

# **AFGHAN, THE**

**by Oscar-nominated director Paula van der Oest**

winner Best European Film, Hollywood Film Festival  
winner Young Actor's Award, Fort Lauderdale  
winner Youth Jury Award, Netherlands Film Festival, Utrecht  
winner Youth Jury Award, European Film Festival, Italy  
winner Best Narrative Feature, Durango Film Festival, Colorado

international premiere in official competition, Moscow  
also selected for Montréal, Chicago, Cairo, Rotterdam, Rehoboth Beach, St.  
Petersburg, Cleveland, Barcelona, Madrid, Boston, New Delhi, Goa,  
Bangladesh

**length: 90 minutes**

**35 mm**

**English**

**The Netherlands / United Kingdom / Luxembourg**

## **Indican Pictures**

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# AFGHAN, THE

## One Line Summary

13-year old girl falls in love with a young Afghan drug runner.

## Brief Synopsis

When teen piano prodigy Claire discovers a wounded and bleeding boy in her family's garden shed, she decides to protect him. The boy is a young drug courier from Afghanistan, shot and wounded during an exchange that went horribly wrong, now on the run with nowhere to go he must rely on Claire to keep him a secret until he can escape. As he slowly recovers under her care, the two fall in love becoming a modern day Romeo and Juliet, only in this case they find the Russian mob syndicate hunting them. Forced to flee the two of them become a modern day Bonnie & Clyde as they pursue a life of crime to escape the criminals!

## Project Summary

Disturbing dark fairy tale by female Dutch director Paula van der Oest, who was Oscar-nominated in 2003 for her feature ZUS & ZO. THE AFGHAN is her ninth feature film and her first time to attempt a sequel.

**Production Company**  
**Co-Producers**

Staccato Films, Netherlands  
Spice Factory, UK  
Delux Productions, Luxembourg

**Country of origin**  
**Language**

The Netherlands / UK / Lux  
English, one scene in French

**Length/Format**

91 minutes, 35 mm colour

**Genre**

romantic thriller

**Tagline**

A hidden secret leads to the adventure of a lifetime.

**Filmmakers**

Director: Paula van der Oest

Producer: Emjay Rechsteiner

Co-Producers Michael Lionello Cowan,  
Jason Piette, Jimmy de Brabant

Screenplay: Carel Donck

**Main cast**

Laurien Van den Broeck, Hunter Bussemaker,  
Andrew Howard, Jemma Redgrave, Johan Leysen,  
Nathaniel Parker, Miguel Gomez, John Sessions and  
Monica Hendrix

## **Director's statement**

The Afghan is a powerful and moving story of two teens, from completely different cultural and social environments that come together leading them to a life in the fast lane. They fall in love, go on the run, symbolically marry, make love, rob, steal, save another's life and finally take a life all in one adventure.

When I first read the script, I immediately thought of the atmosphere in 'Blue Velvet' by David Lynch. In both cases the stories are about a heightened sense of reality. It is a sensitive coming-of-age film, with the elements of a romantic thriller.

The two teens have created a world of their own and communicate in their own special way. This offered me the chance to create a style that encapsulated their unique own world. If you wanted to give that style a name, 'heightened reality' might be a good term to describe it. Although moving, the film isn't meant to be viewed as a romantic film. It is, however, a film that makes one think, a film that is poignant and that causes a change in the viewer. It's the next step from my previous film Moonlight, that film was about figuring out who you are, this film is about what you do once you know who you are.

Above all, it is a story about the age in which we live. It says something about the society we live in, the way people deal with each other, the way in which the system deals with people it deems to be of little value or worth.

Working with these two young actors has been a very special experience. We trusted each other completely and therefore were able to obtain a high level performance. What I think makes the film so moving is that the viewer is able to relate so completely to the children.

I'm very happy with the film and proud to be able to present my film to the public.

