



BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

My Night with Maud (Ma nuit chez Maud)

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Director: Eric Rohmer

Production Companies:

Les Films du Losange (Paris),

Firmament Films Productions,

Les Films du Carrosse,

Les Films des Deux Mondes,

Les Films de la Pléiade,

Productions de la Guéville, Renn Productions,

Simar Films

Presented by: Barbet Schroeder, Pierre Cottrell

Production: Alfred de Graaff

Production [Assistant]: Pierre Grimberg

Assistant Director: Pierre Cottrell *

Screenplay: Eric Rohmer

Director of Photography: Nestor Almendros

Photography [Assistants]: Emmanuel Machuel,

Jean-Claude Gasché, Philippe Rousselot

Editor: Cécile Decugis

[Assistant] Editor: Christine Lecouvette

Décors: Nicole Rachline

Sound: Jacques Maumont, Jean-Pierre Ruh

Sound [Assistant]: Alain Sempé

Cast:

Jean-Louis Trintignant (*Jean-Louis*)

Françoise Fabian (*Maud*)

Marie-Christine Barrault (*Françoise*)

Antoine Vitez (*Vidal*)

Léonide Kogan (*violinist*)

Guy Léger (*preacher*)

Anne Dubot (*blonde*)

France 1969

110 mins

Digital

* Uncredited

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

Eric Rohmer had made two features and a sizeable number of shorts and documentaries before *My Night with Maud* (1969), a mature and complex work detailing the friction between personal belief and amorous desire. Though foreshadowed by the melancholy *Le Signe du lion* (1962) and the calculated *La Collectionneuse* (1967), it was *My Night with Maud* that would fully embody the director's cinematic style: a wandering form that dealt explicitly with relationships in all their complexity.

My Night with Maud follows several young, conversational characters in the provincial French town of Clermont-Ferrand. Jean-Louis (Jean-Louis Trintignant) is a strict Catholic who has taken an engineering job in the town after several years abroad. When at church during mass near Christmas, he chances upon Françoise (Marie-Christine Barrault) who he somehow knows he'll marry. After a chance meeting with an old school friend, Vidal (Antoine Vitez), he ends up back at the apartment of Maud (Françoise Fabian), the divorcee Vidal is seeing. They discuss the contradictions in their moral, theological and political views. With Vidal leaving Jean-Louis to stay the night at Maud's after a heavy snowstorm, tensions rise with the potential of a night's romance. However, the interconnected lives of all of the characters will come back to haunt them many years later.

'I like people who know what they want,' suggests Maud after a brief and confused fragment of passionate embrace. Jean-Louis stopped before going further. His clinically rigid doctrine of belief held him back. Rohmer's film, and its characters generally, are all grappling with a variety of contradictions dictating their actions and desires: reason and instinct, fate and free will, belief and atheism. While Jean-Louis has forced himself into a cage, going full throttle only when his instinct is totally sure (as in the case of deciding, at first sight, that he will marry Françoise), it also means his sense of free will is a masquerade at best. His life, as he sees it, is seemingly as neat as the mathematical formulae on which he works in various cafés. Love, to him, is an equation.

The film is really about realising the divergent paths that lives and relationships can travel down. But Rohmer's cinema is also about the needs, fears and desires that influence the decision of which path to take, even when it results in a dead end. That questioning found its form in *My Night with Maud*. The details of relationships, and the sense of inevitability that comes with Rohmer's ubiquitous pairings, can be seen everywhere in his cinema, from the brutal machinations of *Claire's Knee* (1970) to the strange colour-coded jumper-matching conclusion of *My Girlfriend's Boyfriend* (1987). This unstoppable momentum of relationships, even when undermined as it is in *My Night with Maud*, is a driving force in Rohmer's films.

