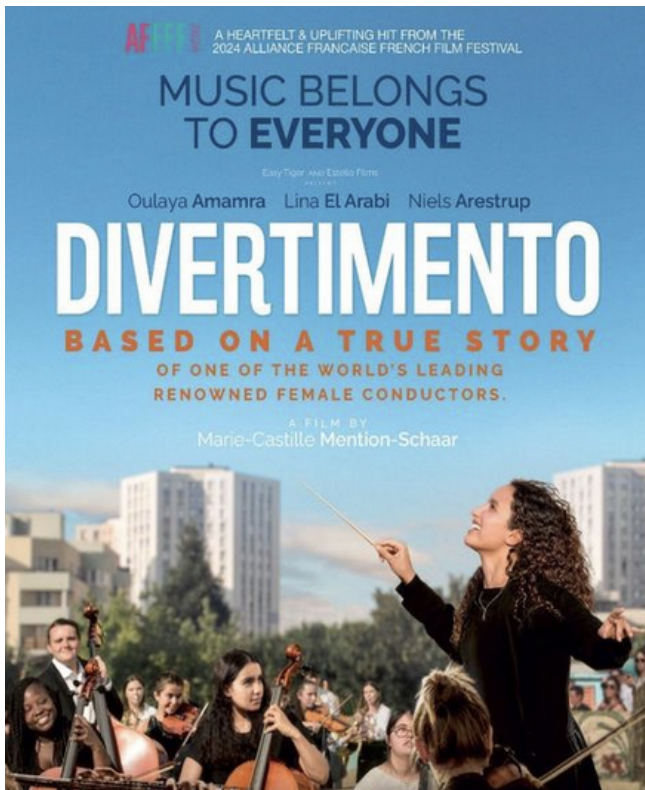


# DIVERTIMENTO

*Original version: French/ English subtitles*



**Director:** *Marie-Castille Mention-Schaar*

**Release Date (Quebec):** July 21<sup>st</sup>, 2023

**Genre:** *Biopic*

**Country of origin:** *France*

**Run Time:** *110 minutes*

## AGE APPROPRIATENESS: OPINIONS



📅 2022

🎬 Drame biographique

CLASSEMENT DU FILM

FICHE TECHNIQUE

DISTRIBUTEURS

VERSIONS DU FILM

### Motifs de classement

Cette production raconte une année dans la vie de jeunes musiciennes désireuses de faire leur place dans un milieu peu hospitalier et misogyne. Le récit initiatique s'inspire de l'histoire biographique de Zahia Ziouani, une cheffe d'orchestre française. De ton et de traitement sobres, le film suit les conventions du genre en proposant un message positif de persévérance et de dévouement.

### Date de classement

24 mai 2023

## SYNOPSIS

On the outskirts of Paris, two teenage sisters of Algerian descent face formidable odds as they aspire to break into the exclusive domaine of classical symphonic music. This inspiring narrative is based on a true story, centred on renowned conductor Zahia Ziouani and her sister, cellist Fettouma Ziouani. Set in 1995, *Divertimento* paints a remarkable portrait of these young women defying expectations and overcoming societal barriers.

## REVIEWS

This triumphant and heartwarming film offers a glimpse into the origins of their extraordinary journey. *Divertimento* showcases not only the pursuit of musical excellence but also the resilience and determination needed to redefine the boundaries of privilege, bringing the universal beauty of classical music to communities everywhere.  
*Alliance française Film Festival – Australia*

This is a wonderful, heartwarming, and uplifting film, and the two leads are so engaging – well worth your time at this year’s festival.

*My French Life*

Divertimento is a great film about confronting racism, sexism and class inequality, which does not peddle the illusions of a level playing field. The solutions shown within the film are ultimately individual, but it makes us very aware of the need for deeper rooted change. Also, the music is pretty good.