**THE AFGHAN**  
**Production notes by producer Emjay Rechsteiner**

Casting

We knew that the casting of the two teenage leads would be crucial for the success of the film. Of course we were lucky since we had found these two amazing kids for the first film, completely ignoring the well-meaning advice to use 16-year olds for the parts. In order to enhance the authenticity of the film we were determined to use 13-year-old actors. It took us two years to complete the casting, during which time we took our search to the Benelux, France, Germany, England and even Brazil. We saw hundreds of actors. But with our two leads coming back, we knew the talent around them would have to be amazing. During filming, Laurien was exactly the same age as Claire in the script, which meant that she was concerned about the same things. She has bloomed into a very serious and experienced actress who is capable of completely entering into a role.

Now that we had a Belgian female lead, we also wanted to have a Belgian father in order to enhance the plausibility of the story. And who better to play the role of the understanding psychiatrist, who can't quite connect with the fantasies and sensitivity of his daughter, than Johan Leysen?

The young drug courier turned out to be the most difficult role to cast. For Kemna casting, we threw out all the stops and considered candidates from the most exotic countries only to finally choose Hunter Bussemaker, who happens to live around the corner in a houseboat on river Amstel. Of all the candidates, he was by far the most capable of breathing life into the difficult role of the quiet, but certainly not passive, drug courier. He enveloped the sensitivity and nuance needed to make someone who doesn't speak our native language, understandable and sympathetic.

Andrew Howard came on board as the heavy, which is so funny as Andrew is such a sweet man in real life but has become a great villain. Turns out Andrew has some darkness in him that made him perfect for the role of the ruthless, but also tormented gang leader.

Jemma Redgrave as the mother, who too-enthusiastically reacts to her daughter's first menstruation, and, as a concert pianist, has very little time for her daughter, was a great addition. Very polished, able to convey a mother's worry, yet in keeping with the film, able to be very wholesome while creepy at the same time. She was brilliant.

### **Language**

The film is carried by imagery over dialogue. After Claire tries out several different languages on the young drug courier, they learn to understand each other in an invented language. The little dialogue that occurs is in English (Claire with her parents), with a few phrases in French, German and Afghani. The gang leaders speak Russian and Serbo-Croatian, but this dialogue occurs expressly in the background.

### **Location**

The film was primarily shot in the forests of Luxembourg. Through our choice of languages and actors we have tried to make it appear as if the action takes place in Belgium and Luxembourg, but in fact the story could take place anywhere in Western Europe. We even toyed with the idea of setting the new film in the Southwestern United States as it's become a problem there with minor children being used to transport drugs in their bodies (by swallowing drugs encased in condoms), however, it would pull the feel to far from the original so we stuck with Europe.

### **The choice of Director**

Partly because there is so little dialogue, the film is about expressive acting. I consider Paula to be one of the best directors of actors in the Netherlands. In addition, both Carel Donck and I knew that her experience as a mother and as a director of young actors in her previous films, would enable her to deal in a balanced way with the sensitive relationship

between the two leads. Fortunately, Paula was just as enthusiastic about Carel's script as I was and in the last few years we were able to produce this sequel in the ideal three-way relationship of writer-producer-director, working together as a close team.

### **Music**

As with the first film the new one features music by renowned Dutch composer Fons Merkies as well as contemporary songs from British and Dutch bands as diverse as Gomez, Fu Manchu, Front 242 and Yulduz. Music supervisor was Bob Last ('Orlando', 'Backbeat', 'Chocolat').

### **Wardrobe**

Wardrobe was designer by Jany Temime who also designed the costumes for 'Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire', 'Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason' and of two Oscar-winning films ('Character' and 'Antonia's Line').

### **The rest of the crew**

Moonlight was cameraman Guido van Gennep's first feature film. He had previously delivered some beautiful work in short films including 'De Tijdreiziger' (The Time Traveler) and 'Het Spaanse Paard' (The Spanish Horse). Now by the time of the sequel 8 years later he has over 60 credits to his name! Editor Sander Vos and composer Fons Merkies are included in the list of personal favorites of both the director and the producer. We gave a lot of thought to the choice of sound designer.

