

Belier Family / Le Famille Belier (2014) Lartigau

P Michell, 2020

Synopsis:

Sixteen-year-old Paula is an indispensable [interpreter](#) for her [deaf](#) parents and brother on a daily basis, especially in the running of the family farm. One day, a music teacher discovers her gift for singing and encourages Paula to audition for the prestigious [Maîtrise de Radio France](#) music college in Paris, which will secure her a good career and a college degree. However, this decision would mean leaving her family and taking her first steps towards adulthood. Filmed in Val-d'Oise. Farm is at Remieu, Le Housseau-Brétignolles, Mayenne, France

The French have taken romantic / comedies genre from the US (in the past) and made them distinctly 'French'. This is a good example. Also an example of how good technical people make a film 'work'. Note cinematographer, editor, composer. Never just about actors and director. Film has been very well received with many awards.

Themes include: Music, Coming of Age, Disability, Country vs City, Family Loyalty vs Independence, Farm Life.

Creative Talent:

Eric Latigau – Director / co-screen writer (12 credits)

Whilst Latigau makes films about characters reinventing themselves. They vary considerably in style. Made the excellent Big Picture (2010) with Roman Duris about a photographer who takes on another character – with all its problems. Very dark. Belier Family is completely opposite in style and substance. His most recent #jesuisla (2019) [not seen] again is different – set in Korea about a French chef.

Romain Winding – Cinematographer (69 credits)

A much in demand cinematographer. As much as home whether period pieces – Farewell My Queen (2012) – to contemporary Danny Boon films such as – Supercondriaque (2014) to rural settings such as Beliel Family and When Pigs Have Wings (2010) set in Gaza.

Son of Andreas Winding – cinematographer – who filmed Henri-Georges Clouzot's Inferno (1964). A famous unfinished 'masterpiece' beset by various problems inc director's heart attack! Existing scenes screened in 2009 as a documentary.

Galperine Brothers – Music (71 credits)

Evgueni Galperine (born 1974) and **Sacha Galperine** (born 1980) are Russian-born French [film score](#) composers and brothers. They were born in Russia and studied music in [Moscow](#), but moved to [Paris, France](#), in 1990. Composed most of Latigau films.

Jennifer Auge – Editor (43 credits)

Seems to work on films every two or so years. Also edited Promise at Dawn (2017) – a strongly recommended film about the trials and tribulations of the very real and famous French writer – Romain Gary – and his relationship with his mother. Auge made this right after Beliel Family.

Louane Emera – Paula (8 credits)

Seemingly a 'natural' actor. Awkwardness of film acting has been built in to the character. A semi-finalist in the French TV version of "The Voice". Her song was dedicated to her dead father,

Since this film mostly TV work.

Francois Damiens – Rodolphe (Father) (51 credits)

Hard working actor whose work includes comedy inc – Nothing to Declare (2010), OSS 117 Cairo, Nest of Spies (2001) and Delicacy (2011) with Audrey Tautou.

Karin Viard – Gigi (Mother) (91 credits)

Prolific worker. Started work in TV now almost exclusively cinema. Known for her work in Delicatessen (1991), Paris (2008), Polisse (2011), Lolo (2015) as well as Beliel Family. Good work in Love is the Perfect Crime (2013).

Eric Elmosnio – Fabien (Music Teacher) (58 credits)

Was in School of Life (2017), Gainsbourg (2010),

Luca Gelberg - Quentin (3 credits)

Is, in fact a deaf person.

Trivia:

The actors quickly discovered that it's extremely hard to sign and speak at the same time. This proved to be particularly grueling for [Louane Emera](#) in the film's memorable climax where she has to sing and sign simultaneously.

The actors spent roughly 4 months learning sign language.

Michel Sardou (1947-) is a French singer and songwriter. He is known for his love songs such as "La Maladie d'Amour", "Je vais t'aimer" (both used in the film) as well as for songs dealing with social and political issues. His popularity has spanned 50 years, as of 2015.

Reviews:

An emotional roller-coaster that connected with me in a personal level

[estebangonzalez10](#) January 2015

"I am not fleeing, I'm flying. Understand well, I'm flying"

There are times when a film can hit close to home making it hard to review objectively because it has spoken to you in a very personal manner. That is the case with Eric Lartigau's French film, La Famille Belier, which centers on a family who are all deaf and mute except for their adolescent daughter who has become an important part of their life since she serves as their translator to the outside world. The family owns a farm and sells cheese at the local market. Despite of their disabilities, Gigi (Karin Viard) and Rodolphe (Francois Damiens), are very cheerful and caring parents. Their daughter, Paula (Louane Emera), is a talented

singer, but of course her parents don't understand what music means to people. When her choir director discovers her potential, he asks her to participate in an entrance exam for the Maitrise de Radio France, an elite school for musicians in Paris. This puts Paula in a very difficult position because she knows how much she is needed by her family, but she also realizes that this a great opportunity for her to do what she loves. She also has a smaller brother named Quentin (Luca Gelberg) with the same disabilities.

