



JANUS FILMS presents

The Lure

"The freshest film I saw at Sundance this year . . . Nothing short of a stunning feature debut."

—LAURA KERN, FILM COMMENT

"Never less than arresting. There's nothing else like it in the sea."

—GUY LODGE, VARIETY

"Imagine if Gaspar Noé and (the late) Andrzej Żuławski collaborated on a remake of The Little Mermaid. Wholly original and ominously enchanting."

—DAVID EHRLICH, INDIEWIRE

In this bold, genre-defying horror-musical mash-up—the playful and confident debut of Polish director Agnieszka Smoczyńska—a pair of carnivorous mermaid sisters in an alternate 1980s Poland are drawn ashore to explore the wonders and temptations of life on land. Their tantalizing siren songs and otherworldly auras make them overnight sensations as nightclub singers in the half-glam, half-decrepit fantasy world of Smoczyńska's imagining. In a visceral twist on Hans Christian Andersen's "The Little Mermaid," one sister falls for a human, and the siblings' bond is tested as love and survival come into conflict. A savage coming-of-age fairy tale with a catchy New Wave soundtrack, lavishly grimy sets, and outrageous musical numbers, *The Lure* explores its themes of sexuality, exploitation, and the compromises of adulthood with energy and originality.

Poland • 2015 • 92 minutes • Color • 2.39:1 aspect ratio •
In Polish with English subtitles • Screening format: DCP



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DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

The Lure is a genre hybrid: a love story, a musical, and a fantasy-horror reverie—in other words, an adult fairy tale. I was inspired by the kitschy world of big dance-hall parties from the Communist era, which came to a close when I was twelve years old.

The lost souls, the warm vodka, and the glamour amid poverty fueled my imagination and stirred my memories of the two restaurants my mother ran during this not-so-belle époque.

The Lure is also a coming-of-age story about discovering your sexuality and femininity, and how these two things can sometimes be used for problematic purposes. The mermaids are not an end in themselves but a reflection of the eventual, painful discovery that adulthood is not all it seems.

As far as previous depictions of mermaids in popular culture, I was inspired much more by Homer and Hans Christian Andersen than by Walt Disney: my mermaids do not wear seashell bras but rather chew on human hearts. —Agnieszka Smoczyńska



AGNIESZKA SMOCZYŃSKA FILMOGRAPHY

- 2007 *Aria Diva* (short)
- 2010 *Viva Maria!* (short)
- 2012 *Everything Before Us*
(*Wszystko przed nami*)
(TV series)
- 2015 *The Lure* (*Córki dancingu*)



INTERVIEW: AGNIESZKA SMOCZYŃSKA

The film's primary setting is the dance hall in which Silver and Gold perform. What made the "dancing restaurants" of the 1980s different from regular nightclubs?

Under Communism, dancing restaurants were very popular. They were places where people came to enjoy live performances of Polish and American hits played by great musicians. On Fridays and Saturdays, there were special programs with an emcee, a stripper, a magician, and a band, and people could dance in pairs. The dancing-restaurant culture was typical for Eastern Bloc countries. It was a world where one could escape politics. The dancing connected people from different spheres—bureaucrats, directors, cabdrivers, and bankers would

all go there to have a good time. Dancing restaurants also had better food, like meat, Coca-Cola, good vodka, cognac—things one couldn't buy in grocery stores. It was a peek into a better, Western world.

Was the film envisioned as a musical from the start?

No. At first the story was supposed to be a simple psychological drama—a biography of the Wrońska sisters, [Barbara (Basia) and Zuzanna (Zuzia)], with whom our screenwriter, Robert Bolesto, was friendly and whose parents performed at dancing restaurants. Their childhoods were full of vodka, parties, and absent parents, which Basia felt uncomfortable exposing. We were

certain that the project would fall apart, but Robert said, "Instead of two girls, let the two main characters be mermaids." That was so absurd that Basia agreed, and the mermaids became masks behind which the girls could hide. Since mermaids sing and the film takes place in a nightclub, it automatically became a musical, and since our mermaids were related to Homer, they devoured people, making the movie a horror film as well.

What was it about the mythology of the mermaid that appealed to you?