After viewing our first film 'Moonlight' the impressive team from 'Sexy Beast' of designer Jeremy Price and mixer Tim Alban signed on to do the Afghan.

## **THE AFGHAN**

### **About the Cast**

**Laurien Van den Broeck as Claire** (previous credits: Mariken, Mary in the Attic)

The leading role of Claire is played by Laurien Van den Broeck (who was thirteen at the time of original filming). A Belgian, Laurien Van den Broeck has played a number of roles for television and film since 1995. Her performances have been lavishly singled out for awards. The television film “Maria op Zolder” (Maria in the Attic) from the KRO series “De zeven deugden” (The Seven Virtues), won a Golden Calf (= Dutch ‘Oscar’) for Best TV Drama in 1998. “Laurien van den Broeck is a top talent. We’ve really hit the jackpot with her. If you could only see how she prepared for the role. She is truly a ‘method actress’ in the American tradition.” Her career had stagnated since 2010 so we are excited to remind everyone what a great, great talent she is.

**Hunter Bussemaker as the boy**

Moonlight was Hunter Bussemaker’s acting debut. His parents, Reinout Bussemaker (Unit 13, Antonia, De Kleine Blonde Dood, Chopsticks) and Nelleke Zitman (Tot Ziens, Belle, Coverstory) are experienced actors, while his younger sister, Sammie, presented the film programme Stardust Junior for Dutch national TV. He has since gone on to be in several TV shows (currently Dealer Johnny) and several films.

**Andrew Howard as the “Gang Leader” (Hatfield & McCoys, Band of Brothers, Taken 3)**

British actor Andrew Howard plays the role of the ruthless drug dealer and principal antagonist of the film. Andrew Howard has already made an impression on the film circuit as a “Welsh Brando”. His big screen career thus far has afforded him roles in movies as diverse as *North West One*, *Hatfield & McCoys*, *Agents of Shield* and *Mr In-Between*, which won him Best Actor Award at the 2001 International Film Festival in Tokyo. Howard also shares the lead role with Ioan Gruffud in the Universal-distributed feature *Shooters*. On the small screen, he has clocked up strong roles in television dramas such as *Band of Brothers* (for Dreamworks), *Law and Disorder*, *Lifeboat* (BBC) and *Drover’s Gold* (BBC).

**Johan Leysen as the Father** (Felice Felice, La Reine Margot, Brotherhood of the Wolves)

The part of Claire's father is played by the Belgian Johan Leysen, a veteran actor in the Benelux and France. Some of the internationally famous titles in which Johan Leysen has starred are "Brotherhood of the Wolves" and "La Reine Margot". Johan Leysen won Best Actor in Montreal for his part in "Tahir" (1993) and Best Actor at the Dutch Film Festival for his part in Felice Felice (1998).

**Jemma Redgrave as the Mother** (Howard's End, The Acid House, Diana: Her True Story)

Claire's Mother, a concert pianist, is played by Jemma Redgrave. Jemma Redgrave is a member of the famous Redgrave family. She is the niece of Vanessa and Lynn Redgrave, cousin of Joely and Natasha Richardson and granddaughter of Sir Michael Redgrave and Rachel Kempson.

Her resume includes: Diana in *Dream Demon* (1988), *Howards End* as Evie Wilcox (1992) with her aunt Vanessa, Anthony Hopkins, Emma Thompson and Helena Bonham Carter; *One Night Stand* (1993) with James Purefoy; and *La Chance* (1994); *The Acid House* (1998) as Jenny; and her most recent film *Dracula*. TV work: *The Real Charlotte*; *The Trials of Oz*; the TV mini-series *The Buddha of Suburbia*; and *Diana: Her True Story*. TV Series include: her part as Dr Eleanor Bramwell in the popular ITV series *Bramwell*, a role which she has continued to play for four years. She is currently on Doctor Who the acclaimed British TV Series.

