



Patron: Jim Broadbent
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Redoubtable (Cert 15)

dir: **Michel Hazanavicius**

starring: **Louis Garrel, Stacy Martin**

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Synopsis: Paris, May 1967. Jean-Luc Godard is disappointed by the response to his newest, and most political film, *La Chinoise*. A year later, students at the Sorbonne begin demonstrating against the Gaullist government. Godard supports them but they dismiss his overtures. He meets Jean-Pierre Gorin, a political theorist, and they form a partnership. He travels to Cannes with friends and persuades the organisers to cancel the last 5 days of the film festival, in sympathy with striking workers. His friend, who has a film in competition, is dismayed when the film is not shown. On the journey back to Paris, Godard falls out with everyone. His wife accepts an offer to star in a film by an Italian director. Godard resents this. They break up

The actor Anne Wiazemsky, who made her debut in Robert Bresson's *Au hasard Balthazar* (1966) and the following year starred in Jean-Luc Godard's *La Chinoise*, died last October at the age of 70. *Redoubtable*, adapted from her 2015 memoir *Un an après* could perhaps be regarded as a posthumous revenge on the man who became her second director and, not long afterwards, her husband. The portrait of Godard that emerges in Michel Hazanavicius's film though, is rather more scathing, and even more irreverent, than that painted by his ex-wife. (The couple split up in 1970; divorce didn't follow until 9 years later.) The film takes its title from a radio news item that we see the pair listening to early on in the action. Dealing with the launch of a new French navy submarine, the announcer explains that "life is tough aboard *Le Redoubtable*". The line is repeated several times, as Anne's life with her redoubtable mate becomes increasingly insupportable.

Following the unlooked-for success of his multi Oscar-winning silent-movie spoof *The Artist* (2011) and the flop of his all-too-serious *The Search* (2014), set in 1999 Chechnya, Hazanavicius has evidently decided that comedy is his thing - and for all that it deals with the painful emotional erosion of a relationship which culminates in a suicide attempt, *Redoubtable* is largely played for laughs. Louis Garrel's Godard is often reduced to a slapstick figure, repeatedly falling over and smashing his glasses, without which he's almost blind, and at various times humiliated by the youngsters whose cause he tries to support during the uprisings of May '68. ("Grow some balls, Jean-Luc!" yells a student, when Godard misjudges the mood of a tempestuous gathering at the Sorbonne.) But he himself can dish out the humiliation when he gets the chance, mercilessly berating a young film student who has dared to express admiration for his work, and patronisingly lecturing Anne (Stacy Martin, appealingly fresh-faced and increasingly disillusioned) in what she describes in her memoir as his "schoolmasterly tone."

Perversely, it seems that Godard - at least as he is depicted here -



will defer almost cringingly to anyone who criticizes him (especially if they're younger than him) and treat with contempt those who praise him. At times he seems motivated to lash out by what Wiazemsky vividly termed "this terrible spitefulness squatting inside hi", as when he denounces Bernardo Bertolucci to his face as making "*cinéma de merde*". To be fair, he also dismisses his own films in the same scatological terms and much of his anger seems to stem from self hatred. "All artists should die at 35," he announces (being 37 at the time), and writes off the whole of cinema - including that of such former idols as Renoir and Lang - as worthless. Sole exceptions, he asserts, are the Marx Brothers and Jerry Lewis.

One of *Redoubtable's* funniest and most technically virtuoso scenes is set in a car carrying Godard and Anne, their friends Michèle (Hazanavicius's partner and regular star Bérénice Bejo) and Jean-Pierre Bamberger (Micha Lescot), filmmaker Michel Cournot (Grégory Gadebois) and their driver Emile (Marc Fraize) back to Paris from the Cannes Film Festival, which Godard and his friends have succeeded in shutting down on revolutionary grounds - thus robbing Cournot's picture *Les Gauloises bleues* of its premiere. With public transport shut down by the strike and petrol near unobtainable, for Emile to have procured car and fuel as a favour to Michèle and Jean-Pierre is quite an achievement. Nonetheless, Godard, far from expressing gratitude, manages to alienate all his fellow travellers with his curmudgeonly behavior. The scene is shot in a long sustained take framing all 6 actors, a *tour de force* of malicious humour.

This nightmare journey doesn't derive from *Un an après*, where the trip is mentioned but little of what might have happened on it; and Hazanavicius tosses in a good many gags of his own, as when Godard tries to disguise his fingerprints with glue and then finds that everything sticks to his fingers, or when he and Anne wander around their bedroom stark naked talking disparagingly of filmmakers who seem obsessed with undressing their actors. He can't resist slipping in a Woody Allen gag either, with a fan asking JLG, "When are you going to make funny films again?" Some opportunities from Wiazemsky's book are missed; the acrimonious confrontation in London between Godard and John Lennon would have been well worth watching.

At the start of the film, we hear Anne's starstruck voice describing her lover, director and mentor: "He was respected by the whole world, unanimously regarded as the most gifted of his generation. The *nouvelle vague* - that was him, Jean-Luc Godard. His very name embodied a certain concept of cinema. The future belong to him. And I loved him." The disillusion that sets in during the course of the film can be seen not only as hers, but as that of Godard's early admirers, for it covers the period when, largely under the influence of theorist Jean-Pierre Gorin, he went from making (as has often been remarked) films that everyone wanted to

watch to films that no one wanted to watch. The point is underlined by sly visual nods to several of those early ‘funny’ films - *Vivre sa vie* 1 (1962), *Le Mépris* (1963), *Une femme mariée* (1964), *Pierrot le fou* (1966), *Weekend* (1967) and the like - along with pastiche stylistic ‘Godardisms’: chapters, quotations, intertitles (*‘Pierrot le mépris’* reads one) and jump cuts. Faced with poor reviews and falling box office sales, Godard, as one might expect, blames the customer. “If the audience no longer likes my films”, he states defiantly, “it’s because there is something wrong with them.” ‘Them’, of course, being the audience, not the films.

