

# UNDER INFLUENCE



WRITTEN, DIRECTED & PRODUCED BY SIDNEY LEONI STARRING HALLA ÓLAFSDÓTTIR, CHRISTINE DE SMEDT, STEVEN WENDT, MARIANA MY SUIKKANEN GOMES  
MUSIC BY JONATHAN SALDANHA CINEMATOGRAPHY HOANG-SON DOAN EDITED BY DENIS LEBORGNE SOUND EDITING RAPHÄEL HÉNARD  
COSTUME DESIGN MARIE DAVIN EXECUTIVE PRODUCTION HIROS

# SIDNEY LEONI

## UNDER INFLUENCE

**UNDER INFLUENCE** is a fiction feature film portraying the mysterious and psychotic journey of the actress Julia Gordon, who frenetically turns her imagination into a living world away from the humdrum existence of her contemporaries. Frustrated by the character that she is playing in a new motion picture titled *Being Kate Winslet*, Julia Gordon finds comfort under the influence of charismatic classic film characters - which she repetitively turns into.

UNDER INFLUENCE is shaped like a maze of real and naturalistic events, of series of cuts, of shifts and collisions between the real world and fictional ones, of complete imaginary and fantastic situations, of visualization of thoughts, of mental associations, of wishes and fantasies that swirl through the mind of an actress who conveys her dreams to us. The plot being the point of entry into a kaleidoscopic experience of identity and of cinema in the way of a visual, auditory and physical journey.

## SCREENINGS

01 > 03.10.2015	Dansens Hus, Stockholm (SE) - Screening test -
17.03.2016	Inkonst, Malmö (SE)
25 > 26.03.2016	Beursschouwburg, Brussels (BE) - Belgian Première -
28.04.2016	Centre Culturel Jacques Franck, Brussels (BE)
24.08.2016	Reykjavik Dance Festival, Reykjavik (IS)
26 > 27.08.2016	Tanz im August (HAU Hebbel am Ufer), Berlin (DE)
06.10.2016	Buda Arts Center, Kortrijk (BE)

## WALK & TALK

Walk & Talk by choreographer Sidney Leoni is a lecture performance (30') in which language and movement are treated as equal and complementary forms of expression, and from which the inspirations, aspirations and multidisciplinary works of the artist are highlighted.

# CREDITS

**Written, directed & produced by:** Sidney Leoni  
**Starring:** Halla Ólafsdóttir, Christine de Smedt, Steven Wendt, Mariana My Suikkanen Gomes, Alexandra Cismondi, Elias Girod, Sidney Leoni, Zoë Poluch, Manon Santkin  
**Cinematography:** Hoang-Son Doan  
**Music by:** Jonathan Uliel Saldanha  
**Costume design:** Marie Davin  
**Film editing:** Denis Leborgne  
**Sound editing & sound mixing:** Raphaël Hénard  
**Hand shadow puppetry:** Steven Wendt  
**Color grading:** Paul Millot, Cobalt Films  
**Executive production:** Hiros  
**Production designers:** Ruben Desiere, Estelle Gautier, Luis Miguel Félix, Adrien Monfleur, Kevin Trappeniers  
**First assistant camera:** Alexandre Cabanne  
**2nd first assistants camera:** Charlotte Marchal, Ada Detraz  
**Grip:** Brendan Senden, Pierre Schoenstein  
**Sound 1st assistant:** Lucas Lebart  
**Sound 2nd assistant:** Alban Cayrol  
**Script supervisor:** Estelle Gautier  
**Set decorator, paper artworks:** Sidney Leoni  
**Additional Couture clothing:** *Jadis Collection* by Loic Barbarroux  
**Costumers:** Sidney Leoni, Marine Vanhaesendonck  
**Hair & Make up:** The cast, Marie Davin, Sidney Leoni  
**Painter:** René Leoni  
**Film set photographer:** Thomas Cartron  
**Additional cast:** Estelle Gautier, Emma Kim Hagdahl, Michael Helland, Miles Madison, Ula Sickle  
**Extras:** Helga Baert, Amandine Bigot, Billy Bultheel, Alexandre Cabanne, Thomas Cartron, Jenthe Coenen, Ludwig Dieleman, Fanny Evers, François Geslin, Marie Gob, Julie Gouju, Arya Honarmand, Surya Ibrahim, Louise Lanckmans, Alice Lapalu, Johan Leclercq, Bart De Leeuw, Martin Lervik, Carlos Lopez, Tamara Maes, Enad Marouf, Mara Mathyssens, Aïda Merghoub, Paul De Mont, Alex Pauwels, Matthieu Peyrand, Rudy Rillaerts, Anika Ruisch, Coline & Laurent Toulouse, Matthieu Triolet, Evelien Van De Velde.  
**Technical director for live screening:** Akim Troch  
**French subtitles:** Stéphanie Gauthier  
**Camera, lenses & equipment:** BFC Rental, Eye Lite, Key Grip Systems  
**Sound equipment:** AD HOC Sound Services  
**Final Sound Mix at:** DojoMix Studio  
**Catering:** A CHACUN SA MADELEINE  
**Administrative support:** Interim Kultur (Stockholm)  
**Supported by:** Montévideo contemporary art center (Marseille), Centre Culturel Jacques Franck (Brussels), Stockholm University of the Arts, PACT Zollverein (Essen)  
**Co-productions for live screenings:** Beursschouwburg (Brussels), Dansens Hus (Stockholm), Kunstencentrum Buda (Kortrijk)  
**With the financial support of:** the Flemish Community, City of Stockholm, the Swedish Arts Council  
**Special thanks to:** Abbaye de Villers, Brasserie Du Gourmet, City of Brussels, Commune de Forest, Foodmaker, Gare de Genval, Gîte Du Chenélet, KVS, Narafi, Luca School of Arts, OR, Potemkine bar, Scouts en Gidsen Sint-Hubertus LDK, Sipwell, Taxis Verts, Vedett.  
**Duration:** 74 min.

