

THE
NEWGIRL
FRIEND



MANDARIN CINÉMA and FOZ
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DONOSTIA ZINEMALDIA
FESTIVAL DE SAN SEBASTIAN
INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

The new girlfriend

A film by
FRANÇOIS OZON

ROMAIN DURIS ANAÏS DEMOUSTIER

RAPHAËL PERSONNAZ

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Synopsis

After the death of her best friend, Claire falls into a deep depression, but a surprising discovery about her friend's husband gives her a new taste for life.



Interview with François Ozon

Where did you get the idea for *THE NEW GIRLFRIEND*?

The film is a loose adaptation of a 15-page short story by Ruth Rendell, similar in tone and spirit to the television series *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*. In it, a woman discovers that her friend's husband is a closet crossdresser. He becomes a girlfriend to her, but when he declares his love and tries to make love with her, she kills him. I read the short story at the time of *SUMMER DRESS*, some twenty years ago, and wrote a faithful adaptation for a short film, but I couldn't get financing or find the right cast so I abandoned the project.

But the story stayed with me, indeed haunted me, over the years. It occurred to me that most of the films I liked about crossdressing were the ones where the character crossdresses not out of a personal desire but because of outside constraints: Musicians disguise themselves as women to outfox the mafia in *SOME LIKE IT HOT*; an unemployed actor becomes an actress in order to get a role in *TOOTSIE*; another broke actress turns actor in *VICTOR VICTORIA*. These external circumstances made it possible for the audience to identify with the characters and enjoy the transvestism without guilt or discomfort. Billy Wilder is a great reference for treating the subject. Except that in my story, the character has a deep-seated desire to crossdress before actually doing it.

Is that where the idea of his grieving comes in, to help the audience sympathize and identify with David-Virginia?

Yes, the death and subsequent grieving, which were not in the short story, allow the audience and Claire to understand David's behavior prior to accepting it. That's the key to the flashback scene where David uses his dead wife's blouse, along with her scent, to soothe his baby and feed her.



I got that idea from a conversation with Chantal Poupaud, who directed *CROSSDRESSER*, a documentary about transgender people, interesting in its exploration of the day-to-day rituals of transformation: plucking hair, applying make-up, using a cache for beards, etc. Chantal is very familiar with the milieu, so I asked her to tell me about transvestites she knew. She mentioned one whose wife had been very ill. The woman knew she was going to die, so she decided to disappear from her husband's life. To bring her back, he felt a desire to wear her clothes, and began crossdressing regularly. I was captivated by his story, and found it very moving. I finally held the key to adapt and write my story.

This morbid starting point is quickly eclipsed. Dead Laura is gradually replaced by the liberating force embodied by Virginia.

The beginning of the film – outlining Laura's life and death – is quite dramatic, but little by little, as the new friendship takes shape, lightness, pleasure and joy return, with trips to the mall, a movie, the nightclub. The two characters are good for each other, they console each other. The film turns back toward life. David-Virginia has never felt happier, and Claire is totally blossoming. At one point, I'd written a statement of intent that was a bit ironic: "My goal is for every man to run out of this film and buy nylons, make-up and dresses – not for his wife, but for himself!" The producers feared that might chase the money away. But my goal really was for men to discover and share in the pleasures of feminine artifices, to bring them into the world of transvestism gently, with humor and tenderness. The idea being that we would never make fun of the characters, we'd go on their journey with them, always empathizing.

Right. We never laugh at David-Virginia, we laugh because the pleasure he gets from crossdressing is communicative, particularly in the shopping scene.

The humor comes from the pleasure the character is experiencing. We're on his level, and his level is innocent. David's desire is quite straightforward. By the middle of the film, he has found and accepted his identity: he wants to be Virginia. He's the one who asks Claire to tell Gilles the truth, and to stop lying to herself. Claire is more shaken up by the situation. She's full of doubts and questions. She takes one step forward, one step back. Ironically, she's the more neurotic, tortured character. She's initially shocked and calls David sick,

a pervert. Then she embarks on a true voyage of discovery, ultimately accepting David's desire completely, along with her own desire for Virginia.

At the beginning of the film you retrace twenty years of friendship in a series of stunning visual ellipses.

That was important in order to establish identification with the characters. I had written some voiceover narration in the script, but on the shoot I tried to tell as much of that backstory as I could in a visual manner, and when we got to the editing room the narration was no longer necessary. Focusing on the key stages of life – childhood, friendship, marriage, the birth of a child, sickness, death – we had to avoid getting corny. I had to find the right distance to create emotion.