When I was small, my mother used to tell me about myths rather than fairy tales. I remember mermaids who lost a battle with Orpheus, who drowned out their song with

his harp music; they threw themselves into the sea from a cliff and transformed into sea foam. I also remember another myth in which mermaids were guides of souls; they accompanied people in the last moments of their lives. When we looked deeper into the mythology of mermaids, we noticed that mermaids were often portrayed as evil, wild, and predatory. In our myth, the mermaid is a voracious but sensitive being who tries to follow the principles of the human world and loses her own identity.

You've described the film as an "adult fairy tale." Did you feel like you were working with themes that were already present in the Hans Christian Andersen story?

Our story is Hans Christian Andersen's in that it speaks about the impossibility of the love of a mermaid for a human being, but for us the mermaid became a metaphor for a girl who is not yet a woman. The goal of the film was to remind one of the feelings and the experiences associated with puberty: the first menstrual period, the first cigarette, the first drink, the first sexual encounter, and the first romantic obsession, which for you is everything and shapes your identity. It seems to you that once it disappears, you will disappear with it.

You've also described the film as very personal, having spent so much time in the restaurants your mother managed while you yourself were coming of age. How did your memories shape the film?

I spent my childhood in the back rooms of dancing restaurants in Szklarska Poręba and in Kowary that were run by my mother. Through the wall I could hear the beat of the live music. During the breaks, the sweating musicians in their sequined jackets would sit in the small dressing room, pulsating with a highly erotic energy. On the dance floor, beautiful, perfumed women would be dancing—they were elegant, and sometimes increasingly drunk. Thin waiters would bustle about in between guests. Men in suits after several hours of drinking would start to move slowly. Toward the early hours I would be woken by voices of the last people to leave the place and the emptiness that remained after them, just like in the song: "Drunk, lonely, supporting the bar / Drunk, lonely, supporting the walls."

The look and feel of the nightclub is very different from the drab offstage world the

human characters inhabit. How did you work with your production designer and cinematographer to delineate those spaces?

I gave the cameraman, [Jakub] Kijowski, the screenplay in one hand and a CD with the Wrońska sisters' songs in the other hand. Once he heard the dissonance between the psychedelic lyrics of the songs and the violent text of the screenplay, he began to understand the film as a series of dualities: that which is bestial and that which is human, and that which is naive and that which is brutal. We were looking for a way to present the world like a nightclub: on the one hand, enchanting and dazzling, and on the other, dirty and putrid.

Design-wise, the point of departure for us was the art of [Aleksandra] Waliszewska, who paints perverse takes on fairy-tale characters for adults. With the set designer, [Joanna] Macha, we wanted the viewers to move with the characters from the underwater world to the pulsating world of the city. [Joanna] used reflections of mirrors and refraction of lights to create the world of the nightclub, as opposed to the girls' home, which was meant to be monochromatic and sad. We were also inspired by the photos of Nan Goldin, who speaks of a world that is also beautiful, vulnerable, and naked, but very much for adults.

How did you direct your "mermaids"?

A few months before shooting, with trainers and on our own, we would go over the entire screenplay with the girls, scene after scene, in order to lay it out in our heads. We would play out the scenes that were meant to be the most difficult emotionally and physically. It was not our intention to rehearse dialogue but rather to mobilize the relevant emotions and mechanics of the body: how it feels not to have legs, how it feels to be an animal in a world of humans. This was useful more than once on set, especially when working with Marta [Mazurek]. I would ask her, "Do you remember what happened in rehearsal?" and that would trigger her memory from her training sessions. For Michalina [Olszańska], the most difficult scenes were those that demanded psychological candor. The girls came from different worlds. This is why I am happy that now they have a closer relationship—like sisters.

INTERVIEW: BARBARA AND ZUZANNA WRÓŃSKA

Your parents were musicians who played in nightclubs in the 1980s. What are your memories of that time?

Barbara: I remember this world as one that was very attractive, colorful and mysterious. When our mother would get ready for work, she would put on her makeup and perfume, and we felt that she was about to do something magical, unknown, and attractive. I remember also practicing singing songs and listening to them. Some of them I remember to this day.

How did your childhood experiences influence your music as you grew older and began performing on your own?

Zuzanna: As sisters, we always wanted to spend time and work together. A psychologist would probably find some kind of influence from our mother, but she did not write songs—she played covers as a musician trained to do a job, whereas we started out as amateurs with a desire to create our own material. But the world of performances, costumes, and rehearsals was never foreign to us.

What were your goals in writing the songs for The Lure? How did you find the balance between writing in your own style and writing in the style the film called for?

