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## 'Gentle Monster' Review: Léa Seydoux Brings Gravity to a Harrowing End-of-Family Drama

The French actress ably embodies the anguish of a wife and mother reeling from the revelation of her partner's involvement in a child pornography ring in director Marie Kreutzer's grimly persuasive follow-up to the superb 'Corsage.'

By [Jessica Kiang](#) ▾



esy of MK2, Frédéric Batier, Cannes Film Festival

It is ironic, in a film of precious little irony, that [Marie Kreutzer](#)'s intelligently made but unremittingly bleak “[Gentle Monster](#)” — the Austrian director's Cannes competition-selected follow-up to her Un Certain Regard prizewinner “[Corsage](#)” — should not only begin and end with a trampoline, but should to some degree pivot on the uncomplicatedly happy image of a little boy somersaulting and bouncing on it. Plotting a linear, sinking trajectory, Kreutzer's discomfiting film describes no such buoyant highs and lows. Here, what goes up must come down and down and still further down.

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The little boy is Johnny (Malo Blanchet), the son of young parents Lucy ([Léa Seydoux](#)) and Philip (Laurence Rupp). Lucy is French, and an avant-garde musician who performs deconstructed covers of pop songs, exclusively by male artists, played on an array of unusual, seemingly self-designed instruments. Philip is Austrian, and a filmmaker who has been working in TV to pay the bills, the pressures of which have apparently led to burnout. A prologue shows Lucy practising at the piano (a prophetic reinterpretation of Charles & Eddie's “Would I Lie to You?,” which, like all the music, is arranged by composer Camille) in their city apartment, when Philip staggers in, in the throes of a massive panic attack.

so the threesome up and move to a house in the calmer environs of the

German countryside, where they believe they can make a new start. The couple makes love on the mattress in their bedroom (production designer Myrna Wolf does a fine job evoking the feel of a new, not-yet-settled-into life, through the details of the untended garden and rooms with too little furniture in them). They talk about getting rid of their cellphones and installing a landline. They buy and assemble a trampoline for Johnny, and Philip waves down from an upstairs window and films him, bouncing and somersaulting.

They are, in essence, an ordinary family, albeit of the creative class, who communicate in a polyglot private mishmash of German, French and, between the adults, often English. And everything within DP Judith Kaufmann's muted, naturalist frames, from the casual familiarity of the performances — featuring some lovely observed details like how Philip can only get Johnny to brush his teeth by timing the strokes to the child's reedy rendition of Coldplay's "Yellow" — cues us to invest in their normalcy. Despite Philip's breakdown, there is hope for stability in their new setup. Which makes it all the more shocking when the Munich child sex crimes unit, led by young officer Else Kühn (Jella Haase), shows up on their doorstep to seize computers and phones and to arrest a grey-faced Philip, whose expression suggests he is not ignorant of why they're there.

From here on, we're with Lucy in her bewilderment, her dawning dread and rising panic at the suspicion, which she cannot definitively prove, that her beloved husband may not just be a purveyor of online child pornography, but may have abused their child. At the same time, to the not-so-subtle disdain of officer Kühn, her mind races to find a way to ameliorate the horrors of which Philip is accused — and Seydoux is particularly strong in conveying Lucy's wilful, occasionally self-deluding desire to, as she says, "make this all not have happened." She reacts with a horrified kind of relief when Philip first tells her he circulated the pedophilic material "for the money." But that, like his initial claim that it was all research for a documentary, also turns out to be untrue.

at money?" says one jaded, seen-it-all police investigator to Kühn, barely

suppressing an eyeroll.

The only relief from this close-quarters focus on Lucy comes from a subplot about Officer Kühn's aging father and his repeated unwanted groping of his live-in carer, Natalia (Patrycja Ziółkowska). And it provides little actual relief, when Kühn herself is guilty of the same kind of minimization she is otherwise so scornful of in her harrowing day job, writing off her father's sexually inappropriate behavior as a symptom of his encroaching senility and offering Natalia more money to put up with it. And so this storyline simply echoes the other, as if the film's fundamental point of view were that men will always abuse, and the women who love them, however much they should know better, will always try to excuse them for it.

But then, despite Kreutzer's evident deep research and Seydoux's undeniably compelling commitment to her character's horror and heartbreak, it's hard to discern the real motivating intention behind "Gentle Monster," unless it is to put us all on high alert that the benign faces of the men nearest and dearest to us may be concealing some unspeakable depravity. But wouldn't unwarrantedly suspecting a partner, or a father, of such heinous crimes in fact be its own kind of monstrousness? "Gentle Monster" is a meticulously plausible depiction of the dissolution of a family under the most trust-annihilating of circumstances, but that is all it is, and save for the moments when Lucy loses herself in the performance of a song she has wrested away from the man who wrote it and remade in her own voice, it offers us no way out of the darkness of this devastated woman's darkest days.

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**Gentle Monster' Review: Léa Seydoux Brings Gravity to a Harrowing End-of-Family Drama**

**Reviewed at MK2+, Paris, May 8, 2026. In Cannes Film Festival (Competition). Running time: 114 MIN.**

Production: (France-Germany-Austria) An MK2 and IPR.VC presentation of a Film AG production in co-production with Komplizen Film, Kazak Productions, Kjellson & Wik, Film i Väst, ORF, ZDF, ZDF/Arte. (World sales: MK2, Paris.) Producers: Alexander Glehr, Johanna Scherz. Co-producers: Jonas Dornbach, Janine Jackowski, Jean-Christophe Reymond, Marie Kjellson.

Crew: Director, screenplay: Marie Kreutzer. Camera: Judith Kaufmann. Editor: Ulrike Kofler. Music: Camille.

With: Léa Seydoux, Laurence Rupp, Jella Haase, Malo Blanchet, Anton Rubtsov, Nils Strunk, Catherine Deneuve, Patrycja Ziółkowska, Sylvester Groth, Regina Fritsch, Rainer Doppler, Katharina Lorenz, Baran Sönmez, Sara Sukarie, Sami Loris, Johannes Kienast, Franziska Schlattner. (German, French, English dialogue)

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