



25th Anniversary

Amélie

Amélie Le fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain

Director: Jean-Pierre Jeunet

©/Production Companies: Victoires Productions, Tapioca Films, France 3 Cinéma, U.G.C.

Production Company: MMC Independent

Producer: Claudie Ossard

German Unit Producer:

Arne Meerkamp Van Embden

Unit Production Manager: Alain Mougenot

Unit Managers: Nicolas Davy, Eric Duchêne

Production Managers: Jean Marc Deschamps, Marc Grewe

Financial Manager: Gilles Caussade

Production Administrator: Nicole Heitzmann

Location Managers: Jacques Pelissier, Marc Lehingrat

Post-production Supervisors: Lionel Kopp, Lumière Unique, Sophie Vermersch

Production Secretary: Marie-Laure Compain

1st Assistant Director: Christophe Vassort

2nd Assistant Director: Pascal Roy

Script Supervisor: Anne Wermelinger

CASTING: Pierre Jacques Bénichou

Scenario: Guillaume Laurant, Jean-Pierre Jeunet

Dialogue: Guillaume Laurant

Director of Photography: Bruno Delbonnel

Hand-cranked Camera: Dominique Colin, Thierry Tronchet

Steadicam Operators: Patrick de Ranter, Jörg Widmer

Stills Photography: Bruno Calvo

Digital Effects: Duboi, Alain Carsoux

Duboi Supervisor: Thomas Duval

Special Effects: Les Versaillais, Yves Domenjoud, Olivier Gleyze, Jean-Baptiste Bonetto, Thierry Reymonenq, Noël Chainbaux, Daniel Lenoir

Photo Booth Technician: Sébastien Guyomard

Animator: Michael Sowa

Editor: Hervé Schneid

Art Directors: Aline Bonetto, Volker Schäfer

Set Decorator: Marie-Laure Valla

Photo Booth Album: Ludovic Lecouteux

Mural Posters: Théry

Painters of 'Le Déjeuner des canotiers':

Michèle Bataille, Pascale Boillot, Delphine Mabed

Storyboards: Luc Desportes

Sculptures: Stéphane Chauvet

Properties: François Borgeaud

Costumes: Madeline Fontaine

Make-up: Nathalie Tissier

Hairdressers: John Nollet, Véronique Boitout

Titles: Ercidan

Music: Yann Tiersen

Music Consultant: Édouard Dubois

Sound: Jean Umansky, Sophie Chiabaut

Mixer: Vincent Arnardi

Sound Editor: Gérard Hardy

Sound Effects: Laurent Kossayan, Jean-Pierre Lelong

Thanks to: Frédéric Mitterand

Researcher: Véronique Lambert De Guise

Cast:

Audrey Tautou (*Amélie Poulain*)

Mathieu Kassovitz (*Nino Quicampoix*)

Rufus (*Raphaël Poulain, Amélie's father*)

Lorella Cravotta

(*Amandine Poulain, Amélie's mother*)

Serge Merlin (*Dufayel*)

Jamel Debbouze (*Lucien*)

Claire Maurier (*Suzanne*)

Clotilde Mollet (*Gina*)

Isabelle Nanty (*Georgette*)

Dominique Pinon (*Joseph*)

The French icon of 2001 is a small, slim young woman with bobbed hair and girlish clothes. Her name is Amélie Poulain. Played by the delightful Audrey Tautou, she is the heroine of France's latest cinematic talking point, Jean-Pierre Jeunet's comedy *Amélie*. Amélie is a shy café waitress who dreams up elaborate schemes to try to make other people happier – whether by tracking down the adult owner of a cache of childhood toys she unearths in her flat or cheering up her widowed father by arranging to have his favourite garden gnome photographed in a series of foreign locations. Set in a digitally enhanced Montmartre with a retro-chic accordion soundtrack, the film is both very funny and a cornucopia of dazzling techniques. But what could have been just another feel-good movie has become, in the weeks since its launch, an unprecedented media phenomenon.