**Director: Paula van der Oest**

Van der Oest was Oscar nominated for her previous feature, 'Zus & Zo'. Paula studied at the Netherlands Film and Television Academy from 1984-1988. In 1996 she directed her first feature film, 'A New Mother' and the hilarious television film 'Altijd Yours / Voor Never'. In 1997 her second feature film, 'Tate's Voyage'. Paula's third feature film, was the comedy 'Zus & Zo'; 'Moonlight' was her fourth film, 'Black Butterflies' her fifth, and more recently 'The Domino Effect'.

### **Producer Emjay Rechsteiner / Staccato Films**

Emjay Rechsteiner is CEO of prolific Dutch production company Staccato Films, which he founded in 1989. Staccato aims to produce quality films with international appeal.

Emjay Rechsteiner's most recent accomplishment was to convince Ennio Morricone to compose the soundtrack of his next film, *SPORTSMAN OF THE CENTURY*. Other highlights include co-producing Oscar-entry *PAULINE & PAULETTE*, winner of the Forum Audience award at the Cannes Festival 2001, its successor *SWEET JAM* which premiered at the Venice Film Festival 2004. He also produced *SUZY Q*, *THE EMPEROR'S WIFE* starring Jonathan Rhys-Meyers (*BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM*, *ALEXANDER*) and Max Beesley and *THE DEVILS DOUBLE* with Dominic Cooper.

### **Script writer Carel Donck:**

After completing his education at the Netherlands Film and Television Academy (1968-1972), Carel Donck wrote a number of short films followed by series work like 'De Beslagen Spiegel' for television, the series 'Weekend', the series 'Sanne' (nine episodes). This series won the UNDA-WACC prize in 1986. Additional credits include the television game 'Ik Red me Wel', the series 'De Wereld', 'Laura', and the NCRV series 'Zwarte Sneeuw'. After that came the spectacular television films '9 dagen van de gier' and 'IJs'. His most recent credits include the films 'Laptop' and 'Broken Red'.

### **UK Co-Producers – Jason Piette and Michael Cowan for Spice Factory**

Spice Factory is one of the most prolific production companies in the UK. Founded and run by Michael Lionello Cowan and Jason Piette, previous film productions include *Mr In-Between*, *The Killer Tongue*, *Dying to Go Home*, *New Blood*, *Pilgrim*, *Sabotage*, *Ricky 6*, and *Being Considered*. More recent titles include: *Married Unmarried*, *Dead in the Water*, *Redemption Road* and *Bollywood Queen*, *Anazapta*, Gerard Pires \$15 million *Heist*, and the \$35 million *Napoleon*. Spice production *The Merchant of Venice* (starring Al Pacino) premiered at the Venice Film Festival 2004. Other notables include *The 4 Musketeers*, *Iron Sky* and *Citizen Jane*.

**LUX Co-Producers – Jimmy de Brabant for Delux Productions**

Luxembourg-based company Delux Productions is run by Jimmy de Brabant. Delux, a subsidiary of the RTL group has produced and co-produced films including Peter Greenaway (“Eight and a Half Women” and “Pillow Book”), Roman Coppola’s directing debut “CQ” and “Shadow of the Vampire”(nominated for 2 Oscars). His most recent titles are ‘Rescue Dawn” and “The Whistleblower”.

Staccato Film CV

PRESENTS

IN CO-PRODUCTION WITH

Spice Factory

Delux Productions

Peppermint

IN ASSOCIATION WITH

Film Fund Luxembourg

Dutch Film Fund

CoBO Fund

VARA

**CAST:**

Laurien Van den Broeck

Hunter Bussemaker

Johan Leysen

Jemma Redgrave

and

Andrew Howard

in

THE AFGHAN

PRODUCTION DESIGNER

Harry Ammerlaan

COSTUME DESIGNERS

Jany Temine

Mariëlla Kallenberg

SOUND  
Jeremy Price  
Piotr van Dijk

MUSIC SUPERVISOR  
Bob Last

COMPOSER  
Fons Merkies