

## Interview with Anke Blondé



Anke Blondé shooting "The Best of Dorien B." © Jo Voets

By Tara Karajica  
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*Belgian director Anke Blondé has three short films under her belt, "Mister Frits" (1998), "Buiten Adem" (1999) and "Dura Lex" (2011), which all won numerous awards at international film festivals. Next to her work as a director she is also an in-demand casting director. Blondé was in charge of casting such films as "The Misfortunates" and "The Broken Circle Breakdown" by Felix van Groeningen and the TV series "Beau Séjour".*

*Tara Karajica talks to Anke Blondé about her debut feature "The Best of Dorien B." and women in today's film industry.*

### **Can you talk about "The Best of Dorien B.", how it came about and what inspired you to make this film?**

**Anke Blondé:** The idea of "The Best of Dorien B." actually came from a feeling that I had when I was thirty-two. I was at a moment in my life where everything collapsed privately and in general. I think it was 2007 or 2008 and the economic crisis was taking place, there was a lot about the environment coming out, everything was going to ruin, Al Gore's documentary was released and, to me, it appeared that everything I thought was true or valuable wasn't there any more. My parents were divorcing, I was building a house, I had two babies... I was raised with the idea that I could do anything. Phrases like: "Having children is great!" or "Men at Home" were slammed around my ears. I think I had a mid-life crisis or maybe a post- and pre-partum crisis all in one because I was pregnant with my two children in a row, with only three months in between. Things seemed pointless to me and I felt trapped and desperate, tricked by society. It sounds pathetic, but it's not. I'm convinced that everyone has these moments in life. When I make something, I always start with a feeling because I think it's the strongest way to make people feel what you want to tell. That feeling is the thing that I am putting in my film right now.

### **You say that women in the audience will hopefully identify with Dorien B., with her sense of humour, her heartbreak and life's relentless ironies. Can you elaborate on that?**

**A.B.:** I want to be very cautious about the fact that it's not a film *for* women. It's a film for men *and* women. It's a film for *everybody*. How am I so sure about this? Because male friends who have read my script recognised themselves in it as well. So maybe it is a bit about womanhood; but it's mostly about a person who has the feeling that everything is upside down, that her life is in a sort of disorder and that she needs to reshape her own universe. It's really an identity crisis. The thing that I am really careful about is to avoid saying that it's a women's film. It's funny whenever a woman makes a film with a female lead, journalists say: "It's a real women's film". Or: "How does it feel as a woman to direct a film?" And I think: "How can I answer that? I wasn't a man before, so how can I compare?" My point is that if a man is making a film with a male lead character, no journalist or anybody would say: "That's a real male film". "As a woman, you always get these "women's questions" and I don't know why exactly. Maybe because worldwide women filmmakers still are the minority?"

**"The Best of Dorien B." is your debut feature. Aren't you afraid of being boxed in as a (female) director who makes films about women, who approaches storytelling from a female point of view?**

**A.B.:** Well, it's going to be from a woman's point of view since the main character is female. And for me, that's, of



Still Picture from "The Best of Dorien B." © Jo Voets

course, a well-known point of view. But it doesn't mean that my next film won't have a male lead role because, as a storyteller, I can explore that too. The things you make start from a core inside you and it doesn't matter if you are a man or a woman to me. I am working on a story now about three people in a city and it has little to do with the subject of womanhood. I just like to tell stories and, of course, you want them to be a little bit personal and to have a bit of your point of view. But a male character can also tell things that I want to express. I think that the first film of a director is the most personal, but it doesn't mean that I want to drag out womanhood or only make films for female actors. I think it's a very difficult subject, especially right now with the #MeToo movement. I believe it's very good that it happened.

**Can you elaborate on that?**

**A.B.:** It's a subject that goes way back in history, so it's not easy to put that in a few phrases. Basically, to me, it's a question of power. I think it was really necessary because the way some powerful people – whether they are physically or mentally stronger – behave towards others has to change. I believe that if you are in a powerful position, you have to be really careful to respect others and not take advantage. Since mostly men are in powerful positions, I tend to believe that the issue is more present with them. I'm convinced it's a good thing that women are encouraged to stand up and take powerful positions as well. Anyway, you have to use power in a positive way. Maybe it's a good subject for a film.

**What do you think of the situation of women in the film industry today?**

**A.B.:** I don't think it's a problem related especially to this industry, it's a worldwide issue. But I do not think that there are not enough women working in the industry, because there *are* a lot of talented females working in the industry. And I believe things have already shifted in a positive way. I can only speak for myself of course, because I don't know how it is in other countries across the world. My husband is a director of photography and of his last four projects, three were with female directors, so my point of view might be from a positive perspective... I also don't want to generalise, I worked nicely with my crew on this film. I don't know if it made a difference that I am a female director. I don't believe it did at all. But I do think that women still mostly take a step back and take care of their family. But that's a society issue. And that's why this movement is good for women because they know there's something going on and they feel stronger to make their voices heard or stand up for themselves. The movement is good, but not only for the filmmaking industry; that is just a tiny segment of the world.

**Can you talk about the title of your film?**

**A.B.:** There are several elements in my film that refer to the title. Dorien, the main character, has memories of her youth after finding a CD entitled "The Best of Dorien B.". When she was young she made her own compilation with her favourite songs. It's a nice link for the audience. Next to that, "The Best of Dorien B." also refers to being or becoming again the best version of yourself, because that's when you're the happiest. It's about loving yourself, being relaxed about yourself and doing what you want to do and what makes you happy. It's a layered title. It's also about the female body and the best of the female body. But it's also cynical to me, because her problems are from such a spoilt white western female perspective.

**What about the visual style of the film? What can you say about its aesthetic and how it will look?**

**A.B.:** The director of photography (David Williamson) and I started with pictures by Larry Sultan to develop the visual style. He is an American photographer who took pictures of the domestic life of his parents. His pictures often have a humoristic framing. It's really a domestic film as well. I chose locations with a lot of woods to create this feeling that you're being locked in because of all the trees around the houses. For me, the visual style is something that comes from

within the belly. I still need to find the rhythm in the editing room and it will be combined with the tone that I want to create in this film. It's a dramatic comedy or a comic drama – as you wish. And the tone will be a bit dark combined with light elements. We always started from the main character to see how she feels and, for that, we chose a fixed camera and a shoulder camera and we focused on her feelings. For me, there is dark humour too. I don't like "light" comedies so to speak.

**Will it look like your previous work, or have the same feel?**

**A.B.:** Actually, when I saw one of the first stills from the film, I suddenly had the impression that it really looked like my latest short film. So I think visually there are going to be similarities. This is not on purpose. It's a feeling that I use to make films. It's very hard to explain why you do what you do. It seems that I have a similar tone in my feature. But I think of that as a good sign.

**Can you talk about your work as casting director?**

**A.B.:** If the casting is done well, a lot of work for the film is already done. I always try to think outside the box when I cast people for a role. There is a lot of intuition involved. There are so many actors in Flanders, but for years you always saw the same faces. Luckily, that's changing now. For the role of Dorien B., I cast an unknown actress who is a performance artist and I believe I'm very lucky to have her. The audience will immediately see the character and not think "it's that actress who is playing that role". In a way, this makes it very authentic.