Amélie was seen by more than six million people in France during its first seven weeks. On its release it received reviews ranging from the good to the ecstatic, with such hyperbolic comments as 'an enchantment, a jewel, a treasure' (*Studio*), 'two hours of bliss' (*L'Express*), 'a masterpiece' (*Le Point*). Even the fact that it wasn't selected for Cannes played in its favour as it was hailed as the people's choice against the elitist tastes of the competition organisers. As the box-office figures inexorably rose, the film was hotly debated by intellectuals and journalists, and embraced by politicians as if it held the key to the French people's soul. President of the Republic Jacques Chirac demanded a private screening at the Elysée palace, prime minister Lionel Jospin, several ministers and the new mayor of Paris went to see it in the cinema.

The first location named by André Dussollier's voiceover is Rue St-Vincent, which for French viewers irresistibly evokes the lyrics of the famous song written by Jean Renoir for his 1955 film *French Cancan*. Renoir's film also depicted a picturesque Montmartre – based on his father's paintings, one of which (*Le Déjeuner des canotiers*) plays a key role in *Amélie*. More cobbled streets and steep steps, corner shops and street markets follow; postcard views of Notre-Dame, the Sacré-Coeur and the Pont des Arts alternate with Parisian roofscapes, cafés and art-nouveau metro stations.

Amélie's locations and characters recycle the look and sensibility of the poetic realism that flourished in French cinema in the 30s. The Canal St-Martin (where Amélie casts stones at the water) will be forever linked with Marcel Carné's 1938 *Hôtel du Nord*, in which Arletty snarled 'Atmosphère, atmosphère!' at Louis Jouvet. Without even hearing the words, the French spectator picks up the cue: atmosphere, indeed! And inhabiting these locations are the 'little people' of Paris who filled the films of Renoir, Carné and René Clair: a world-weary *patronne*, an irascible customer, a weepy concierge, a hypochondriac tobacconist, a cantankerous grocer, a mysterious old man, as well as one or two new types such as the sassy porn-video shop assistant and the photo-booth repairman.

One of the key locations is that emblematic Parisian space, the café. Old-fashioned names, objects, flavours whizz past: sweet and chocolate brands (such as Poulain), the Tour de France, and so on. Jeunet admits that his aim was to recreate the feel of his childhood: 'I was born in 1953 and I have retained a nostalgia for the France of my childhood, or rather for its images, its fashion, its objects.' Digitally removing graffiti, dog shit and other such unsightly items, he achieves with real locations a vision of Paris that resembles the

Artus de Penguern (*Hipolito, the writer*)
 Yolande Moreau (*Madeleine Wallace, the concierge*)
 Urbain Cancelier (*Collignon, the grocer*)
 Maurice Bénichou
 (*Dominique Bredoteau, the box man*)
 Michel Robin (*Old Man Collignon*)
 Andrée Damant (*Mrs Collignon*)
 Claude Perron (*Eva, the strip-tease artist*)
 Armelle (*Philomène*)
 Ticky Holgado (*photo booth man*)
 Kevin Fernandes (*Dominique Bredoteau as a child*)
 Flora Guiet (*Amélie, aged 8*)
 Amaury Babault (*Nino as a child*)
 André Dussollier (*voice of the narrator*)
 Eugène Berthier (*Eugene Koler*)
 Marion Pressburger (*credits helper*)
 Charles-Roger Bour (*man at the urinal*)
 Luc Palun (*Amandine's grocer*)
 Fabienne Chaudat (*woman in coma*)
 Dominique Bettenfeld
 (*Amélie's screaming neighbour*)
 Jacques Viala (*customer who humiliates his friend*)
 Fabien Béhar (*humiliated customer*)
 Jonathan Joss (*humiliated customer's son*)
 Jean-Pierre Becker (*bum*)
 Jean Darie (*blind man*)
 Thierry Gibault (*endive customer*)
 François Bercovici (*endive customer's friend*)
 Franck Monier (*young Dominique Bredoteau*)
 Guillaume Viry (*homeless man*)
 Valérie Zarrouk (*Dominique Bredoteau as woman*)
 Marie-Laure Descoureaux (*dead man's concierge*)
 Sophie Tellier (*Aunt Josette*)
 Gérard Weingand (*teacher*)
 François Viaur (*bar owner*)
 Paule Daré (*bar owner's employee*)
 Marc Amyot (*stranger at photo booth*)
 Myriam Labbé (*tobacco shop customer*)
 Jean Rupert (*nasal operation man*)
 Frankie Pain (*newspaper seller*)
 Julianna Kovacs (*grocer's customer*)
 Philippe Paimblanc (*ticket inspector*)
 Mady Malroux, Monette Malroux (*twins*)
 Robert Gendreu (*café patron*)
 Valériane de Villeneuve (*laughing woman*)
 Isis Peyrade (*Samantha*)
 Raymonde Heudeline (*phantom train cashier*)
 Christiane Bopp (*woman at merry-go-round*)
 Thierry Arfeuillères (*statue man*)
 Jerry Lucas (*Sacré-Coeur boy*)
 Patrick Paroux (*street prompter*)
 François Aubineau (*concierge's postman*)
 Philippe Beautier (*Poulains' postman*)
 Karine Asure (*pretty girl on date*)
 Régis Iacono (*Felix L'Herbier*)
 France-Germany 2001©
 122 mins
 Digital

