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TWO FRIENDS
a film by Louis Garrel

Press Reviews

Cannes Film Review: 'Two Friends'



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A mysterious, irresistible woman comes between two mismatched friends in Louis Garrel's lively directorial debut.

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Some bigscreen love stories leave you wondering what the central couple saw in each other in the first place, but not “[Two Friends](http://variety.com/t/two-friends/) (<http://variety.com/t/two-friends/>).” From the opening shot of [Louis Garrel](http://variety.com/t/louis-garrel/) (<http://variety.com/t/louis-garrel/>)’s rowdy, passion-fueled directorial debut, audiences fall for Golshifteh Farahani, who manages to find a moment of private ecstasy in the shower of the women’s prison where she’s serving time for an unclear crime. So, when it comes to deciphering the chemistry of this improbable love triangle, the mystery centers instead on the bond between its title characters,

the two friends played by Garrel and Vincent Macaigne. How did this pair of mismatched personalities ever come to be pals? And why, after a history of betrayals, would a sentimental guy still trust the player who swooped in and shagged all his past obsessions? French cinema seems uniquely suited to such paradoxes, and its adherents should appreciate what Garrel does with that dynamic, albeit in very modest release.

In his native France, the young heartthrob — with his insouciant swirl of black hair (<http://variety411.com/us/los-angeles/hair-makeup-artists-local-798-ny/>) and lazy, half-lidded eyes — is known as the son of self-scrutinizing indie auteur Philippe Garrel, and many wondered whether young Louis' debut might borrow too much from his father's extremely self-reflexive work, much of which dissects episodes from his own love life. Abroad, however, audiences still tend to associate Garrel with Bernardo Bertolucci's three-way sizzler "The Dreamers," which puts them in perhaps a better mindset to receive "Two Friends" — a movie that took as its departure point (as yet another piece Garrel played early in his career) Alfred de Musset's play "The Moods of Marianne," injecting fresh energy and much humor into the familiar French template of a lover torn between two radically different suitors.

Garrel plays Abel, who pumps gas at a service station, but fancies himself a great writer (in the making, at least), reciting extracts from his poetry to the pretty girls who stop by for a fill-up. While plenty adorable, he's also clearly a cad, running around with an underage girlfriend (Mahaut Adam), partying with hookers and, still, always willing to seduce whatever new conquest enters his crosshairs. That's one of the reasons he's so poorly suited to be friends with Vincent (Macaigne), a professional movie extra with a history of falling hard for women outside his league — and losing them to Abel, whose most dependable quality seems to be disappointing his friend.

Vincent's latest crush, Mona (the radiant Farahani), works at a pastry counter in Paris' Gare de l'Est train station. He has known her for less than a week, but after taking her on a drunken bender the week prior, he's smitten, and now hovers around hoping for a second date. Mona politely declines, opting not to mention the real reason for her Cinderella-like curfew (that she's in prison) or the fact that she's more interested in Vincent's friend Abel (and who can blame her?). One of the great strengths of Garrel's script — which he co-wrote with frequent collaborator Christophe Honore

◦ (“Love Songs”) — is the sheer discipline it takes to appear so casual, embracing that fundamental human capacity for spontaneous, reckless and often contradictory behavior that’s so often sacrificed when writing fictional characters.

Set over a window of just three days, the free-wheeling story kicks into gear as Mona is trying to take her train back to prison at the end of her shift. In an act of brute, caveman-like intervention, Abel pulls Mona from her seat and carries her off the train, shrieking all the way. Though the two men hope this wild gesture could be the start of something, Mona knows what missing her train really means: the end of her already limited freedom — and that imbues everything with the sort of tragic fatalism associated with lovers-on-the-lam pics like “Bonnie and Clyde” and “Breathless.”

Meanwhile, the unique chemistry between manic, magnetic Garrel and underdog Macaigne (a talented, if somewhat limited-range actor who’s quickly allowing himself to be typecast) feels like a throwback to one of France’s most famous onscreen friend pairings: namely, the anarchic combination of Gerard Depardieu and Patrick Dewaere, as seen in such early Bertrand Blier movies as “Going Places” and “Get Out Your Handkerchiefs” — and though the result isn’t quite as surreal, the ride can feel similarly unpredictable at times. One moment, the trio is re-creating the student uprisings of May ’68 on set (something Garrel has done in both “The Dreamers” and his dad’s “Regular Lovers”), the next, they’re playing French farce in a low-end motel (where the night clerk mistakes the two friends for a gay couple, and flirts accordingly).

Though the various tensions — sexual and otherwise — give these three terrific actors plenty to work with, much of the film’s spirit derives straight from Garrel’s direction. Using direct sound and minimal added lighting to minimize the distance between audience and action, his restless camera (<http://variety411.com/us/new-york/camera-sound-equipment/>) always seems to be moving, not in the nauseous handheld way of so many recent indie dramas, but scanning the scene and pushing in on the action, as if constantly trying to get a closer, more intimate read into the characters.

Several intense musical injections from the great French composer Philippe Sarde find and amplify the film’s tragic undercurrent, while a few well-chosen contemporary pop tracks (e.g. Antony and the Johnsons’ “I Fell In

Love With a Dead Boy”) invite a whole new dimension of melancholy into the characters’ already frayed emotional midst. Well aware of the minefield of cliches any love-triangle story presents, Garrel combines his actorly instincts with lessons he’s learned working with other directors to hone in on a core truth, capturing in his debut outing (which benefits from practice on three previous shorts) a sense of genuine emotion many directors never accomplish in their entire careers.

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Reviewed at Cannes Film Festival (Critics’ Week), May 18, 2015. Running time: **102 MIN.**

Production

(France) An Ad Vitam release of a Les Films des Tournelles, Arte France Cinema production, in association with Cofinova 11, Indefilms 3, Soficinema 11, with the collaboration of Canal Plus, Arte France, le Centre National du Cinema et de l’Image Animee (CNC), with the support of Fondation Gan Pour le Cinema. (International sales: Indie Sale Co., Paris.) Produced by Anne-Dominique Toussaint.

Crew

Directed by Louis Garrel. Screenplay, Garrel, Christophe Honore. Camera (<http://variety411.com/us/new-york/camera-sound-equipment/>) (color), Claire Mathon; editor (<http://variety411.com/us/los-angeles/editors/>), Joelle Hache; music, Philippe Sarde; production designer, Jean Rabasse; sound, Laurent Benim, Leo Banderet, Benjamin Jaussaud, Melissa Petit Jean; assistant director, Valerie Roucher.

With

Golshifteh Farahani, Vincent Macaigne, Louis Garrel, Mahaut Adam, Pierre Maillat.

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