The energy from said momentum, whether accepted or resisted, has to find somewhere to go. In Rohmer's films this seems to manifest itself in two key actions: deeply detailed conversations (sometimes descending into heated

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BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Little Women

Sun 1 Dec 18:10; Mon 16 Dec 14:30; Fri 20 Dec 17:50

My Night with Maud

Ma nuit chez Maud
Mon 2 Dec 18:10; Thu 5 Dec 12:20; Tue 17 Dec 20:30

Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence

Tue 3 Dec 20:35; Sat 21 Dec 14:50

When Harry Met Sally

Wed 4 Dec 18:10 + intro by Ruby McGuigan, BFI Programme and Acquisitions; Fri 20 Dec 20:50; Sun 22 Dec 12:15

Torch Song Trilogy

Fri 6 Dec 18:05; Fri 13 Dec 20:30

Female Trouble

Fri 6 Dec 20:50; Wed 18 Dec 20:50; Sun 29 Dec 18:30

Fanny and Alexander

Fanny och Alexander
Sat 7 Dec 19:30; Sun 29 Dec 14:15

The City of Lost Children

La Cité des enfants perdus

Sun 8 Dec 15:15; Fri 27 Dec 20:45

Tangerine

Mon 9 Dec 20:45; Sat 21 Dec 20:45

Monty Python's Life of Brian

Wed 11 Dec 18:10 + intro by Justin Johnson, BFI Lead Programmer, Thu 19 Dec 12:30; Sun 22 Dec 18:30

Carol

Thu 12 Dec 12:20; Sat 21 Dec 20:40; Mon 30 Dec 17:50

Eyes Wide Shut

Sat 14 Dec 20:00; Wed 18 Dec 17:40; Sat 28 Dec 17:00

Goodfellas

Sun 15 Dec 17:50; Mon 23 Dec 20:10; Sat 28 Dec 20:15

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debates) and the incessant meandering of his characters. The latter seems to accelerate the likelihood of essential chance meetings between people, usually on foot.

In the case of this film, they've been stopped by the weather, rendering the town a beautiful snowy vista and difficult to traverse. Rohmer gets around this by having Jean-Louis travel in from his isolated retreat, chancing once again upon his fated future wife on the road rather than the pavement. The snow then handily delays her motorised bike and allows for the vital night at Françoise's after the night at Maud's.

Maud is radical in Jean-Louis' eyes due to her status as a divorcee, living by instinct and drive rather than within some hollow moral doctrine. Her sense of being is at friction with fate, radical even before her atheism and her possible left-wing politics (supposedly inherited from her bourgeois family) are addressed.

Perhaps this is why Jean-Louis resists, flees and avoids the impulses which, by his own admission, he would have once followed. He does have brief moments of reconciliation and a flicker of what their relationship could have been later in the film. But, as he suggests himself: 'I never had luck with brief encounters.' The pathos is almost unbearable, with Jean-Louis sticking to his flawed doctrine even though Maud and the audience can see that they are perfect together, contrary to all universal logic.

Instead, it's Françoise who seemingly fulfils his strict codes, based on an almost mathematical assessment of how future relationships will work. Of course, his own fate was blind to him, pure mathematics duping him into believing in a fixed answer to a question in which the raw numbers – the people – are in constant flux. Though Rohmer leaves the film before the conclusion of such a fate can be shown, it is clear that a similar future to Maud's awaits him: a flawed relationship almost definitely due to end. This is marked by a final, happy run into the warm sea at the film's conclusion – a tainted happiness.

It's only five years later, thanks to another chance meeting, that all of this becomes apparent, and Rohmer concludes his film with a brilliant undermining of his main character's beliefs. Jean-Louis and Françoise, married and with child, make their way down to a summer beach. They bump into Maud on the way, her conversation with Jean-Louis revealing the complex intermingling of Françoise with Maud's unseen husband in the naive days when snow lay over Clermont-Ferrand. Jean-Louis' careful and meticulous reasoning, built on a moment of false instinct, comes crumbling down. The questions slowly appear, as if the summer sun had melted the winter's ice and revealed the truth behind all of their relationships. The weather in the scene may be warmer but the frosty undercurrents remain.

Adam Scovell, bfi.org.uk, 11 June 2019