

ARGERICH

(BLOODY DAUGHTER)

A film by Stéphanie Argerich



Switzerland/France, 2012, 95 min., English, French and Spanish, Cert PG

Rome Film Festival, Competition
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SYNOPSIS

The world-renowned pianists Martha Argerich and Stephen Kovacevich, two giants of classical music, are seen here under the scrutiny of their daughter Stéphanie, now in her thirties and a mother herself.

Argerich is a warm, intimate and often funny family portrait that questions the relationship between a mother who is a quasi “goddess”, and a very private person, and her three daughters. Stéphanie also uses the film to try to reconnect with her somewhat estranged father, Stephen Kovacevich. *Argerich* explores with great subtlety the joys and difficulties of combining motherhood with an artistic career. A remarkable journey into the Argerich galaxy, with all its eccentricities, idiosyncrasies, problems, and, most importantly, love of music.

Stéphanie Argerich - DIRECTOR

Stéphanie Argerich was born in Bern in 1975 and is of Swiss, Argentine and Belgian nationality. The daughter of Martha Argerich and Stephen Kovacevich, she studied Russian in Moscow and then photography at the Parson School of Design in New York. She did several video training courses in Paris where she directed her first short films. *Argerich* is her first feature-length film.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Being the daughter of two musical giants was not a bed of roses. The route to self-assertion is no doubt more strewn with obstacles than for many people. You grow up with larger-than-life role models who are devoured by a passion that does not leave much room for family life. I can count family dinners and trips to the park on the fingers of one hand. These things that seem so banal were fantasies for me for a long time.

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While still a little girl I would accompany my mother on most of her trips. At night, I would fall asleep under the piano while she worked on her concertos. We have a very strong bond, especially since, for a long time, no man was living with her.

I would go to school occasionally, since my mother encouraged me to follow her on her tours. When I had enough of being shifted around, I would express my rebellion by hiding my passport under the living room's rug.. My mother would exclaim: 'If she does not come with me, I am not going either!' I had big responsibilities on my shoulders.

Like any daughter, I went through all sorts of phases with my mother... my sisters offer a precious point of comparison. Each of us has a very different relationship with my mother. We are three daughters, three heirs of a powerful matriarchy, three relationships that enable a better understanding of the various facets of our mother.

As for my father, absent when I was a child, we are now learning to get closer to each other. This film is an opportunity to give him a space and encourage him to take a clear position.

In this journey to the centre of complex affective relationships, music is a trusty ally, an open door to the rich, tormented interior world of two great artists. Listening to them play, talking with them about their music, is to gain direct entry into their emotions, even the most deep-seated ones.

Although seemingly a settling of scores, this film is in fact an attempt at reconciliation, an attempt to adopt a stance as the equal to my parents, to enter into their world in order to eventually lead them into mine.

My mother: Martha Argerich

Born in 1941 in Buenos Aires, Argentina

Music lovers all know her as the great, internationally renowned pianist. Although born in Argentina, she has spent most of her life in Switzerland, taking Swiss citizenship, and giving birth to her three daughters there. A child prodigy, she was reproducing short melodies by ear on the piano at the age of three, and by nine she performed her first concerto in public in Buenos Aires. When she was twelve, President Peron awarded her a scholarship to study music in Vienna. She subsequently won the first prize in two major international competitions, in Bolzano and Geneva, just a few days apart. And at twenty-four, she was awarded the first prize in the prestigious Chopin contest in Warsaw. She has since played piano with the most prestigious orchestras and performs around the world. She lives in Europe, between Brussels, Geneva and Paris.

My mother is at the centre of this film, and I hope that it reveals her different facets. There is of course the great virtuoso, for whom a few notes sometimes express more than words, the legendary performer, the sacred monster. My mother is a star, this had to be visible in the film. Then there is the woman-child who, beyond the urgency and immediacy of the stage, lives in a state of permanent doubt. 'Real life? It is elsewhere, this is not real life... How to be someone a little bit good'. My mother is like a bottomless well, someone forever unsatisfied. She draws everyone into her chaos, into her questions. One can easily become lost, while she always finds a way to get back on her feet.

My Father: Stephen Kovacevich

Born in 1940 in San Diego, USA

My father has four children: three sons with two other women, and one 'bloody daughter'. This somewhat bittersweet nickname is the one he gave me.

He left his native California at eighteen to pursue his musical studies in London where he still lives. My father is a mix of tenderness and gloom, violence and vulnerability. 'I am not a very happy creature', he often tells me. A rather solitary man, entirely devoted to music, even if in another life he would have liked to be a tennis player. He is also one of the greatest living pianists, praised in particular for his interpretations of Beethoven and Brahms. It is indeed while listening to him playing Beethoven's second concerto that my mother fell in love with him.

However, when one is capable of loving so much, be it music or something else, one is bound to suffer... My father's suffering is an everyday reality, which he dissimulates with a totally irresistible sense of humour.

We have never lived together, and when I miss him, it is laughing with him that I miss. Laughter is our means of communication, our life jacket.

My elder sister: Lyda Chen

Born in 1964 in Geneva, Switzerland

Lyda was born from the relationship between my mother and Robert Chen, a Chinese conductor. They met in New York but never lived together. When Lyda was born, my mother was twenty-two and a bit lost. My maternal grandmother, Juanita, a brilliant woman who suffered from mental troubles, made matters worse by kidnapping Lyda from the nursery. My mother had to face a

difficult choice: either her mother was sent to jail or she lost custody of her own daughter. She chose the second option. The situation only got worse, to the point that Lyda spent the first years of her life in foster care.

Lyda never really lived with my mother. She is, however, the only daughter who has become a professional musician. After studying law, she devoted herself to the viola. Perhaps a way to become the daughter that she could not be during her childhood, a way to reencounter her mother through music. Now they often perform together.

My younger sister: Annie Dutoit

Born in 1975 in Berne, Switzerland

Annie is the daughter of my mother and conductor Charles Dutoit. We grew up together in London and later in Geneva. Annie lived two years in India with her husband, a Professor of Physics at the University of Pune. She decided to spend the last few months of her second pregnancy at my mother's house in Brussels, where she feels more secure.

Annie is constantly moving, from New York to Brussels, then Pune before coming back to Brussels. She has recently finished her PhD in literature but does not really appreciate her accomplishment. Her constant doubts are sometimes contagious and often end up making me feel anxious, probably sending me back to my own questionings.



L-R Stéphanie Argerich, Martha Argerich, Annie Dutoit, Lyda Chen

Further details at newwavefilms.co.uk

Photos at newwavefilms.co.uk/press.html

CREW

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Stéphanie Argerich

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RTS, SRF, ARTE France

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Sound Editing

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MEZZO

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SBS – Special Broadcasting Service, Australia

SVT – Sveriges Television, Sweden

TVP Kultura – Telewizja Polska, Poland

YLE – Yleisradio Oy, Finland

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In English, French, and Spanish

With Martha Argerich, Stephen Kovacevich, Lyda Chen, Annie Dutoit, Stéphanie Argerich

