

The Crime Is Mine [15]

2023 France

102 mins

UK released **18 October 2024**

Director **François Ozon**

Screenplay **François Ozon**

Cinematography **Manuel Dacosse**

Music **Philippe Rombi**

Cast **Nadia Tereszkievicz** (Madeleine Verdier); **Rebecca Marder** (Pauline Mauléon); **Isabelle Huppert** (Odette Chaumette); **Fabrice Luchini** (Gustave Rabusset); **Dany Boon** (Fernand Palmarède); **André Dussollier** (M. Bonnard)

In a high-profile legal case, the accused stands before two courts: the judgement of a jury and the court of public opinion. Though the first may rule unanimously, the second is a more complicated affair where permissible innocence can be branded guilty. Today, court cases have become a source of entertainment like a reality show that creates overnight celebrityhood. At this intersection of criminality and fame, François Ozon's *The Crime Is Mine* (loosely based on the 1934 play *Mon Crime*) plays out as the prolific French director's first foray into crime comedy.

Set in a romanticised 1930s Paris, the film revolves around whether struggling actress Madeline Rosalie (newcomer Nadia Tereszkievicz) held the revolver that killed a lecherous producer (Jean-Christophe Bouvet). According to Madeleine, the producer sexually assaulted her before she escaped his mansion. But the police, who fumbled together evidence, deemed Madeleine the prime suspect. Luckily, Pauline (Rebecca Marder), Madeleine's best friend and fellow broke roommate, happens to be a lawyer. Together, the dramatic blonde and pragmatic brunette face the judicial system head-on in an engaging battle of wits. With Pauline as her defence counsel and de facto publicity manager, Madeline gives the performance of a lifetime in the dock with rehearsed

monologue lines and carefully selected costumes. Her self-defence declaration has her ascending to stardom, opening a new world of fame and notoriety.

Simultaneously, Ozon has a whale of a time poking holes in the corrupt justice system. He indulges in opulent sets and smart staging as the film brandishes its biting feminist edge. Also, with nods to Billy Wilder (a Mauvaise Graine cinema trip) and the playful inclusion of genre tropes (iris transitions and twiddling moustaches prompt a giggle), Ozon sprinkles *The Crime is Mine* with Parisian cinematic history.

The city of lights twinkles as never before as the blossoming film star and the sought-after lawyer still choose to live together and even share a bathtub. The carefully penned intimacy between Madeline and Pauline adds a freshness to the thirties context and amplifies the latter's desire to keep her friend from the slammer.

Yet halfway through, the energy of the jaunty screwball romp begins to flag. Then, the eccentric silent cinema star Odette Chaumette (Isabelle Huppert) enters. She arrives with a flurry of colour and chaos, draped in fur and feathers like a French Cruella De Vil (a Dalmatian even growls at her) claiming to know the truth about the crime. Her extravagant presence brings an absurdity that abruptly ends any meandering. Terezskiewicz and Marder delight as a double act, but it's Huppert who steals the show with a cunning smile.

Emily Maskell, *Little White Lies*, 21 Oct 2024

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