*Cine Phil – A Berliner Film Blog*

## DETAILS

### LANGUAGE

Young people and adults alike speak an everyday French language with, from time to time, some familiarity. When the teacher asks a question, a student answers with *Qui s’en fout?* Who cares? which provokes the laughter of Zahia, who is expelled from the class.

At the end of the high school, one of the teachers recommends to the students: *Pas de conneries!* Be good!

In these two examples the familiarity in the French language is not necessarily rendered.

The film focuses on the paramount importance of music in the lives of Zahia and her twin daughter Fettouma. A very extensive repertoire of musical vocabulary is deployed in the film's dialogues. It includes instruments such as the cello (Fettouma's instrument), flute, clarinet, piano, violin, etc. as well as more specific aspects about rhythm, tempo.

Some moments of comedy refer to the exaggerated performance of the wind instrument musicians: *On n’est pas à la fanfare!* “We’re not at the brass band,” Zahia says.

When Zahia waves her hands to signal a stop, the musicians mock her and compare her to a puppet. The baguette (bread) that they place in front of Zahia instead of the conductor's baton is once again used to belittle her.

Zahia fleshes out some musical passages with interesting details such as the poem she quotes

*Tu m’appelais and je quittais la terre  
Pour m’enfuir avec toi vers la lumière*

You called me and I left the earth  
To flee with you toward the light

Source of inspiration for Gabriel Fauré.

Similarly, Zahia tells the story of Romeo and Juliet in Prokofiev's *The Knights' Ball*, emphasizing the strength of the heartbeat in the orchestration.

The film's dialogues are full of somewhat sententious sentences that touch on different themes

- Role of the woman in an orchestra: Being a conductor is not a woman's job.  
... and then you're a woman... assistants to maestros who imitate their masters.
- The difference in social classes: *Ne vous excusez pas, Antoine. Ce sont les pauvres qui s'excusent.* Don't repent, Antoine, only the poor do.  
*Quand on est riche, on est désagréable* - When we're rich, we can be nasty

*En banlieue on n'a pas de pognon mais on a de l'imagination* - In the hood, we don't got money, but we are creative

The reaction of the students of Pantin to Lambert Lallemand's surname: "schnell" reminder of how the German soldiers used to shout in occupied countries.

- The rules of life as dictated by the twins' father: *Il faut écouter les profs et les respecter* – You must listen to the teachers and respect them

*Ne laissez pas la vie choisir à votre place.* – Don't let fate decide for you.

Or stated by Sergiu Celibidache... *Elles n'ont pas assez de persévérance* - They don't have enough perseverance.

- Music in all its aspects, including the following examples:

*Qu'est-ce que c'est la musique ?... Nous n'avons pas de définition*

What is music?... We don't have a definition

[About the music critics] *Plus un intellectuel parle fort plus il est idiot comme certains critiques allemands*

The louder an intellectual speaks, the more stupid he is like some German critics

*La mélodie c'est le temps et le rythme* - Melody is time and rhythm

*Sans chef l'énergie de l'orchestre va se diluer* - Without a conductor, the energy of the orchestra will dissipate.

The social class gap between the students of the Parisian bourgeoisie and the twins living in Seine-Saint-Denis, department 93, is underlined by the phone calls Zahia receives from the future musicians of her orchestra, who are afraid to move to Stains for fear of being robbed or attacked. Pejorative allusions to Zahia are expressed in the dialogues  
*Ça existe la musique classique en Seine-Saint-Denis ?* Is there classical music in Seine-Saint-Denis?

*La fille du 93 s'est mise sur son trente et un...*

She cleans up nicely for a girl from the hood.

Or the snobbery of these privileged students is manifested in this inappropriate remark about the quality of the food in the cafeteria: *Le chef c'est pas Bocuse!* - the food is not gourmet meal

## VIOLENCE

The violence is psychological. Zahia's and Fettouma's paths are streaked with all possible obstacles to prevent them from achieving their dream: contempt from the privileged students of the Racine high school, priority for the sons of/daughters of..., lack of means both of the family and of the municipality of Stains for the rehearsal space, the outraged demands of teachers such as Mr. Burgos who refuses to give the gold medal to Fettouma or the failure of Zahia against Lambert Lane.

