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A MAGNET RELEASE

AMELIA'S CHILDREN

A film by GABRIEL ABRANTES

Starring: BRIGETTE LUNDY-PAINE, CARLOTO COTTA, ANABELA MOREIRA,
ALBA BAPTISTA, RITA BLANCO

Portugal / 92 minutes / Color / English Image Format 2:1 / Sound Format Atmos

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FINAL PRESS NOTES

Distributor Contact:

George Nicholis
Rebecca Fisher
Magnolia Pictures
(212) 924-6701 phone
publicity@magpictures.com

Press Contact National:

Katrina Wan
Tatum Wan
KWPR
Katrina@katrinawanpr.com
Tatum@katrinawanpr.com

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SYNOPSIS

When Edward's search for his biological family leads him and his girlfriend Ryley to a magnificent villa high in the mountains of Northern Portugal, he is full of excitement at meeting his long-lost mother and twin brother. Finally, he will discover who he is and where he comes from. But nothing is as it seems, and Edward will soon learn that he is linked to them by a monstrous secret.

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INTERVIEW with director Gabriel Abrantes

Amelia's Children appears to embrace camp and horror while drawing from the lineage of bizarre Euro horror.

Amelia's Children is a supernatural horror film. I love film, in all its guises, its many genres, and have made animations, sci-fi, comedy, experimental films, and my first feature film *Diamantino* (directed with Daniel Schmidt, 2018), was inspired on the comedies of remarriage from the '30s and '40s, like *Bringing Up Baby*, *His Girl Friday*, or *Sullivan's Travels*. I wanted to make a horror film, and have it, for lack of a better word, my aesthetic, in the sense that it mixes weird humor, perversion, shock, and politics.

The mother in the film, Amelia, relentlessly pursues beauty and youth, evoking the monstrosity in mythical narcissists like Dorian Grey.

I wanted to make a horror film about family. I wanted it to have the epic family monstrosity of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, and was inspired by the autobiographic references in Stoker's *Dracula*. What I mean is that the idea that horror was a sort of mirror that enhanced reality by distorting it, was something that I wanted to try doing in this film.

One of the main themes of the film is the primal taboo of consanguine sexual relations, and I wanted to make this taboo into a horror myth about generational narcissism, specifically how parents can be narcissists, and how a mother could be so vain and obsessed with beauty that she would be willing to do anything, even commit the most messed up transgressions.

This was your first time leaning into the horror genre.

It was incredible to direct a horror film. I love conventions, and pastiche, and subverting them, and with horror I felt really at home. I've always been interested in making films that were in some way surreal, perverse, had elements of the fantastic or oneiric, as well as psychosexual and social transgression as themes. Horror has all of this in its DNA.

The European Palace is big character in the film, its walls evoking the overlook, the Bramford, or the expressionism of Suspiria.

Totally, *The Shining* is one of my favorite films. The first time I watched it, I was in a little cottage in the middle of the woods in the north of Portugal, with Schmidt, and it was one of the most terrifying experiences of my life. *Carrie*, *Kuroneko*, *Blue Velvet*, *American Psycho*, *Ringu*, *Ju-On*, and more recent films by Aster, Eggers, and Robert Mitchell were big inspirations.

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There are some links to *Suspiria* and *Profondo Rosso*. I was writing about a European aristocracy, delapidated and irrelevant, someone like the Duchess of Alba that has a Goya portrait of her ancestor hanging in her living room. The Duchess had a lot of plastic surgery done, seemed like a party animal in Google image search, and was in a relationship to a much younger man. This character, an aristocratic woman, living in the lap of luxury, and transforming her face in a pursuit of eternal youth, really inspired a lot of what the film is about. The film has a blend of my brand of perversion, comedy, surrealism, violence and politics, and the style grew out of these spines.

A lot of my films embrace camp, and in this film I wanted campy art direction, campy costumes, and some over the top performances (like Amelia and Manuel), to butt up against an unnerving portrayal of a narcissistic and incestuous aristocracy that was living in a bubble, isolated within their own weird wealth. I wanted to picture the weirdness, perversion, and violence of this weird Euro aristocracy.