It's hard to determine the geographic location of THE NEW GIRLFRIEND.

Some of my films are anchored in a very precise, documented reality. Others – *EIGHT WOMEN*, *IN THE HOUSE*, *THE NEW GIRLFRIEND* – create their own world. My idea here was to recreate the universal, timeless dimension of the fairytale, a genre referenced



in the beginning of the film with Laura lying in her coffin, and at the end when Virginia awakens like Sleeping Beauty.

How did you come to choose Romain Duris?

I tested a number of actors, trying on make-up and wigs to see what they looked like as women, to see if it worked. It was also an opportunity to test their desire to be feminine. Romain stood out, not because he made the most beautiful woman, but because he absolutely radiated joy at crossdressing. It came so naturally to him. He embraced the fetishized pleasure of putting on stockings and dresses with no irony or detachment. I'd already spotted this in his graceful, playful interpretation of the song from Jacques Demy's *LOLA* in Christophe Honoré's film *SEVENTEEN TIMES* CÉCILE CASSARD.

His desire to play the role of David-Virginia was so strong that I couldn't not pick Romain.

How did you physically create his character?

Before the shoot, we tried out lots of different make-up and hairstyles. And I asked him to lose some weight, as I do with all of my actresses! It was important that he be comfortable with his figure. Right away, he asked costume designer Pascaline Chavanne for a pair of high heels so he could work on his walk in his spare time.

We had to feminize Romain without masking his masculinity. It was a question of striking the right balance each time, according to the scene and the character's state of mind. Sometimes Virginia resumes a male way of walking and his face is stubbly. Other times, on the contrary, he had to be very beautiful. At the beginning, Virginia is still a work in progress. She's overly sophisticated, playacting her femininity. Like many of the transvestites I met, to begin with she wears her wife's and her mother's clothes. She's trying to find herself, determine her style. Little by little, she finds the right clothes, the right walk. At the end of the film she's wearing pants and a jacket. She's traded Laura's blond hair for her natural hair color. She no longer feels the need to over-accessorize her femininity. She has blossomed, quite simply. She's finally found her look!

Whereas Claire has become more feminine.

Claire, whose clothes are initially quite ordinary, rediscovers the pleasures of dressing up through this man who crossdresses, and he also helps her reconnect in a sense with her late friend Laura, who is shown as a more feminine, more luminous woman. By the end of the film, Claire has accepted her femininity. She's wearing a dress, and she's pregnant. As a matter of fact, at one point the film's title was *I AM WOMAN*, but I changed it because I was afraid the audience would associate it too much with David. The character who becomes a woman in my film is first and foremost Claire – and she's the one who sings about it.

As in many of your films, the characters here mirror each other. Claire's desire blossoms as she observes David-Virginia's desire.

Our desire is often a response to someone else's, we feed on it to discover who we are. In my film *SEE THE SEA*, the mirror relationship ends badly: one of the two women lets herself be killed by the other, who has usurped her identity. Here, the characters' desires feed off of one another, because of Laura's death. Laura's absence creates a void in which Claire and Virginia will find each other.

How did you come to choose Anaïs Demoustier?

Claire is a complex character whose point of view we follow. She is above all in reaction mode, a witness to David-Virginia's metamorphosis. She doesn't have much dialogue, her face tells us more about her personal journey: her desires, her fears, her lies to Gilles but also to herself.

I auditioned many actresses for the role, but Anaïs quickly emerged as the most interesting one to film in the position of observer. There is always something going on in her face, in her eyes. During the screen tests with Romain, she clearly stood out.

For the film, I asked her to change her hair color. To me she really has a redhead's complexion. I wanted to highlight and magnify her freckles.

Director of photography Pascal Marti and I also worked a lot on the autumn colors. Red hair fit in nicely with our color scheme.

And Raphaël Personnaz?

I initially met him for the role of Virginia. In theory, physically, it's easier to imagine him as a woman than Romain, but it didn't really work. When I called him back to tell him I wasn't casting him in the role of Virginia but that I'd like to offer him the role of Gilles, he immediately exclaimed, "Great! I prefer Gilles, I didn't feel comfortable in the other role."

And Isild Le Besco?

Isild is so blond and fair she veritably shines. And as with the character of Claire, I needed an actress with youthful features who could credibly go from sixteen to thirty. And someone with a luminous face, sufficiently singular to haunt the entire film.

The nightclub scene has a documentary feel to it.