# IN THE PRESS

## ABC – SIDNEY LEONI

agendamagazine.be – 25 > 31.03.2016

Ive Stevenheydens

**Choreographer, dancer, and performance artist Sidney Leoni's feature-length film *Under Influence* premières this week at the Beursschouwburg. This is his ABC.**

“I grew up in the south of France and at a young age, I decided to take ballet lessons at the Toulon opera. I was able to build a theoretical foundation thanks to my studies in dance, music, theatre, and ethnology of the arts at the university of Nice. Afterwards I did research into choreography as part of the Master's programme at DOCH in Stockholm. Despite the good fortune of having completed several arts programmes, and especially surrounded by talented artists, I do primarily consider myself an autodidact with a great sense of **ADVENTURE**. That is also true of this film project. The ‘dynamite acting’ of Gena Rowlands in John Cassavetes's *Opening Night* and Elizabeth Taylor in Mike Nichols's *Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf* or the last seconds of darkness in Lars von Trier's *Melancholia* made me eager to start working on this project. I don't really want to be identified as a dancer, choreographer, or filmmaker. Again, autodidact fits me best.”

“I travel often, and I really enjoy commuting between here and Stockholm. But there is nowhere in the world that you have the same cultural freedom and possibilities as in Belgium and Brussels. The number of artists, spaces, and enthusiastic creative people is enormous here. Unfortunately, I don't think we cherish that enough. Friends and colleagues – cinematographer Doan Hoang-son, performer Manon Santkin, choreographer Mette Ingvartsen, Helga Baert from the Hiros production house – convinced me to move to Brussels. Here I immediately found people and institutions that were willing to help and support me with this ambitious film project, for example Buda in Kortrijk, the Beursschouwburg, and Centre Culturel Jacques Franck in Brussels. But this **BIOTOPE** is so fragile, and with the latest cuts to subsidies, I'm afraid that it will not emerge unscathed. Let us hope that the arts scene in Brussels continues to be this full and rich for many years to come!”

“My research and productions often tend to be immersive, sensorial, and experience-oriented. Over the last few years, I have worked in total darkness so as to submerge the audience in soundscapes and let them experience wind circulation, temperature changes, vibrations, and smells. The transition from choreography to **CINEMA** was thus small and logical. Making the film has allowed me to explore further the relationship between images, sounds, music, dramaturgy, and dance. Film opens a space between reality and dreams that you can fill up freely as a director. Writing and making this film did not necessarily follow a logical and linear pattern. That is why the work especially attempts to move people, rather than presenting a structured narrative. Instead of asking the old question: ‘What is it?’, the film seeks to explore the question: ‘What does it do?’ Of course, it is up to the viewers to judge whether or not we have succeeded in this goal.”

## TANZ IM AUGUST: WEEKEND IN REVIEW

Exberliner - 30.08.2016

Nina Branner

When I let myself collapse in the (not so soft) seat at the HAU1, I'm ready to be entertained by Sidney Leoni's feature film *Under Influence*. I had liked the trailer on the festival's website and was looking forward to revelling in Leoni's dreamy universe. But shame on me for demoting the film genre to a somehow less demanding form of art.

