



MICHEL PICCOLI: A FEARLESS TALENT

Une chambre en ville (A Room in Town)

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Directed by: Jacques Demy

©: Progéfi, TF1 Films Production, U.G.C., Top 1

Co-production: Progéfi, TF1 Films, UGC, Top 1

Presented by: Christine Gouze-Réнал

Producer: Christine Gouze-Réнал

Unit Production Manager: Bernard Vaillant

Production Manager: Philippe Verro

Administration: Nelly Niay

Production Assistant: Jérôme Chalou

Trainee: Mathieu Mitsinkides

1st Assistant Director: Denis Epstein

2nd Assistant Director: Patrice Martineau

Script Supervisor: Annie Maurel

Scenario: Jacques Demy

Director of Photography: Jean Penzer

Camera Operator: François Lartigue

1st Assistant Camera: Michel Coteret

2nd Assistant Camera: Eric Vallée

Camera Assistant: Michel Coteret

Gaffer: André Nové

Key Grip: Gilbert Darraux

Stills Photography: Mouné Jamet

Editor: Sabine Mamou

Assistant Editor: Nelly Meunier

Trainee Editor: Patricia Mazuy

Art Director: Bernard Evein

1st Assistant Art Director [Paris]: Georges Glon

2nd Assistant Art Director [Nantes]: André Guérin

Trainee Art Director: Florence Lhebrard

Set Decorator: Gabriel Bécher

Set Dresser: Bernard Geanty

Prop Buyer: Gérard James

Property Master: Alain Laude

Furniture Property Master: Raymond Lemoigne

Upholstery: Roger Fresca

Costumes: Rosalie Varda

Costumers: Christiane Fageol, Bernard Minne

Miss Dominique Sanda's Fur Coat by:

Claude Gilbert

Make-up: Ronaldo Ribeiro de Abreu

Hair: Patrick Archambault

Music: Michel Colombier

Lyrics: Jacques Demy

Orchestra and Choirs Directed by:

Michel Colombier

Music Producer: Jacques Revaux

Sound Supervisor: André Hervé

Sound Recording: Bruno Lambert,

Eric Tomlinson, Jean-Michel Porterie

Sound Mixing/Effects: Jonathan Lieblich,

Bernard Leroux, Gérard Lamps

Stunt Co-ordinator: Mario Luraschi

This film was made at: Studios de Billancourt

Cast:

Dominique Sanda (*Edith Leroyer*)

Danielle Darrieux (*Margot Langlois*)

Richard Berry (*François Guilbaud*)

Michel Piccoli (*Edmond Leroyer*)

Fabienne Guyon (*Violette Pelletier*)

Anna Gaylor (*Madame Pelletier*)

Jean-François Stévenin (*Dambiel*)

Jean-Louis Rolland (*domestic*)

Marie-France Roussel (*Madame Sforza*)

Georges Blaness (*CRS chief*)

Mapie Folliard (*woman with child*)

Monique Creteur (*woman with cat*)

Gil Warga (*worker 1*)

Nicolas Hossein (*worker 2*)

Yann Dedet (*worker 3*)

Antoine Mikola (*worker 4*)

Jacques Demy's new film, *Une chambre en ville*, is one of his oldest projects. In 1953-54, just out of film school, he began to write a novel set in his home town of Nantes, a tragic love story against a background of violent conflict in the shipyards of a kind which has been frequent in the town. 'I had done seven or eight chapters, and then I dropped it because I realised it wasn't a novel at all and that it would be better to make it into a film. I couldn't find the right ending; I couldn't work it out. Perhaps it was too close to me because in many ways it was my father's life, or attached to memories of things he had told me.' In 1964, after the success of *Lola* and *Les Parapluies de Cherbourg*, he mentioned his '*premier vrai scénario*' in an interview with *Cahiers du Cinéma*. By that time, however, he was talking about 'doing an opera, an opera for an opera house', and the action had moved from Nantes to Saint-Nazaire.

Ten years later, Demy came back to the subject to give it its final form: a musical tragedy in which all dialogue would be sung, as with *Les Parapluies de Cherbourg*. His old collaborator, Michel Legrand, did not like the script, and Demy turned to another composer, Michel Colombier, with whom he worked for a year on the project. In a 1976 interview Demy said: 'The music is pop and lyrical, very beautiful. The film opens during a strike, with a cordon of police in the Place de la Prefecture and the workers in the Rue du Roi Albert, all singing in chorus. Really very lyrical ... Gerard Depardieu was to play Guilbaud, a workman who rents a room from an elderly Countess, a colonel's widow. Catherine Deneuve was Edith, the Countess' daughter, who is married to a bourgeois and prostitutes herself in the evenings, naked under her mink coat. She meets Guilbaud by chance and they fall madly in love; a total, guilty passion which leads to their deaths. Simone Signoret was to play the Countess, and Isabelle Huppert Guilbaud's fiancée.'