You had worked with Carloto Cotta and Anabela Moreira before, but this is the first time you worked with Brigitte Lundy-Paine, Blanco and Alba Baptista.

It was the first time I worked with Brigitte Lundy-Paine, Alba Baptista and Rita Blanco, who are all incredible talents. I had worked with Carloto Cotta for over 10 years, who also acted in *Diamantino* and likewise with Anabela Moreira. Anabela's transformation into Amelia, which involved four hours of daily prosthetics, was incredible. There was something about the mask that liberated Anabela even more than usual. One of the biggest challenges was due to the idea of twins that exists in the film, and doubling Carloto with greenscreen and split screen.

I think the biggest challenge we had during the film was trying to strike the right balance in between dread and humor. I have a love of humor, and so on set, when an actor milked a laugh, or played up the absurdity of a situation, it would get a rise out of me. We all had to keep that in check, so that the perversely playful part of the film didn't detract from the intention of making a film imbued with dread and fear. I wanted to create real discomfort with Amelia's relationship with her children, that would be the emotional core of the film.

How was shooting horror different from your prior films?

Shooting films is so incredibly hard. Someone said that writing a script is like building a beautiful, majestic house and decorating it with as much love, hope and expectation as possible. Filming is very different: you and a bunch of friends are looking at that same beautiful house, but it's now fully consumed by a raging fire, and your job is to run in and out to try to salvage anything you can. That's how this shoot felt. But it was incredible. It's the first time I leaned so hard into genre, and I felt that directing the suspenseful moments, jump scares, chase and fight scenes, were the most fun. I mean, it was brutal. Brigitte was screaming, like a deranged moose (per my direction), for four days straight. They were exhausted. But you feel it in the film, their energy.

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I made this film with my wife, Margarida Lucas, who co-produced and edited the film with me. We had no life, no weekends, but it was beautiful, making this incredibly challenging, ambitious creative project together, as a family. Margarida was brilliant: she's a born pessimist (which compensates my naïf optimism), and has an exacting demand for quality, and an obsession with making things work, not settling.

The film rides a line between a fun and twisted humor, a perverse core, and sleek cinematography.

I like rules. We were working on a low budget, which is always a challenge. I took a lot from the Blumhouse rulebook (few characters, no extras, one location, one house) and then added some more rules. I knew I wanted the film to have a gliding, sleek cinematography, and that the contrast of the camp and weirdness of some of the art direction and characterizations would rhyme evocatively with a 'prestige' aesthetic. I think Lynch is someone who is the master of this: blending gonzo camp performances, weird pastiche of Americana, with evocative, poetic, and glossy aesthetics. The same kind of dynamic exists in *Silence of the Lambs*, with Hopkins' wildly over the top Hannibal, contrasted with the sober 'prestige' realism of the style. Vasco Viana, the director of photography of *Amelia's Children*, is one of the most talented directors of photography in Portugal, and he and his team did an incredible job framing Paula Szabo's campy 'mansion' in a way that contrasted it in this beautiful, ominous atmosphere.

Is that balance hard to strike?

It was difficult, and we figured a lot of it out in editing. The crew and cast felt that there was a tension that was not so clear to them, in between the desire to make a traditional horror film, but then embracing a humorous, campy side to the script, that can be found in a lot of my work.

One of my favorite films is *Blue Velvet*, and the mix of horror, violence, and shock with a playful, surreal and absurd camp has always struck a chord with me, and that balance creates this delirious popular surrealism, that at once causes me to feel repulsion, glee, adrenaline, intoxication, humor.

I think *American Psycho* strikes a similar evocative balance.

Humor has always been in your work, but it's the first time you try your hand at jump scares.

I started with a pitch that would be based on the horror that undergirds a perverse and taboo familial relationship, and quickly came up with Oedipus as a point of departure, but as I was developing this story, it became clear that the horror of the mother-son

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relationship I was developing, was illustrating ideas about selfishness and narcissism. I also knew that I wanted a double ending, that would have parallel confrontations happening at the same time – a supernatural psycho-sexual one, as well as a physically violent chase, and that these would be intercutting.

