

## Petite Maman [U]

2021, France, 72 mins

UK release date **19 November 2021**

Director **Céline Sciamma**

Screenplay **Céline Sciamma**

Cinematography **Claire Mathon**

Cast **Joséphine Sanz** (Nelly); **Gabrielle Sanz** (young Marion); **Nina Meurisse** (the mother); **Stéphane Varupenne** (the father); **Margot Abascal** (the grandmother)

An extremely small and exactly perfect film, Céline Sciamma's *Petite Maman* might at first appear dwarfed by her last title, *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*. But come closer – and this is a film that beckons like a forest path – and there is much that is similar. There's the luminosity of the filmmaking – an introvert radiance made extrovert by the unshakable assurance of Claire Mathon's camerawork and Sciamma's own directorial certitude. And there's a kinship between the stories, one about romantic love, the other about a mother-daughter bond. Both are really about the beautiful tragedy of love, even when fully reciprocated: that you can never truly know anyone, however much you care for them.

Nelly (Joséphine Sanz) is eight, and her maternal grandmother has just died. With her mother, Marion (Nina Meurisse), and her father (Stéphane Varupenne), Nelly has taken leave of the other residents of her grandmother's care home, and is being driven to her grandmother's old house, where Marion grew up. From the backseat, Nelly wordlessly pops snacks into her mother's mouth while she drives, even offering her a sip from her juice box – mute acts of care that speak volumes about their closeness, and about Nelly's unusual empathy for her grieving maman.

It's a current that flows both ways. Later, Nelly confesses her feelings of confusion and guilt at not having said a proper goodbye – this story is also a superb evocation of a child's first encounter with death – and so she and Marion reenact a proper farewell, with Marion as her own mother's proxy.

In the house, a kind of fairytale nook next to a forest, Dad's presence is peripheral but kind. But mostly this is about Nelly and Marion, and the

fascination Nelly has with stories her mother tells her about her own life at Nelly's age, in particular a hut she built in the adjoining woods around the time she had an operation to correct an inherited condition.

The next day Nelly goes to play in the woods. There, she meets an eight-year-old girl who looks a lot like her (Gabrielle Sanz: the young actresses are twins) and is building a hut. Her name is Marion, and she lives in the same house Nelly is staying in, only accessed a different way, fully furnished and inhabited by the younger version of Nelly's grandmother (Margot Abascal).

Alongside moments of precocious wisdom, there is a precise naturalism to the girls' interactions. They both accept their little miracle unquestioningly, and behave like any girls whose sudden friendship blossoms over the course of an afternoon.

Sciamma's film embodies a scintillatingly simple solution to the conundrum of filmmaking under lockdown conditions: if circumstances dictate that the scale becomes smaller, zoom in. *Petite Maman* is a tiny suspended moment within time, magnified at high resolution until the microscopic becomes momentous, and the mystery of a child's love for her mother becomes the mystery of all love.

After: **Jessica Kiang**, Sight and Sound, 8 March 21

### Coming soon....

Monday 24<sup>th</sup> January: **I Never Cry (15)**

Monday 31<sup>st</sup> January: **Power of the Dog (12A)**

**Visit our website for information about upcoming films**

[www.buxtonfilm.org.uk](http://www.buxtonfilm.org.uk)

**Buxton Film is a Registered Charity no. 1165040**

 [admin@buxtonfilm.org.uk](mailto:admin@buxtonfilm.org.uk)

 [@buxtonfilm](https://twitter.com/buxtonfilm)

 [BuxtonFilm](https://www.facebook.com/BuxtonFilm)