## NUDITY

None

## SEXUAL ACTIVITY

Brief allusions to the love encounter between Carl and Fettouma: smiles, slightly languorous looks. Carl touches Fettouma's shoulders.



## PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT/ MESSAGES

- **This life journey will make young people (and more) want to fight to achieve their dreams.** (*Le Parisien*)

The twin sisters constantly fight in the film against everything.

-Contempt from the privileged classes

-Their limitations: the apartment where they live with neighbors who complain about the "noise" they make; the distance between their place of residence and the Racine high school (their father drives them at 3 a.m. during the strike so that they arrive at the school on time); the resistance of the municipality of Stains to lend the hall for rehearsals.

-The anti-feminism of the musical world in relation to the profession of conductor (see the Language section)

-Zahia's feeling of isolation in front of her orchestra, hence her failures and discouragement

- With ***Divertimento***, the filmmaker wanted to stage a constructive and positive feminism (*Allociné*)

Given Zahia's success in conducting and Fettouma in mastering the cello, Marie-Castille Mention-Schaar highlighted all the elements that contributed to their rise.

- **Zahia and Fettouma's resilience**

The film's director speaks out

I am filled with admiration for this young girl who, at the age of seventeen, succeeds in involving people from such different backgrounds as her comrades from Racine and her friends from Stains in this crazy project, for her faith, her energy. Society projects so much self-censorship; they forbid the greatest number of people to take an interest in areas that seem inaccessible to them

(...) They have exemplary strength of character and courage. I don't romanticize anything: Zahia and Fettouma never stopped.

The film praises the qualities of perseverance and resilience thanks to the support of the family.

- **The positive role of the family**

Zahia and Fettouma's father was able to instil without forcing the love of classical music that inhabits him.

The film highlights the influence of fathers or father figures that teachers can embody:

- Mr. Burgos wants only the best for Fettouma just like her father.
- Sergiu Celibidache is severe with Zahia but he shares moments of paternal tenderness.

The young clarinetist visits his father in prison. The two experience a moment of intense communion.

- **Gift of transmission**

**"They didn't just want to fight for themselves; They also wanted others to succeed, to pass on what their parents had passed on to them."**

The film highlights the generosity of Zahia and Fettouma who spend time with disadvantaged children in the neighborhood.

Fettouma who attaches colors to the strings of his cello. Zahia who coordinates the percussion instruments.

Zahia does not hesitate to share her knowledge, her passion, to help any musician improve.

Moreover, it was Zahia who trained the actress Oulaya Amamra and Fettouma the actress Lina El Arabi (herself a violinist) for their roles.

**One of the most wonderful messages:** the hope that the example of the Ziouali twins gives to all these disadvantaged young people to realize their dream one day, like this little black little girl who is beginning to mime the gestures of an orchestra conductor.

- **A Window on classical music**

**"Divertimento", a symphony for the eyes, ears and heart**

The film features both demanding arias unknown to the general public and more accessible pages such as Camille Saint-Saëns' "Bacchanale", from the opera "Samson et Dalila", or Ravel's famous "Bolero".

*(RTS)*

The young clarinetist visits his father in prison. The two experience a moment of intense communion.

*Some characters smoke cigarettes.*

## FILM PHOTOS



Zahia and Fettouma Ziouani with the actresses playing them: Oulaya Amamra et Lina El Arabi

The Ziouani twins



Zahia.

Fettouma





Zahia with her Racine High School classmates before she meets Maestro Sergiu Celibidache



Illustrious conductor Sergiu Celibidache and Zahia are getting acquainted





Zahia does not feel lonely any longer when she conducts her orchestra



Zahia Ziouani coaches Oulaya Amamra during her rehearsal