When I met Leoni for an interview the following day, he explained to me the way he's worked on the film: The scenes had for the most part - visually - already existed in his head. Like little glowing babies waiting to be conceived. He'd relied on the presence of his actors rather than on a narrative. He wanted his main character, Julia Gordon, to always be in motion - and the spectators likewise - never in the know about what happens next.

All of which is to say, that's probably the way you should watch *Under Influence* - like a dance. Forget about making sense of the many (!) scenes that turn and twist among each other, more similar to an ecstatic body improvisation than a tightly choreographed performance piece. At times it is very confusing.

Here's what worked for me: Halla Ólafsdóttir and Christine de Smedt are delightfully present and watchable as the psychotic actress and her frustrated director - impressive because neither of them have acted in a film before. The film is visually beautiful with its many close-ups, delicate range of colors and theatrical expression, and the conciliatory yet distressing music score by Jonathan Uliel Saldanha accompanies the scenes elegantly. The mise en abyme principle in which Julia Gordon confuses herself with the actress Kate Winslet is original and the *Titanic* parody is funny.

# BACK TO THE BODY

## INTERVIEW WITH SIDNEY LEONI

Tanz im August Blog - 28.08.2016

Nina Branner

Choreographer Sidney Leoni's first feature film *Under Influence* is like a dance: An eternally evolving movement which, when it's good, keeps its characters and the audience on their toes in the search for truth. Nina Branner met him for a talk about female idols, Scandinavian darkness and the return to basic, human sensations.

### **You've been working as a dancer and choreographer for over ten years. Why did you want to make a film?**

Already when I was a teenager I developed an intimate relation to cinema and films like 'Last year at Marienbad' and 'Opening night' - and to actresses too. My readings are often on cinema too. Cinema and my dance education in an opera house have fed my imagination all these years, and the medium was a way to materialize all that I have stored and puzzled in my head. Another reason I went for it is that, for years now, I have been making performance projects which are taking place in total darkness, and where I orchestrate the media of sound, light, body, smell or temperature. Making films was somehow natural and logical, an extension of my multidisciplinary artistic endowment.

### **What is your fascination with darkness about?**

It started when I moved to Stockholm, where darkness is literally very present. But it also has to do with my personality: I'm quite a solitary person, though I am often with friends and working with large group of artists. During my first performance project, *Undertone*, I was very engaged in reading the French theorist and poet Georges Bataille, who has written a series of erotic poems, often mentioning the holes in our body. Holes, that are tunnels to the unknown - to the darkness. That inspired me. For me darkness is an invitation to freedom: freedom of projection, of imagination and interpretation. Darkness also offers an intensification of experiencing. In darkness a very little sound can take an incongruous proportion. In a performative context, but also in the real world, I see in darkness a promise of a greater kind of sensibility, physicality and interactivity between people beyond the normative rules of sex, gender, race and class. The goal of my work is to challenge how we interact with each other. In our modern and technological world, we tend to forget to rely on our sensory capacities to interact and connect with one another.

**What is the difference between choreographing a dance performance and directing a film?**

The main difference was in how to work with my dance colleagues. It was a big challenge for me to find the right terminology, the right way to address them and to give them clear instructions. During the first period of shoot, I was saying things like “can you look more sad” or “show her that you are in love.” Very quickly it became clear that it wasn’t the right way for me to conduct. It was way too confusing for the actors. After that, I started to only give them physical instructions, saying things like “this scene will be totally static. Stand still as long as you can. If you can’t hold it any longer, say cut”.

**Which I suppose is the way you work as a dance choreographer...**

To a certain extent yes. But there is a completely different atmosphere and work rhythm when working in a dancing studio or in a theater. The screenplay for the film is quite thin because 75 % of the film isn’t verbal, and only based on short descriptions of character’s physicalities and actions. On top of that, many dialogues in the film repeat themselves again and again with different kinds of variations and transitions - much like a dance. That’s the reason it was so evident for me to work with some of my talented friends and performers, rather than with professional actors.