The film connected with me on a personal level because my father had a stroke five years ago and hasn't been able to speak since. He understands everything and communicates through signs and expressions, but he can't speak. The right side of his body was affected as well and he has trouble moving his leg and has no movement in his arm. I've been his therapist and seen his improvements from day one. He's also been very upbeat, cheerful and full of faith with regards to his disability. I connected with Paula's character because I understood the sacrifice she makes everyday for her family, although I'm in no way talented with my singing. The reason I'm writing all this is because it is hard to review a film that touches you in such a personal way. The film doesn't have any brilliant technical aspects to it, the story is melodramatic and clichéd, the performances are sometimes over the top (but comedic nonetheless) and the music sometimes can play a key role into manipulating the mood of the audience. These are aspects of films that I usually criticize, but in this film none of that mattered because it was an emotional roller coaster for me personally. I was entertained from the very beginning and enjoyed the entire film despite its flaws.

The lead role is played by Louane Emera who has a beautiful voice without a doubt. She was actually a participant in the French reality TV show, *The Voice*. This is her first film, but she really delivers a natural and touching performance. Speaking of reality shows, the film actually feels like one at times. You know how they usually try to engage the audience by introducing a participant who had a troubled past and is overcoming the obstacles to achieve his or her dreams. That is kind of what they do here with the character of Paula, they are using her difficult life story to touch the audience and make us care for her. I didn't have a problem with that however because it worked here. It manages to be funny and sad at the same time and it balances out those moments throughout the entire film.

There are many subplots that weren't developed and should've been left out, but I think they were included mostly for comedic purposes and to take away our attention from the main theme of the film. Take for instance the moment where Rodolphe decides that he is going to run for mayor. There are a few funny moments but the film doesn't go anywhere with that. There is also a subplot revolving around Quentin's relationship with one of Paula's best friends, but that also ends up going nowhere. Those subplots were included as a way to mix things up a bit and fool the audience as to which way the film was heading, because in the end it is a bit all too predictable and clichéd. However, the music in this film works extremely well and I ended up caring for these characters and the decisions they had to make. Karin Viard and Francois Damiens had great chemistry together and provided most of the comedy in the film. Viard goes a bit overboard with her exaggerated stagey performance, but it worked. *La Famille Belier* is a very charming feel-good movie full of funny and sincerely touching moments.

The Bélier Family earns every tear and chortle with its mix of sensitivity and rude exuberance.

Rochelle Siemienowicz, SBS, 2015, updated 2020.

Being a teenager is awkward and embarrassing at the best of times, but try being the only hearing member of a deaf family, and having to translate for everyone at the doctor's office, the bank and the market stall. Not to mention having uninhibited parents (François Damiens and Karin Viard) who vigorously pursue an active sex life and anxiously await their daughter's first menstrual cycle. This is the predicament of shy, beautiful Paula (Louane Emera), a girl who escapes by donning her headphones and singing her heart out as she rides her bike to school near her family's dairy farm. It's no wonder Paula tries to keep her family a secret, especially when she falls for a cute boy (Ilian Bergala) and discovers her own surprising singing talent, fostered by a stern Gainsbourg-like choirmaster (Eric Elmosnino, who actually played Gainsbourg in the 2010 biopic). Yet Paula's double lives can't help but collide when she has to choose between her family, whom she adores, and a singing career that will take her away to Paris.

'Feelgood' is the word most commonly associated with this French comic crowd-pleaser, and there's a tendency to underestimate films that work so well at playing our emotions. Yet *The Bélier Family*, directed by Éric Lartigau (*The Big Picture*) earns every tear and chortle with its mix of sensitivity and rude exuberance. Emera is simply wonderful as the slightly round-shouldered teen hiding a golden voice. (This is her first acting role after she was discovered as a runner-up contestant in France's version of *The Voice* and she won Most Promising actress at the 2015 César Awards.) Damiens and Viard are both hilarious and infuriating as the provincial parents who see their daughter's hearing as a disability rather than a gift, while Luca Gelberg is funny and sweet as the younger brother with a humiliating allergy to latex. Together the actors create a unique and slightly exaggerated portrait of a family so loving and close they threaten to stifle each other.

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There's a refreshing Gallic frankness about sex and bodily functions providing much of the humour here, and you can just imagine how Hollywood might (and probably will) stuff up a remake. But it's the unashamed use of music to mirror and express emotion that really gives the film heart. In several extended performance sequences, Paula sings the songs of beloved French pop singer and songwriter Michel Sardou, especially "Je vole" (about a child needing to spread its wings and leave the nest). It's not subtle, but it does what it needs to, providing an impassioned plea by the girl for her parents to let go and not see her transformation as a rejection. Conversely, Lartigau is generous to the parents too, showing one of the concert performances without sound so we can experience the bafflement and boredom of those who cannot hear. It's a moment when the viewer truly understands the huge gap between Paula and her parents and their difficulty in bridging it. Bafflement and boredom are rare, however, in this film that's both simple and effective. Take tissues and leave cynicism at home.