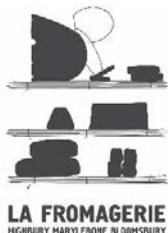
In spite of this casting, it had proved as difficult to find a producer as it had been with *Parapluies* ten years earlier. But Demy proceeded, thanks to a 50,000 franc '*avance sur recettes*' grant, and in 1976 Gaumont and Planfilm finally agreed to produce the picture. Backing and distribution were assured, recordings started, and a shooting schedule was agreed. It had to be called off when Catherine Deneuve, whose singing voice had been dubbed in *Parapluies*, as with all the other actors, refused to be dubbed on this occasion, arguing that her voice was an integral part of her artistic identity. Depardieu followed suit. The musical score was a very difficult one, the tests did not satisfy a demanding director, and both players eventually withdrew. Although efforts were made to go ahead, with Dominique Sanda replacing Deneuve and Danielle Darrieux taking the Signoret role, the impetus had been lost.

For the next two years, Demy struggled to set up an enormous Franco-Soviet co-production, a musical comedy called *Anouchka*. It failed because he was unable to find a producer willing to risk the modest French participation. Another plan, for a musical with Yves Montand and Isabelle Adjani, also fell through. During this time he did direct two commissioned works: *Lady Oscar* (1979), a big historical picture made in France but filmed in English for a Japanese producer, and *La Naissance du jour* (1981), a sensitive adaptation of Colette's novel for French television.

Then, quite unexpectedly, at the end of 1981 Demy finally got his chance. At the insistence of Dominique Sanda, whom he had just directed in *La Naissance du jour*, he was asked by the producer Christine Gouze-Réнал to make a television film. Demy suggested instead that she should produce *Une Chambre*

Patrick Joly (*waterer*)
with the voices of
Danielle Darrieux (*Margot Langlois*)
Florence Davis (*Edith*)
Liliane Davis (*Madame Pelletier*)
Fabienne Guyon (*Violette*)
Marie-France Roussel (*Madame Sforza*)
Jacques Revaux (*François*)
Jean-Louis Rolland (*domestic*)
Georges Blaness (*Edmond*)
Aldo Franck (*Dambiel*)
France 1982©
93 mins

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en ville, and six years after its collapse the production was on again. Because of financial constraints, Demy had to agree to shoot all the interiors in a studio, something he had not done in France since making *Le bel indifférent* in 1957.

Back in the spring, I visited the set at the Billancourt studios. In a small corner of an immense stage, Bernard Evein, who has worked with Demy ever since they were at art school together in Nantes, had constructed the intricate set of a six-room apartment. Even when Demy works in a studio, he likes to find the familiar logic of places which really exist, and the set is so organised that the camera will be able to move easily from one room to another or glimpse what is happening through a half-open door at the end of a corridor. In Edith's bedroom, which is littered with sports magazines and bicycle wheels, there is an 18th century bust on the mantelpiece, Evein's familiar signature for any bourgeois interior he designs for Demy. This time it is irreverently topped with a cyclist's cap.

The film's soundtrack had been recorded six weeks before shooting started, and for some weeks the actors have been listening to a cassette recording to familiarise themselves with rhythms and inflections they will have to respect scrupulously during the takes. The first scene is to be shot in the Countess' salon, a large, entirely red room, and brings together Darrieux and Richard Berry, a promising newcomer to French cinema, playing her lodger. Darrieux sings herself (as she did in *Les Demoiselles de Rochefort*), but it is the first day of filming and you can feel how tense she is at having to subordinate her acting to a tyrannical voice which will suffer no vagaries. After a few rehearsals the process becomes natural, and in the days that follow I see the actors forgetting after a few minutes that no one is recording the sounds they are producing, and playing as though the voices coming from the huge loudspeaker on the set were their own.

Demy is insistent that his camera's lens should never be in a position that would be physically impossible for a human observer. He is also concerned, as in all his films, with precise indications of time (the whole action takes place in 48 hours). As the crew moves from one room to another, the props man rushes ahead to set a drawing room or kitchen clock at the right time. It's also evident, from the first scene, that Demy will be showing his actors' reflections in mirrors whenever the sets and the action allow it.

Demy is quite happy to be shooting in a studio, with sets that can be planned in terms of camera angles and walls that can be moved at will, particularly since the film involves a limited number of places, with Darrieux's apartment and Michel Piccoli's television shop taking up more than half the shooting schedule. At the same time, he pays special attention to all the props which link the film with Nantes. Later in the schedule, the production moves to Nantes for location shooting – not in the 18th century part of the town where *Lola* was shot but in the 17th century quarter, where the buildings are more austere and more in keeping with this film's sombre tone. Michel Piccoli's shop, however, is in the Passage Pommeraye, where Roland Cassard met Lola more than 20 years ago.

There will also be three days in the Place de la Préfecture, filming fighting between police and strikers. About 800 extras are recruited locally for these scenes (many of them unemployed, since the region has been badly hit by the economic crisis), and local choirs have been enlisted to give conviction to the workers' song of hope and confidence amid the tear gas and the burning cars. Two decades after *Les Parapluies de Cherbourg*, Jacques Demy is facing the biggest challenge of a career which has never been characterised by caution.

Jean-Pierre Berthome, *Sight and Sound*, Autumn 1982