



MICHEL PICCOLI: A FEARLESS TALENT

## Milou en mai

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Director: Louis Malle

Production Companies: Nouvelles Éditions de Films, TF1 Films Production, Ellepi Films

Executive Producer: Vincent Malle

Production Manager: Gérald Molto

Production Co-ordinator: Jean-Yves Asselin

Assistant Director: Michel Ferry

Screenplay: Louis Malle, Jean-Claude Carrière

Director of Photography: Renato Berta

Editor: Emmanuelle Castro

Art Director: Willy Holt

Set Decorator: Philippe Turlure

Costume Designer: Catherine Leterrier

Wardrobe Mistress: Anne David

Chief Make-up Artists: Joël Lavau,

Françoise Berroyer

Music: Stéphane Grappelli

Sound Recording: Jean-Claude Laureux

Sound Re-recording: Dominique Hennequin

Cast:

Michel Piccoli (*Milou*)

Miou-Miou (*Camille*)

Michel Duchaussoy (*Georges*)

Dominique Blanc (*Claire*)

Harriet Walter (*Lily*)

Bruno Carette (*Grimaldi*)

François Berléand (*Daniel*)

Martine Gautier (*Adèle*)

Paulette Dubost (*Madame Vieuzac*)

Rozenn Le Tallec (*Marie-Laure*)

Renaud Danner (*Pierre-Alain*)

Jeanne Herry-Leclerc (*Françoise*)

Benjamin Prieur, Nicolas Prieur (*twins*)

Marcel Bories (*Léonce*)

Etienne Draber (*Monsieur Boutelleau*)

Valérie Lemerrier (*Madame Boutelleau*)

Hubert Saint-Macary (*Paul*)

Bernard Brocas (*priest*)

Georges Vaur (*Delmas*)

Jacqueline Staup, Anne-Marie Bonage (*neighbours*)

Denise Juskiewski (*Madame Abel*)

Stéphane Broquedis (*young man*)

Serge Angeloff (*Adèle's fiancé*)

France-Italy 1990

107 mins

### Promotional partner



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Set in the South in peacetime, teeming with characters, full of jokes and sly allusions, sunny and mischievous, a comedy not a tragedy, *Milou en mai* might seem to confirm Louis Malle's sometime reputation as a maverick. Certainly, he was never a card-carrying *Cahiers du Cinéma* activist: but he was at least on the fringes of the New Wave, and Truffaut valued him highly, especially for *Zazie dans le metro* – 'un film follement ambitieux et d'un courage immense'. In fact, *Milou en mai* is also madly ambitious, and its boldness in teasing a cherished theme has led to attacks on it in France.

Once again, cliché plays a part: this time, the vultures who gather to hear the reading of a will. The deceased is an old lady (Paulette Dubost) whose 60-year-old son Milou (Michel Piccoli) has been happily neglecting the family estate in the Gers, to the west of Toulouse. His bucolic pleasures – fishing, beekeeping, bedding his housekeeper – are interrupted when the relatives descend. They include a selfish, dishy blonde daughter (Miou-Miou), an anxious brother, an English in-law (Harriet Walter) and an angry lesbian niece. The will, as always, is a disappointment and a bone to pick: but more embarrassing is the fact that this is May 1968. In faraway Paris, the radio reports student riots; and even here in the South-West the gravediggers have gone on strike.

So Madame lies in state in the library – until rumours of revolution, even in this rustic enclave, spook the family into taking to the woods. Out they all traipse, with aspirins, laxatives and other essentials, incongruous as the tottery ladies on their high heels in some Jacques Tati farce. Then they, too, are infected by the spirit of the May *événements*. They dream of living the simple life. They share a joint, puffing like gaffers. They grope inconclusively towards free love.

In the end, of course, convention is re-established. The local capitalist even poisons a stream. Precious possessions, it's clear, will be scattered and wasted on greedy heirs: only the housekeeper, an unexpected legatee who now plans to marry her young fiancé, will really benefit from the will. As for Milou, who knows? His lazy stoicism, superbly conveyed by Piccoli, never so relaxed and florid, will probably enable him to enjoy his remaining years.

On the surface, then, this is a cheerful picture, endorsing scapegrace pastoral values, with even some nods towards ecological Greens. It includes incidental felicities: a swarm of bees writhing on a peasant's head and shoulders, a dizzy tracking shot of a bicycle ride, a sweet modulation from seemingly classical violin music into the joyous syncopation of Stéphane Grappelli. Yet, on analysis, the film's depiction of the *bourgeoisie de province* is no less scathing than in some of Chabrol's movies; and its real subject, like that of *Une affaire de femmes*, is treated mainly offscreen. What *Milou en mai* is saying, in fact, is what attracted hostility in Paris: that the 1968 student riots, as Raymond Aron was reviled for pointing out, were chiefly an intoxicating charade. For nostalgic *soixant-huitards*, this was an unwelcome message, hardly compatible with their notion of *la Nouvelle Vague*.

In reality, questioning received wisdom was always the New Wave's habit; and in his best films of the last 20 years, Louis Malle has quietly and firmly done just that. *Lacombe Lucien*, in 1974, blew up a storm of protest because naïve viewers thought it an apology for wartime collaboration. *Au revoir les enfants*, painfully autobiographical, hinted at guilt and self-accusation for adolescent insouciance. And when I last saw Malle he was musing about a film on the *épuration*, the postwar settling of Occupation scores. There seems nothing conformist about such prickly, uncomfortable concerns. In that respect, the New Wave lives on.

Richard Mayne, *Sight and Sound*, Summer 1990

Programme notes and credits compiled by Sight and Sound and the BFI Documentation Unit

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