It was important to see through Claire's eyes as she discovers this environment for the first time. I was inspired by the atmosphere of nightclubs in the early 80s. Back then people of different social backgrounds and ages mixed more readily in the gay community. It was before AIDS, everything seemed possible, which is no longer really the case. The casting for this



scene was critical. I wanted to show the faces, the beauty of these people. It's the heart of the film, a moment of well-being and communion, in which the "abnormal" couple formed by Virginia and Claire is completely accepted, without judgment. When I wrote this suspended moment I thought of two scenes I love from melodramas: the gardener's friends' party in Douglas Sirk's *ALL THAT HEAVEN ALLOWS*, where love suddenly seems possible between the two protagonists; and the visit to the grandmother on the Riviera in *AN AFFAIR TO REMEMBER* by Leo McCarey.

And the song *Une Femme Avec Toi* (A Woman With You) by Nicole Croisille?

I wanted a very straightforward, simple song. The lyrics were perfect, with a slight shift in meaning from my story. The transvestites I auditioned for the scene were surprised by my choice. The song is rarely used by female impersonators; they prefer to play more with irony.

As in Douglas Sirk's melodramas, your film is about accepting someone else with their differences.

Yes, transvestism is not the subject of the film but a way to address difference and prejudice. These themes are more internalized here than with Sirk, because times and society have changed: David's in-laws, upper middle class Catholics though they are, are actually quite tolerant, as long as everything is hidden from view! The film explores fantasies that the audience may or may not relate to. Either way, the main point is to see how each character accepts the peculiarity of the other and finds his or her identity beyond gender, beyond masculine or feminine. At the end of the original script, Claire ironically referenced Simone de Beauvoir's famous line, "One is not born a woman, but becomes one."

In addition, I really wanted to embrace the melodrama, take the love story as far as I could while maintaining the emotional suspense of the Ruth Rendell story, the secret phone calls, meeting in the garage, etc. However, here the suspense comes not from the outside world but from the interplay between the characters. When will they realize they're attracted to one another and stop lying about their feelings? Claire and Virginia don't want to see that they're in love because they're caught up in social and familial limitations, but their desire is stronger in the end.

The first time Claire and David make love, Claire rejects David:
“You’re a man!”

This very literal exclamation raises a smile. Claire is lost. She knows deep down she’s not sleeping with a woman, but she’d almost forgotten, and the penis brings her back to reality, a bit like in the short story. Except that the character in Ruth Rendell’s story commits murder when she feels the man’s hairy body, she is so repulsed by it.

Here, Claire “kills” Virginia by rejecting her, but the act is symbolic and accidental. And this rejection is just a step in Claire’s journey. Later, she will bring Virginia “back to life” by accepting her as she is, and realizing that she herself has become a woman with her. In a certain sense Claire resuscitates Virginia, which she couldn’t do with Laura.



Filmography François Ozon

- 2014 **THE NEW GIRLFRIEND**
- 2013 **YOUNG & BEAUTIFUL**
- 2012 **IN THE HOUSE**
- 2010 **POTICHE**
HIDEAWAY
- 2009 **RICKY**
- 2007 **ANGEL**
- 2006 **A CURTAIN RAISER** (short film)
- 2005 **TIME TO LEAVE**
- 2004 **5X2**
- 2003 **SWIMMING POOL**
- 2002 **8 WOMEN**
- 2001 **UNDER THE SAND**
- 2000 **WATER DROPS ON BURNING ROCKS**
- 1999 **CRIMINAL LOVERS**
- 1998 **SITCOM**
- 1997 **SEE THE SEA** (medium-length film)

Interview with Romain Duris

How did you get involved in *THE NEW GIRLFRIEND*?

François Ozon called me and said he wanted to talk to me about a role. “I think you’re going to like it because I’ve heard you want to play a woman.” And that was true. I’d wanted to play a woman ever since childhood, when my big sister would dress me up as a girl for dinner with the family or with friends of my parents. I was her doll and I loved it. Maybe the simple pleasure of being a girl back then was already a way for me to be an actor!

What appealed to you about the story?

I loved that the audacity of this transformation is triggered by grief, filtered through the eyes of Claire and made possible through feelings of friendship, then love. The subject of David crossdressing to become Virginia is treated profoundly and sensitively, it’s not just a gag or a showcase for an actor. I love how it sparks off, with David telling Claire very sincerely that dressing up as a woman is his way of filling the maternal void his daughter is suffering from. His desire to crossdress is beautiful and consistent with his entire being; his motives are very human, and generous.

And even when his motives become more personal, he enjoys the experience in a very pure, innocent way.