The idea of doubles is very present in the film, and I thought this was something that could dovetail during this climax, all the doubles crosscutting with each other.

You composed the soundtrack as well.

I had made the soundtrack for two of my short films, but this was the first time I took on a feature, and it was overwhelming. I wanted to play with thematic ideas and leitmotifs for each character, and although they are still there, I progressively made them more and more subtle, because the more recognizable the thematic melodies were, the more childish the score seemed to become. I took a lot of inspiration from Penderecki, Shaw, Wolfe, Pärt, Lopatin, Levy, Johansson, Görranson, Disasterpeace, Bobby Krlic, Carpenter, Goblins, Popol Vuh, and a lot from Morricone.

I composed everything on a small Moog synth and big orchestral sample libraries from Spitfire Audio. I was attracted to a mix of low-end sub bass synth growls, and these undulating layers of orchestral dissonances, but the soundtrack also really shifts moods a few times, from synth heavy harmonic ambient risers, to classic cluster cacophony.

Do you have any upcoming projects that you'd like to talk about? Is there anything else you'd like to add about Amelia's Children?

Yeah, I'm working on a black comedy thriller, about a Hollywood actress that is sick of Hollywood and wants to 'do good', so she goes to visit Angola for the first time, where her mom is from, but her good intentions are quickly shattered by her discovery of a conspiracy and how it is intertwined with the deeply complex political and economic reality of Luanda. My mom's family is from Angola, and I shot one short film in Luanda, *Liberdade*, and this has been a dream project for me for a while.

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ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

GABRIEL ABRANTES – Director/Writer/Producer

Gabriel Abrantes was born in North Carolina, United States in 1984. His films have premiered at the Quinzaine des Réalisateurs and Semaine de la Critique – Cannes, Berlinale, Locarno Film Festival, the Venice Biennial, and the Toronto International Film Festival. He has been distinguished with a number of awards, including the EFA prize at Berlinale, the Golden Leopard at Locarno Film Festival, and the EDP Young Artist Award. His first feature, *Diamantino* (2018), won the Grand Prix at the Semaine de la Critique.

His work has been exhibited at the Whitechapel Gallery and Tate Britain (London), the Palais de Tokyo (Paris), the MIT List Visual Arts Center (Boston), the Kunst Werke (Berlin) and Serralves Museum (Porto). He participated in the 32nd São Paulo Biennial, the 2016 Bienal Tropical, and the 2014 Bienal d'Image Mouvement. His work has been shown in retrospective screening series at the Lincoln Center (New York) and BAFICI (Buenos Aires).

He currently lives and works in Lisbon.

MARGARIDA LUCAS – Producer/Filmmaker/Editor

Margarida Lucas is a producer, filmmaker, and editor. She has produced and directed two award-winning short films, *Rampa* (2015) and *Holy Family* (2019), both of which have garnered multiple accolades. *Amelia's Children* marks Margarida's first feature film production, working alongside Abrantes under their Artificial Humors banner, following their successful collaboration on award-winning short films *The Artificial Humors*, *A Brief History of Princess X*, and *The Extraordinary Misadventures of the Stone Lady*.

The duo has a diverse range of projects in the pipeline, founded on their creative synergy, as well as strong passion for storytelling.

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ABOUT THE CAST

BRIGETTE LUNDY-PAINE as Riley

Brigette Lundy-Paine is an American actor who starred as Casey Gardner in the Netflix original series *Atypical*.

Brigette can recently be seen in the critically acclaimed film *Bombshell* alongside Charlize Theron, Margot Robbie and Nicole Kidman, starring in the third installment of Orion Pictures' *Bill & Ted Face the Music*, and as the lead alongside Justice Smith in A24's *I Saw the TV Glow*.

Other recent credits include Johnny Knoxville's *Action Point* and *The Glass Castle* alongside Woody Harrelson and Naomi Watts.

Brigette was born in Portland, Oregon but grew up in Northern California. Brigette went on to study acting at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts. They are a member of the improvisational voice band Subtle Pride and the Art Director of WAIF Magazine.