Barbara: In hiring us to compose the songs for the film, it was essential to both Aga and Robert that we maintained our own style both compositionally and lyrically. Our collaborations would fluctuate—sometimes a song would be called for by the screenplay; sometimes an existing song would propel the film forward. The hardest task came later, when we had to find compromises between the film's sound design and the musical arrangements.

CAST

Nightclub singer	Kinga Preis
Gold	Michalina Olszańska
Silver	Marta Mazurek
Bass player	Jakub Gierszał
Drummer	Andrzej Konopka
House manager	Zygmunt Malanowicz
Triton	Marcin Kowalczyk



BIOGRAPHIES

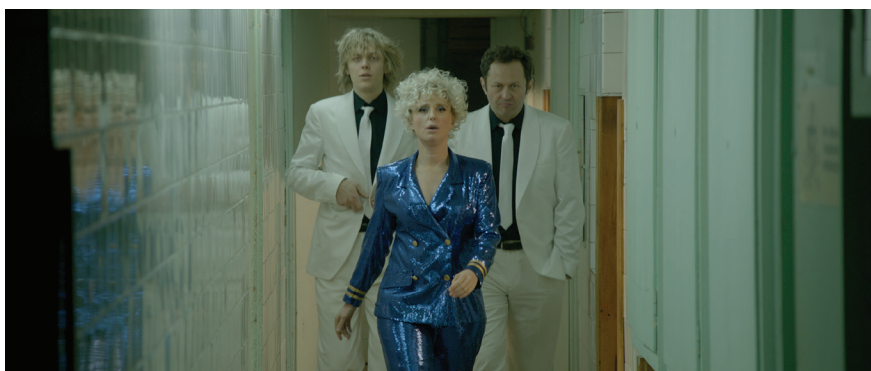
Agnieszka Smoczyńska (director) is a graduate of the Krzysztof Kieślowski Faculty of Radio and Television at the University of Silesia in Katowice. She won many student awards at international film festivals for her shorts *The Hat* and *Three Loves*. In 2007, she directed *Aria Diva*, written by Robert Bolesto, the screenwriter of *The Lure*. *Aria Diva* won best fiction film at the Krakow Film Festival. *The Lure* is her first feature.

Robert Bolesto (writer) received his first credit on Agnieszka Smoczyńska's short *Aria Diva* (2007). In 2014, Bolesto cowrote the feature *Hardkor Disko*, directed by Krzysztof Skonieczny, which showed at the Moscow International Film Festival, the Edinburgh Film Festival, and Fantastic Fest.

Barbara and Zuzanna Wrońska (original songs) are the core of the Polish indie band *Ballady i Romanse* (Ballads and Romance), which released its debut album in 2008.

Michalina Olszańska (Gold) has appeared in more than 10 films since beginning her career in 2013. Most recently, she played the lead role in the true-crime biopic *I, Olga Hepnarová* (2016), which was nominated for best first feature at the Berlin Film Festival and won critical acclaim for Olszańska's performance.

Marta Mazurek (Silver) made her feature debut in 2014's *Obywatel*, directed by the legendary Polish actor Jerzy Stuhr (*Camera Buff*, *Dekalog*). In 2016, she appeared in Anne Fontaine's *The Innocents* and was reunited with her *Lure* costar Michalina Olszańska in *I, Olga Hepnarová*.



TRIVIA

The nightclub scenes in *The Lure* were filmed on location at the abandoned Club Adria in Warsaw, where the Wrońska sisters' parents frequently performed. The Adria had been shuttered for years until Agnieszka Smoczyńska and her crew got permission to film there.

The tails that the actors wear are actual physical models, each weighing more than sixty pounds, with pedals that initiated the movement. "Our tails had to be different, monstrous, for them to give the impression that this beautiful girl is half beast," says Smoczyńska. "Without a practical model it would have been impossible."

When working with the lead actors, choreographer Kaya Kołodziejczyk tried to emphasize the awkwardness of the mermaids' adjusting to life on land by focusing on body language, breathing, discomfort, and limited motion.

The character of King Triton, the mermaid's father in Hans Christian Andersen's original tale, makes a cameo appearance in the film as the leader of an underground punk band—a stark contrast to Silver and Gold's glitzy, fantastical nightclub appearances.

All of the actors recorded their own vocal tracks for the film's musical numbers.