Yes, even when Claire accuses him of crossdressing solely for his own pleasure, I tried to make him as sincere as possible, to play it without irony. I wanted it honest, human. I didn’t want to box the character into a problem that was too specific. I wanted the film to speak to as many people as possible, to open doors, to raise questions about gender in the larger sense. Yes, we can be humanly attracted to another gender, and there is nothing wrong with that.



In the scene where David admits to having derived pleasure from dressing his dead wife, the morbid aspect could have taken on too much importance. But I had reached a point where I felt Virginia inside me with so much immediacy and coherence that I no longer even felt the need to rationalize her crossdressing as above all a place of freedom and pleasure.

And you completely succeed in communicating that pleasure to us.

I felt it so much myself that I think it shows through. When I came for the screen tests, I knew I would feel that pleasure. Whether François chose me or not didn't matter, the bliss I felt was genuine, and I think that's what he saw, before seeing whether the wigs suited me or not.

Transvestism is not so much the subject of the film as a way of representing difference, which is then overcome through love.

Yes, this film is also a great love story. There is no romantic love between Claire and David at the beginning, but Laura's death, David's desire to crossdress and the secret friendship that comes out of it all lead to feelings that are beyond friendship. David is not in love with Claire, but Virginia will fall in love with Claire. The film shows us that when we're in love, the gender of the person doesn't matter.

Would you call the ending of the film utopic or realistic?

I find it totally natural and credible. It's a response to the claims of those who oppose marriage equality. They can think what they like and protest all they like, they can't stop this progress. Life moves toward freedom and love.

Did you research transvestism to prepare the role?

François asked me to watch *CROSSDRESSER* by Chantal Poupaud and *BAMBI* by Sébastien Lifshitz. Bambi, a transsexual who is utterly comfortable in her skin, really moved me. Her femininity is not centered solely on the sexual, on seduction and desire. It is broader and more internal, maternal even. Its richness and sweetness greatly inspired me for my role.

I didn't want to meet transvestites, but just before the shoot, I happened across one in the street and I was very happy. She had great legs, she really could have been a Virginia, she had such a liberated way of being a woman!

How did you prepare physically for the role?

I had a coach and choreographer, Chris Gandois. She and I worked on my walk, my attitudes, how to use my body. I didn't speak about it much with François. I sensed it might worry him, because he wanted there to be some awkwardness about David turning into Virginia. But I needed to feel a certain ease. And we weren't shooting the film in chronological order. What would I do if, five days in, we had to shoot a scene from the end of the film, where I'm supposed to be perfectly natural as a woman?!

So I learned to walk in heels, sit down at a table and cross my legs, etc. It was mostly about being comfortable. I knew that finding the right moves for Virginia, without exaggeration, would allow me to feel the character and her femininity, and to speak in her voice, whether low or high.

One thing was certain: I didn't want to play the drag queen. That would be wrong, François and I agreed on that. We didn't



want people making fun of Virginia. The humor needed to come not from the gender switch but from situations, like for example when David conceals his lipstick by pretending he has to vomit.

How did you feel about your character's changing styles?

At first I didn't really understand the choice of dresses. I thought they were odd, they were tight on me. But I trusted Pascaline Chavanne. I was familiar with her work on François' other films and knew she had good taste, so I didn't interfere too much.

We had to find the right dose of femininity for Virginia. By the end of the film she's wearing jeans and her hair is darker. She's like a female Mick Jagger, while the script made her seem more like Lauren Bacall! But her inner femininity is no doubt stronger.

Make-up artist Gill Robillard was every bit as subtle as Pascaline. This is the first film I've ever worked on where I adored being made-up and had no qualms about getting up two hours before everyone else. I took my role as actress very seriously!

You even lost weight.

In the beginning, François was inspired by "Casa Susanna", a book of photos featuring rather plump American transvestites. In the script, it was made clear that Laura's clothes would be tight on me. But when I started working with Chris, I couldn't see any correlation between a little fat and the woman in me! That sensation wasn't helping. On the contrary, I needed to have a small waist. I know I've got a tiny waist, all the ladies tell me so! I wasn't about to play a woman without using that! So I went on a diet to feel more in touch with the character. Losing weight also made my facial features more delicate.

We're talking a lot about Virginia, but what about David?

The tricky thing was actually playing David, that's when the real questions arose. The easy answer would have been to play him as the opposite of Virginia: sad, dark, a broken man. Then he becomes Virginia and the light returns. But I didn't want that. Nor did I want to accentuate his virility. David does not turn into Virginia to run away from pain or frustration but rather to find himself. And for pleasure.

How would you describe working with François Ozon?