CARLOTO COTTA as Ed/Manuel/Artur

Carloto Cotta is an actor born in 1984, in Paris. He studied in EPTC in Cascais and the Lee Strasberg Theatre and Film Institute in Los Angeles in 2014.

In cinema, the actor worked with numerous directors such as Miguel Gomes in *31, A Cara que Mereces, Tabu* and *As Mil e Uma Noites*, João Pedro Rodrigues in *Odete* and *Morrer como um Homem*, João Salaviza in *Arena* and *Montanha*, Marco Martins in *Como Desenhar um Circulo Perfeito*, Carlos Conceição in *Carne*, Gonçalo Galvão Teles in *Senhor X*, Christine Laurent in *Demain?*, Valeria Sarmiento in *Linhas de Wellington*, Teresa Villaverde in *Colo*, Gabriel Abrantes and Daniel Schmidt in *Diamantino*, Ira Sachs in *Frankie*, João Mário Grilo in *Campo de Sangue*, Miguel Gomes and Maureen Fazendeiro in *Diários de Otsoga*, and Goran Stolevski in *You Won't Be Alone*.

Recently, he was on the show *Glória* and is currently part of the show *Élite*, both from Netflix. Carloto won the Portuguese Golden Globes for "Best Cinema Actor" in 2019 and 2022.

ANABELA MOREIRA as Amelia (Old)

Anabela Moreira, born in Lisbon in 1976, is an actress and director. Moreira's broad-ranging contributions span more than 30 films, including collaborations with directors like João Canijo, João Botelho, Carlos Conceição, Gabriel Abrantes, Daniel Schmidt, David Bonneville, and Lucas Elliot Eberl.

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Moreira's compelling performances have earned her numerous awards. She received the Sozekeyser and Cinedria awards in 2011 for "Best Actress" in *Sangue do Meu Sangue* and the GDA Award for "Best Cinema Actress" for *Mal Nascida*. Her role in *O Último Banho* won multiple "Best Actress" awards at various festivals, including the Liverpool International Film Festival, Festival del Cinema Latino Americano di Trieste, Festival de Cinema Luso-Brasileiro de Santa Maria da Feira, the Black Sea Film Festival, and the Portuguese Golden Globe for "Best Cinema Actress."

She took the lead role in João Canijo's acclaimed *Mal Viver*, which clinched the Silver Bear at the Berlin Film Festival this year.

ALBA BAPTISTA as Amelia (Young)

Alba Baptista's film contributions include notable performances in *Caminhos Magnétykos* by Edgar Pêra and *Equinócio* by Ivo Ferreira.

Baptista's first English-language role was as Ava, the lead in Netflix's series *Warrior Nun*, released on July 2, 2020. She reprised her role in its second season, which debuted on November 10, 2022. The year 2022 also saw her portraying Natasha, a 1950s Dior muse in the critically acclaimed British feature film *Mrs. Harris Goes to Paris*, nominated for an Academy Award for Best Costume. Additionally, she starred in the American feature film *Borderline*, produced by Margot Robbie's production company LuckyChap Entertainment, alongside Samara Weaving, Eric Dane and Ray Nicholson. Baptista's performance talents have earned her considerable recognition, including the Most Promising Newcomer award at the 2019 Kilkenny Film Festival and the Shooting Star award at the 2021 Berlin International Film Festival.

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CREDITS

CAST:

Riley- Brigitte Lundy-Paine

Ed / Manuel / Artur - Carloto Cotta

Amelia (old) - Anabela Moreira

Amelia (young) - Alba Baptista

Sra. Vieira - Rita Blanco

CREW:

Director / Writer - **Gabriel Abrantes**

Producers - **Gabriel Abrantes, Margarida Lucas**

Director of Photography - **Vasco Viana**

Production Designer - **Paula Szabo**

Visual FX Makeup - **Rita Anjos, Dave Bonneywell**

Sound - **Olivier Blanc**

Editor - **Margarida Lucas**

Visual FX – **Irmalucia**

Composer - **Gabriel Abrantes**

Re-Recorder Mixer - **Branko Neskov, c.a.s**

Sound Designer - **Ivan Neskov**