**In Under Influence, the main character stars as Kate Winslet in a movie and confuses herself with her in a psychotic journey towards independence. How did you get this idea?**

I have idealized women like Kate Winslet, Jodie Foster, Gena Rowlands - actresses, but also composers like Nina Simone, who have taken on strong roles. So my desire to portray women who aren’t afraid to challenge people and know what they want came rather intuitively. I came up with this plot - an actress who turns into other actresses - because it allowed me to basically never respect a linear way of telling the story. Rather than having the actions in the film going from a point A to a point B, I chose most of the times to not have any point B. And also to start with a point A that is as obscure as point B. I wanted to keep things as unpredictable as possible. Through the film, the signs of what belongs to the real world and to the main character’s fantasy - like for instance when the film director shouts ‘cut’ - gets more and more blurry. I hope that will bring the spectators to stop wondering what’s real and what’s imaginary. I want to put these two things on the same level and show how our imagination can invade the real world, influence our actions and vice versa.

# EVERYBODY'S SPECTACULAR UNDER INFLUENCE UNDER THE DIRECTION OF SIDNEY LEONI

Sóley Frostadóttir

What just happened? I stepped out from the screening of Sidney Leoni's *Under Influence* and could by no means put what I just saw into words. It took quite a while to understand the film and as a matter of fact I am still trying to figure it out. Even so, the sensation that stayed with me was especially clear, as if I knew exactly what had just happened. It reminded me of waking up from a surrealistic dream. The movie is about Julia, an actress (Halla Ólafsdóttir) that plays the role of Rose acting on set in *Being Kate Winslet* (Life after Titanic). Julia, acting Rose, finds herself in a struggle and tries to change the character. She imagines different scenes, becomes another person and reacts quite inexplicably, so that it was impossible to keep track. I am certain that it is precisely that which succeeded so well. Because of this I had to surrender and let myself follow. I could only rely on my own sensation. Julia's imagination was an interesting view on our perception of reality. The imagined world was somewhat more surreal but just as crisp. It was surprisingly easy to relate to Julia, Rose, April (Halla), perhaps because she is not one but three characters. Most of us are more than just one character and we all have different roles. We jump from being a student, to parenthood, to being a son or daughter.

(...)

Julia in *Under Influence* appears to lose control of her situation and goes back and forth between fiction and reality. It's up to the audience to make a distinction between the two. Leoni works with the sensations and experience of the audience. He brings the audience into a vision of a dream only to grip them back to reality with a shot of Julia turning against the director on set. There is a very thin line between the fictional and the real in the film.

(...)

Julia attempts to kill the crazy woman within her but realizes that it is impossible. We all have many roles to play and even though it becomes difficult when they clash, it is in no way easier to erase parts of ourselves. We are all of these characters. Everybody's spectacular. Everybody's remarkable, characters of many layers, each with a role of its own. The festival seems to have chosen pieces that introduce a separate reality, whether it is a person revealing other sides of herself or whether we get to peek into a parallel world.





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## BIOGRAPHIES

### SIDNEY LEONI

° 1984, lives and works in Brussels & Stockholm

Sidney works as a choreographer, performer and filmmaker. His artistic research explores the field of immersive and experiential theatre and cinema, in which he focuses on the processes and effects of audience's imaginary and sensory perceptions. With his last two performance projects *Undertone* (2010) and *Hertz* (2013), the theatre space is plunged in complete darkness becoming the stage for the orchestration of sensory movements such as surround-soundscapes, live music, smells, vibrations, airflows and temperature fluctuations, in correlation to performative situations of encounter and mutual reliance between performers, musicians and audience members.

Sidney insists in darkening the rooms where his work takes place (theatre, black box, cinema), as he sees in darkness an immense promise – a promise of a different kind of sociability and sensibility between humans.

As a performer, Sidney has taken part in works by Mette Ingvartsen: *Giant City* (2009) and *The Artificial Nature Project* (2012), Andros Zins-Browne: *The Host* (2010) and *Welcome to the Jungle* (2012), and Stina Nyberg: *Splendour* (2015).

**Halla Ólafsdóttir / Lead actress - performer - choreographer**

Halla Ólafsdóttir is an Icelandic artist, dancer, actress and choreographer, living and working in Stockholm. She works in different constellations and collaborations that have an interest in expanding the notion of dance and choreography. Her stage work is concerned with methods of reinterpretation of recognizable formats of representation, facilitating a shared experience.

Her work takes on various forms and expressions, as she also co-curated the Reykjavík Dance Festival: A Series of Event 2012. For the past two years she has been working in a collective project with the band the Knife, co-creating and performing the show *Shaking the Habitual*, touring it in Europe and North- America.