The first thing that springs to mind is his impatience! I think his sense of urgency is well-suited to filmmaking. It makes it dynamic, prevents you from getting stuck on the many questions you may have, keeps things moving along, stops you from getting bogged down. I think his impatience also stems from the fact that he frames his own shots. As soon as he finishes a scene he's already on the next one! It's great for the actors because we don't have much downtime, but it's a challenge for the technicians. This was the first time I've worked with a director who frames his own shots. I really liked that level of involvement.

I was equally astonished by how much François delegates certain things - and reassured to see him intervene on some very specific points. He is extremely lucid. He can easily tell whether something is working or not, whether emotion, truth, spontaneity or life is coming through in a scene. He is very vigilant about that. And he knows what shots he needs. He doesn't shoot from every angle to make the editing cushy, to avail himself of every option. He makes real choices on the set, and that's also really nice for the actors.

And working with Anaïs Demoustier?

I'd met her during screen tests for a different film and really wanted her to get that role, but she didn't. I knew she was a knockout and I was not disappointed! It's crazy how right she gets it, there's so much going on in her face.

Did playing a woman allow you to explore a side of yourself you didn't know?

When François asked me what my best profile was I had no idea, but I loved pondering such questions, finding out that one of my profiles is more masculine than my three-quarter profile, where my nose disappears a little. I was confronting questions that are no doubt more familiar to actresses, but these questions are an integral part of our profession, even for men. We're constantly drawing on feminine forces when we act, giving ourselves over to a character, surrendering to a gaze, expressing emotions. In the twenty years I've been acting, I've been trying to push back my masculine side, and now, suddenly, I've burst through the door!

Playing Virginia also allowed me to give more weight to silence, to feel it, nourish it. Virginia takes her time when speaking. Her silence is never empty, it exists, it's feminine. I wasn't afraid of it. In the past I've had a tendency to want to fill silence up with physical action, which is a handicap. The actors who blow me away are usually those who know how to shut up. When Niels Arestrup speaks a line, it comes from far away, it's been chewed, digested. There is silence before, after, during.

Has this experience given you a new approach to your profession?

An actor gets few opportunities to embody such a radical transformation and this has given me wings. Today, thanks to Virginia, I'm less afraid to take my time, to fully experience my characters. Virginia is one of the roles that has had the biggest impact on me. I'll miss her!



Filmography **Romain Duris**

- 2014** **THE NEW GIRLFRIEND** by François Ozon
- 2013** **CHINESE PUZZLE** by Cédric Klapisch
- 2012** **MOOD INDIGO** by Michel Gondry
POPULAIRE by Régis Roinsard
- 2010** **THE BIG PICTURE** by Éric Lartigau
- 2009** **PERSÉCUTION** by Patrice Chéreau
HEARTBREAKER by Pascal Chaumeil
- 2008** **AFTERWARDS** by Gilles Bourdos
PARIS by Cédric Klapisch
- 2007** **L'ÂGE D'HOMME** by Raphaël Fejto
MOLIÈRE by Laurent Tirard
- 2005** **IN PARIS** by Christophe Honoré
- 2004** **RUSSIAN DOLLS** by Cédric Klapisch
THE BEAT THAT MY HEART SKIPPED
by Jacques Audiard
ARSÈNE LUPIN by Jean-Pierre Salomé
- 2003** **EXILS** by Tony Gatlif
OSMOSE by Raphaël Fejto
- 2002** **NO BIG DEAL** by Bernard Rapp
LE DIVORCE by James Ivory
ADOLPHE by Benoît Jacquot
- 2001** **17 FOIS CÉCILE CASSARD** by Christophe Honoré
EURO PUDDING by Cédric Klapisch
- 2000** **CQ** by Roman Coppola
SCHIMKENT HOTEL by Charles de Meaux
BEING LIGHT by Jean-Marc Barr and Pascal Arnold
LE PETIT POU CET by Olivier Dahan
- 1999** **PEUT-ÊTRE** by Cédric Klapisch
- 1998** **LES KIDNAPPEURS** by Graham Guit
JE SUIS NÉ D'UNE CIGOGNE by Tony Gatlif
- 1997** **DEAD ALREADY** by Olivier Dahan
GADJO DILO by Tony Gatlif
DOBERMAN by Jan Kounen
- 1996** **CHACUN CHERCHE SON CHAT** by Cédric Klapisch
MÉMOIRES D'UN JEUNE CON by Patrick Aurignac
- 1994** **LE PÉRIL JEUNE** by Cédric Klapisch
MADEMOISELLE PERSONNE by Pascale Bailly

Interview with **Anais** Demoustier

Tell us about your first meetings with François Ozon.

