for me throughout the project, and it clearly comes through in *I Lost My Body*. And I thank everyone warmly for this.

TECHNICAL AND ARTISTIC CREDITS

A FILM BY	Jérémy Clapin
PRODUCER	Marc du Pontavice
SCREENPLAY	Jérémy Clapin, Guillaume Laurant
STORYBOARD	Jérémy Clapin Quentin Reubrecht Julien Bisaro, Maïlys Vallade Loïc Espuche
VOICES	Hakim Faris Victoire Du Bois Patrick Dassumçao
3D SUPERVISOR	Pierre Ducos
3D ANIMATION	David Nasser
2D ANIMATION	Mathieu Chaptel
COLOR BACKGROUNDS	Fursy Teyssier Jeoffrey Magellan
COMPOSITING	David Says
EDITING	Benjamin Massoubre
SOUND	Manuel Drouglazet, Sound Design Anne-Sophie Coste, Sound Editing Jérôme Wiciak, Mix
ORIGINAL MUSIC	Dan Levy
LINE PRODUCERS	Camille Wiplier and Lucie Bolze
PRODUCTION	Xilam Animation
DISTRIBUTION FRANCE	Rezo Films
INTERNATIONAL SALES	Charades