**Christine de Smedt / Actress - performer**

Christine lives in Brussels. Her artistic work is situated in between dancing/performing, choreographing, coordinating, organizing and curating artistic projects. Being a member of the company Les Ballets C. de la B. since 1991, she produced a solo, *La force fait l'union fait la force* (1993), a traveling project in the Balkan, *Escape Velocity* (1998) and a large scale project *9x9*, on mass and choreography (2000-2005). She collaborated for several years with Meg Stuart-Damaged Goods (1995- 1999). Over the last years she was involved in various artistic collaborations with Mette Edvardsen, Marten Spangberg, Xavier Le Roy, Philipp Gehmacher, Vladimir Miller, Jan Ritsema amongst others. Currently she tours *untitled 4*, 4 choreographic portraits, a solo project presenting four performative portraits of different artists/choreographers.

**Mariana Suikkanen Gomes / actress - performer**

Mariana Suikkanen Gomes is an actress and performance maker based in Stockholm. Her solo works include *Show me yours and I'll show you mine* and *Xenglossi I*. Mariana is part of the performance collective GLQ/GomesLechQuigley who are currently collaborating on *HAPPILYFOREVERAFTER*.

Other work as a performer, and collaborations with other artists include *Lundahl&Seitl's Proscenium* (Royal Dramatic Theatre, Stockholm) *Geist's Titanic or The art of failure* (Stockholm City Theatre), *Das Große Nature Theater of Oklahoma Reuft Euch!* (Nature Theater of Oklahoma's residency at HAU Berlin) and Sidney Leoni's *UNDERTONE* (Stockholm, Oslo, Trondheim, Brussels and Frankfurt).

**Steven Wendt / Actor, music composer-musician, shadowgraph**

Steven works as an actor, performer, music composer-musician, hand shadow artist and puppeteer. Since 2012, he plays as a blue man in the acclaimed show *Blue Man Group* at the Universal Studios Orlando. Since 2008, Steven plays in various films: *If Not Now, When?*, *Zombie Love*, ..., in theater performances: *Phil Soltanoff & Jim Findlay Project* by The Center Theater Group (2010-2011), *Ground to Cloud* (2010) by RedCat (Disney Hall), ... As a puppeteer, he played in *The Accidental Insight* (2009) by Dominik Krzanowski, *Peter's Shadow* (2009) by Christine Marie and *Pirates and Ninja's* (2008) by Lissa Sherman.

### **Son Doan / Director of Photography**

Son is a director of photography based in Brussels. Son Doan studied direction of photography at INSAS and photography and art at ERG (both schools in Brussels.) He has been working as a DOP in numerous fiction films, fashion and music videos.

He is specialized in 16/35 mm and HD, Highspeed for feature films, shortfilm and music video.

### **Jonathan Uliel Barbosa Saldanha / music composer-musician**

Jonathan is a composer and artist living in Porto, Portugal. Working in the interception of live-dubbing, electroacoustics, percussive sounds, mass choral singing and wind instruments within the acoustic, physical and mental proprieties of time.

Saldanha has performed his work in festivals like Primavera Sound, OUT.Fest, Circular, Amplifest, Milhões de Festa and Sónar. His music has been released under the labels S00PA, Ångström Records, Wordsound, Rotorelief and Tzadik.

### **Denis Leborgne / Film-sound editor**

Denis works as an independent film editor for short and feature films, documentaries and music videos. He also works as an assistant editor, mainly for feature films. In 2011 he graduated from the Film editing & Script supervising section at IAD (Institut des Arts de Diffusion) in Louvain-la-Neuve.

He edited his first feature film at the age of 21, *Celui qui pleure a perdu* by Marion Lefeuvre (2012) which was selected in various festivals (Philadelphia, N.Y.C, Washington D.C, Saint-Jean-de-Luz). As an assistant editor, he worked on feature films such as *The Invader* by Nicolas Provost (2011), *L'affaire Chebeya, un crime d'Etat?* by Thierry Michel (2012), *Tokyo Anyway* by Camille Meynard (2012) *Suite Française* by Saul Dibb (2014), *The Age of Death* by Benjamin Colaux & Christopher Yates (2015).

### **Raphaël Hénard / Sound designer - sound mixer**

Raphaël is a music composer, sound mixer for cinema, artistic films and sound installations. After graduating from the Sound Department of the cinema school La Fémis in 2012, Raphaël joined the production department at IRCAM. He is now involved in the Art Center Le Fresnoy in Lille and collaborates on many film projects and installations. He also conducts his artistic sound research on white noise, recording and using wind as a primary source. Coming from cinematographic practices, his dissertation studies questioned the possibility of receiving an emotional response from sound when the image is missing.



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