The first few times we met, François was pretty skeptical. He was still wondering a lot about the character of Claire and how old she should be. I did some tests, with the casting director running lines. I was not very convincing! Luckily, I did some more tests later with Romain, and those went great. Paradoxically, it's a film that hinges on the interplay between two people of the opposite sex. Our chemistry totally worked.

How did you approach your character?

The script revealed little about this young woman, who is mostly in observation mode. Actually, I believe several actresses turned down the role before me because they felt there was nothing to sink their acting chops into. Well, they were wrong! I discovered a gold mine of unspoken words, stillness, silence to inhabit. Loosely defined characters can be very rich. We hold many secrets that the audience, the other characters and the director aren't aware of.

Your character is in the position of observer but gradually starts to enjoy herself as much as Virginia.

Yes, privately Claire is experiencing some powerful emotions, in a different way than Virginia, but at the same time, they're in it together. Claire is a surprising character. At first she seems shy, ensconced in her normality, but actually she's a very strong person with a keen appetite for life. Claire's femininity is just under the surface, ready to bloom. She doesn't have many opportunities to express it with her husband, but Virginia helps her unleash her sensuality. She plays the game with her, reveling in their complicity and the excitement and freedom associated with the crossdressing. In fact, quite quickly, Claire starts running the show. David sort of becomes her doll. She



takes power over him, which is all the easier as she's the only one who knows his secret. When she learns he's seeing a shrink, it hurts her to have lost her exclusive position!

David and Claire are united in their sorrow over Laura's death, but losing this role model in their lives also helps them bloom.

Claire loved and admired her best friend enormously, but she was living in her shadow. In losing her, she breaks free of the reflected image in which she was living despite herself, and moves forward toward something real and sincere. She's excited by the danger, and the ruses she and David have to come up with. I love when she lies to her husband. Gilles is endearing, but he doesn't have a clue what his wife is going through. They're not at all on the same wavelength. I love how François Ozon manages to film the solitude women experience, the daily sadness of living with someone who doesn't understand us. I felt that in *YOUNG & BEAUTIFUL* too.

This film packs an emotional punch because Claire and David are both experiencing the same solitude. As audience members, we care about them. It's a lovely feeling, we don't judge them, we let ourselves be swept up in their joy and their desires.

The more Virginia reveals herself, the less androgynous Claire becomes.

During wardrobe fittings, François was adamant. He kept saying, "Claire mustn't be too pretty at the beginning of the film!" Later on, I understood he was right. We had to downplay her femininity to start, then gradually liberate it and feel Claire becoming more and more comfortable in her female body. The fun she's having with Virginia shines through. It helps her find her place, accept her femininity. But not necessarily through clothing. Her style doesn't change radically, as opposed to Virginia, who has a far more clear and caricatured idea of femininity. For her, being a woman is all about wearing a pink dress with high heels!

Did you do research on transvestites?

No, I wanted the subject to remain a mystery, an unknown realm, as it is for Claire in the film.

Beyond transvestism, *THE NEW GIRLFRIEND* is first and foremost a love story.

Yes, it is not so much the story of a man who dresses like a woman as it is the story of two human beings and their attempts to love each other, to open up to one another, to get past their differences and the burden of conformism and taboos. It's not a militant film, it's a film about people who dare to accept their deepest desires. I think it's beautiful to make a film that asks the essential question, "Do we love each other or not? Do we have a right to love each other?" At first we think, "No way, how can those two possibly get together?" But after a while, we want them to fall in love. That's the film's great strength, especially in the context of the debate over marriage equality, the need certain people have to stigmatize others, to insist on "a father and a mother", "a man and a woman". The film starts with an unusual story and very singular characters, then takes on a universal dimension and speaks to all of us.



What was the shoot like?

François is like a kid on the set, his eyes are full of mischief and glee. He's made so many films I thought he'd be on autopilot, but no, his enthusiasm about filmmaking is impressive, it's like he's addicted to it. He runs a tight ship, and he's always shouting "Action, action!" even when nobody's ready! You really have to be on your game. At first, I felt overwhelmed and a bit panicky about his speediness. I worried that shooting so quickly wouldn't allow time for good acting. But you just have to plug in to his energy, and then it's amazing, he carries you along with him at his giddy pace.

And I'd never worked with a director who choreographs his scenes with such precision and virtuosity. He could put everything I'd read in the script in just one shot. When you're acting, it's wonderful to feel that the camera is always in the right place to capture what you're doing. The camera was always moving slightly, with François behind it, right there with us in the shot.