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poetic-realist sets of the 30s, in particular in Amélie's apartment building with its staircase, courtyard and old fashioned interiors. As Amélie opens her window to gaze at Monsieur Dufayel obsessively repainting 'Le Déjeuner des canotiers' she could be stepping out of Renoir's *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange* (1935) or *Hôtel du Nord*.

Like Renoir with *French Cancan*, Jeunet made *Amélie* on his return from Hollywood (where he directed *Alien Resurrection*). Both films depict a city saturated with Frenchness but with a distance that comes from experience abroad. In a rare negative review of *Amélie*, the Communist daily *L'Humanité* complained it is 'situated in a postcard Montmartre presumably aimed at seducing the American audience fond of the picturesque'; another critic called it 'Eurodisney in Montmartre'. But while *Amélie* has successfully pre-sold to foreign markets, it has also seduced the French themselves. Mirroring the film's compendium nature, critics have scoured French culture for suitable comparisons. Thus the film revives not just poetic realism but surrealism, Jacques Prévert's poetic inventory, Robert Doisneau's photographs, Poulbot's drawings of Montmartre urchins and Raymond Peynet's of lovers in Paris, the novels of Raymond Queneau (*Zazie dans le métro*), Georges Perec (*La Vie mode d'emploi*), Marcel Aymé (*La Traversée de Paris*) and more recently Philippe Delerm, celebrator of 'little pleasures' in his cult novel *La Première Gorgée de bière*.

Thematically *Amélie* may be significantly different from Jeunet's earlier films with Marc Caro (*Delicatessen*, 1991; *La Cité des enfants perdus*, 1995). But stylistically, like them, it deploys a veritable arsenal of *cinéma du look* motifs and techniques: exaggerated sounds, a saturated colour scheme, abrupt changes of scale, huge close-ups of objects or faces balanced by long takes that use intricate camera movements. These are updated with digitally created special effects: Amélie dissolving into water, her beating heart or a key visible through her clothes. Inevitably accusations of a triumph of technique over content have been made, recalling discussions in the 80s about image versus substance in the *cinéma du look* of Luc Besson and Jean-Jacques Beineix, and the late critic Serge Daney's phrase 'post-cinema' in reference to a cinema pervaded by the aesthetics of television and advertising. Thus Serge Kaganski, deputy editor of the modish magazine *Les Inrockuptibles*, criticises Jeunet because, 'His cinema is not a tool to explore the real but a simple technical means to recreate the world according to him.' It's an odd accusation since Jeunet freely admits to the 'falsity' of his images while self-reflexivity is at the (postmodern) heart of his film.

So why has *Amélie* generated such a riot of interpretations, especially in comparison with the critical indifference that has greeted other recent comedies with far more contentious views? I think for the same reason it's been so popular – namely, its ambivalence and absence of clear ideological discourse. Jeunet has justified his film's optimism in the following terms: 'We live at a time when there are no longer big political (or otherwise) ideals and to be able to focus on small pleasures, I think that's great.' In a France where the continued unfurling of state and municipal sleaze (Paris City Hall, the Elf financial and political scandal) alongside revelations about the country's inglorious past (most recently General Aussarresse's shocking disclosures about torture in Algeria) show politicians and political ideals to be deeply compromised, *Amélie* – which offers a national vision both totally imaginary and yet utterly recognisable – is the perfect escapist product.

Ginette Vincendeau, *Sight and Sound*, August 2001