Redoubtable, predictably enough has stirred up a good deal of indignation among dedicated Godardians, being denounced in various quarters as “crude”, “pointless”, “fawning”, “lazy” and “what happens when the mediocre envy the truly great”. Godard himself has dismissed the film as a “stupid, stupid idea” - a verdict that the distributors, opportunistically impudent, have plastered all over the release posters. Hazanavicius, while acknowledging that “to me, [Godard is] one of the five to eight directors who changed the history of cinema”, adds that “some people probably think me telling Godard’s story is blasphemy....but he’s not my hero or my god. Godard is like the leader of a sect and I am an agnostic.”

Hazanavicius has also claimed (not entirely convincingly, perhaps) to have “made *Redoubtable* in a spirit of admiration and respect for Godard and his work, at the same time as aiming to make a film that was entertaining and appealing to a wide audience”. Entertaining it certainly is; there’s a playful irreverence about the narrative treatment that keeps it watchable, and Garrel, often seen as a narcissistic actor, paradoxically gives perhaps his most likable performance yet as a largely dislikeable character. Altogether the film treads a knife-edge, maintaining an effectively teasing balance between satire and homage, and depicting, in Hazanavicius’s words, “a man’s profoundly sincere...quest for political and artistic truth, combined with a sort of masochistic and self-destructive pathology”.

Further muddying the waters, Hazanavicius has stated that the real topic of his film is radicalism. An arguable claim; but the central section of *Redoubtable* does succeed in capturing, more vividly than any other film of recent years, the excitement, exhilaration and delusive hopes of the *événements* of May ‘68.

Credits

Jean-Luc Godard	Louis Garrel
Anne Wiazemsky	Stacy Martin
Michèle Rosier	Bérénice Bejo
Jean-Pierre Bamberger (Bambam)	Micha Lescot
Michel Cournot	Grégory Gadebois
Jean-Pierre Gorin	Felix Kysyl
Jean-Henri Roger (Jean-Jock)	Arthur Orcier
Emile	Marc Fraize
Marco Ferreri	Emmanuelle Alta
Director	Michel Hazanavicius
Screenplay	Michel Hazanavicius (from the book <i>Un an après</i> by Anne Wiazemsky)
Director of Photography	Guillaume Schiffman
Editors	Anne-Sophie Bion, Michel Hazanavicius
Art Direction	Christian Marti
Sound	Jean Minondo, Nicolas Bouvet-Levrard, Jean Paul Hurier
Costumes	Sabrina Riccardi

France/Myanmar 2017.
107 mins

Another View

This was a disaster waiting to happen. One of the great icons of European cinema, an artist of sublime intellectual rigour who exists in a perpetual state of creative reinvention, becomes the subject of a glossy biopic from one of the continent’s crowd-pleasing showmen. That inscrutable demigod, Jean-Luc Godard, goes before the lens of Oscar-winning recreation artist, Michel Hazanavicius, with the actor Louis Garrel slipping into the suede desert boots and rectangular shades of the maestro himself. What could possibly go wrong?

To be honest, nothing much. But then not too much goes right either. *Le Redoubtable* is a handsomely mounted trifle about JLG’s transformation from populist arty hit machine to revolutionary screen sage. It’s a film about how he abandons his audience at the exact same time that he allows coquettish muse, Anne Wiazemsky, to get away from him. There’s no real reason why they should stay together, as Hazanavicius (purposefully or otherwise), suggests that their relationship was little more than a silly game. He dominates her intellectually and psychologically, so it was never meant to be.

What really hits home is that Hazanavicius equates commercial failure with artistic failure – that is to say, artworks which don’t connect with an audience are ultimately worthless. As such, he contends that Godard’s career (or, at least, his value as a filmmaker) ended around 1968 when he formed his Dziga Vertov group as a way to channel the essential spirit of democracy into the process of artistic creation and, by extension, relinquish his iconic name. A sequence dealing with the filming of his “red western”, *East Wind*, is played for laughs when no-one agrees with Godard’s filming methods and he’s forced to go along with the vapid majority vote. Democracy has turned him into everything he despises.

In this sense, *Le Redoubtable* is rather a right wing work – highly sceptical and derisive of revolutionary communism, very pro marriage and in favour of the iron-fisted auteur who imposes his vision upon the braying underlings. Even though the film itself is split into chapters with wacky Godardian titles, and it attempts to copy the saturated, primary-hued ‘60s aesthetic, the story itself is as conventional as it gets. But maybe this is just Hazanavicius abiding by his clear disdain for anything that might be deemed experimental?

On the plus side, Garrel does a very solid imitation of JLG, and his gift for light comedy does come as something of a surprise. Stacy Martin, however, underwhelms as Wiazemsky, playing her as a prim, air-headed and in hypnotic thrall to her famous lover. She spends much of the film nude for no reason, to the point that film feels duty bound to make a joke out of it. At its best, it’s flippant fun, but with its depiction of a hateful, haughty, tortured artist who is losing touch with reality, it feels much more like a film about Woody Allen than it does Godard.

Little White Lies

Our next film - Friday October 12th, 7.30pm Goodbye Berlin (Cert 15)

With his mother in rehab and his father away with his assistant, Maik is sent to stay at the family villa. But the dull summer takes an exciting turn when his Russian classmate Tschick turns up in a stolen car, and the mismatched pair set off on a road trip involving all sorts of trouble and even a little romance.. Acclaimed German director Fatih Akin (the first of two of his films in the season) delivers a charming and enthralling adaptation of Wolfgang Herrndorf’s best-selling young adult novel.

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