And working with Romain Duris?

Having Romain as a partner was pure joy! He was really involved, encouraging, complicit and considerate with me – a far less experienced actor than he is. I think he'd always dreamed of playing a role like this and his enthusiasm, like that of François, was infectious. This was not just another film for either of them.

At certain moments I really saw Romain, the actor, the handsome guy, then suddenly, I saw a woman, more or less pretty, more or less stylish! I felt like I was playing opposite neither a man nor a woman but a person who was impossible to categorize. It was very strange, I was experiencing the same fluctuations as Claire.

"You're a man!" exclaims Claire to Virginia before fleeing the hotel room. What is the significance of this reaction in the context of their relationship?

It's not obvious from the outset that they are going to fall in love. Claire likes to tell herself they're just close friends who like to shop or do their hair together. At times their relationship takes a considerably more ambiguous turn and could veer into something more sensual and carnal, but Claire pulls the wool

over her own eyes. She's troubled by this burgeoning desire. The situation culminates in that scene of panic at the hotel. Claire is truly in love with this creature Virginia, but this blunt reminder that she is actually a man is more than she can handle. "You're a man!" is also another way of saying, "You're Laura's husband!" Claire is far more complicated than she might appear. She takes two steps forward, three steps back.

When you sing in the hospital at the end, your voice is at once confident and shaky with emotion.

I was very apprehensive about shooting that scene in the hospital. François and I didn't rehearse it at all. I prepared for it on my own, he trusted me. I had to find the right balance, stay in the emotion of the scene, not take on a singer's voice. Singing is very intimidating, I told myself not to think about it. The song is a gift to Virginia and I just focused on the words, on hoping they would help her wake up.

We've often seen you in more realistic or naturalistic contexts. This is different.

In a statement of intent, François said he considered this film a melodrama. That opened up new acting perspectives for me. I feel like I'm more extraverted than usual here, more comfortable in the emotions. I've come to a place in my life where I'm less interested in playing realistic, everyday stuff. I feel like doing more stylized, lyrical, playful films. I was happy doing *THE NEW GIRLFRIEND*. It felt like a little door was opening up to me, especially since the characters themselves are acting, lying, and lying to themselves.

We're constantly going back and forth between laughter and tears.

We had a lot of fun on the set. François was always cracking up at the end of the scenes, so I thought we were actually making a comedy in the spirit of *POTICHE*. But at the end, when we did the hospital scenes, we realized the seriousness and sadness of the situation.

Actually, there's a constant back-and-forth between scenes of real tenderness and scenes where we're laughing along with the characters as they go shopping, take a weekend in the country or hit a nightclub.

Would you call the ending of *THE NEW GIRLFRIEND* utopic or realistic?

The last image is very powerful, with the three characters walking away together hand in hand. It's like a fairy tale: "They were married and lived happily ever after." And yet I find the ending completely realistic! The richness of the film lies in its ability to make us believe in this reality, to make it obvious, to show us this love is not impossible, it is there, within reach. You just have to be willing to open up, listen to your desires and question your tolerance and who you really are. Claire does all of those things in the film.



Filmography **Anaïs Demoustier**

- 2014** **THE NEW GIRLFRIEND** by François Ozon
CAPRICES by Emmanuel Mouret
À TROIS, ON Y VA de Jérôme Bonnel
- 2013** **SITUATION AMOUREUSE : C'EST COMPLIQUÉ**
by Manu Payet
AU FIL D'ARIANE by Robert Guédiguian
PARIS FOLLIES by Marc Fitoussi
BIRD PEOPLE by Pascale Ferran
- 2012** **THE FRENCH MINISTER** by Bertrand Tavernier
- 2011** **THÉRÈSE** by Claude Miller
- 2010** **ELLES** by Malgorzata Szumowska
L'HIVER DERNIER by John Shank
THE SNOWS OF KILIMANDJARO by Robert Guédiguian
- 2009** **DEAR PRUDENCE** by Rebecca Zlotowski
LIVING ON LOVE ALONE by Isabelle Czajka
SWEET EVIL by Olivier Coussemacq
- 2008** **PARTIR** by Frédéric Pelle
GROWN UPS by Anna Novion
BE GOOD by Juliette Garcias
- 2007** **THE BEAUTIFUL PERSON** by Christophe Honoré
THE PRICE TO PAY by Alexandre Leclère
GIVE ME YOUR HAND by Pascal-Alex Vincent
HELLPHONE by James Huth
- 2006** **LA VIE D'ARTISTE** by Marc Fitoussi
LES MURS PORTEURS by Cyril Gelblat
L'ANNÉE SUIVANTE by Isabelle Czajka
- 2004** **BARRAGE** by Raphaël Jacoulot
- 2003** **TIME OF THE WOLF** by Michael Haneke

Filmography **Raphaël Personnaz**

- 2014** **THE NEW GIRLFRIEND** by François Ozon
LE TEMPS DES AVEUX de Régis Wargnier
- 2013** **MARIUS / FANNY** by Daniel Auteuil
- 2012** **THE SCAPEGOAT** by Nicolas Bary
THE FRENCH MINISTER by Bertrand Tavernier
- 2011** **THE STROLLER STRATEGY** by Clément Michel
SPECIAL FORCES by Stéphane Rybojad
ANNA KARENINA by Joe Wright
AFTER by Géraldine Maillet
THREE WORLDS by Catherine Corsini
- 2010** **THE PRINCESS OF MONTPENSIER**
by Bertrand Tavernier
LA CHANCE DE MA VIE by Nicolas Cuche
MY FATHER'S GUESTS by Anne Le Ny
- 2009** **ROSE & NOIR** by Gérard Jugnot
- 2006** **BLAME IT ON FIDEL!** by Julie Gavras
- 2005** **IL NE FAUT JURER DE RIEN** by Eric Civanyan
HOUSEWARMING by Brigitte Roüan
- 2004** **THE FIRST TIME I TURNED TWENTY**
by Lorraine Levy
- 2002** **NICKEL AND DIME** by Sam Karmann
THE LANDLORDS by Rémy Waterhouse
- 2001** **THE PORNOGRAPHER** by Bertrand Bonello
- 2000** **LE ROMAN DE LULU** by Pierre-Olivier Scotto





Cast

DAVID & VIRGINIA	Romain DURIS
CLAIRE	Anaïs DEMOUSTIER
GILLES	Raphaël PERSONNAZ
LAURA	Isild LE BESCO
LIZ	Aurore CLÉMENT
ROBERT	Jean-Claude BOLLE REDDAT
EVA CARLTON	Bruno PERARD
NANNY	Claudine CHATEL
NURSE	Anita GILLIER
NURSE'S AIDE	Alex FONDJA
WAITRESS	Zita HANROT

Crew

Written and directed by **François OZON**
Loosely adapted from *The New Girlfriend*
by Ruth Rendell

Produced by **Eric & Nicolas ALTMAYER**

Director of Photography **Pascal MARTI**

Production Design **Michel BARTHELEMY**

Costume Design **Pascaline CHAVANNE**

Key Make-Up Artist **Gill ROBILLARD**

Key Hair Stylist **Franck-Pascal ALQUINET**

Editor **Laure GARDETTE**

Original Score **Philippe ROMBI**

Sound Engineer **Guillaume SCIAMA**

Sound Editor **Benoît HILLEBRANT**

Sound Re-Recording Mixer **Jean-Paul HURIER**

Casting Director **Antoinette BOULAT**

1st Assistant Director **Arnaud ESTEREZ**

Script Supervisor **Joëlle HERSANT**

Production Manager **Serge CATOIRE**

Stills Photographers **Jean-Claude MOIREAU**
Bertrand CALMEAU



Music

“Hot N Cold”

(K. Perry / L. Gottwad / M. Martin)

Performed by Katy Perry

© 2008 When I'm rich You'll be my bitch/ Kasz Money Publishing /
MXM Music AB, Administered by Kobalt Music Publishing Ltd
© 2008 Capitol Music Group, a division of Capitol Records LLC

“Une Femme avec toi”

(A. Ferrari / V. Pallavicini / P. Delanoë)

Performed by Nicole Croisille

© CAM SRL
© 1975 Budde Music France

“Follow Me”

(A. Lear / A. Moon)

Performed by Amanda Lear

© Arra bella Musikverlag GmbH/New Logic SRL
© 1998 Siebenpunkt Verlags GmbH

“Mon cœur s'ouvre à toi”

(Camille Saint-Saens, Aria from Samson and Delilah)

Vocals: Klaus Nomi

© 1981, Spindizzy Music

“Bridal March”

(Wagner-Lohengrin)

Organ: Michael Austin

“Vesperae Solennes – Laudate Dominum K. 339”

(W.A. Mozart)

Soprano: P. Coles

Choir: Kosice & Camerata Cassovia, directed by J. Wildner

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Film excerpts

“Waterloo Bridge”

Directed by Mervyn LeRoy

Music: “Auld Lang Syne” (Robert Burns)

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