



35 shots of rum (35 rhums)

Autumn
Season
2009

Review by Peter Bradshaw, the Guardian:

This outstanding new film from Claire Denis, the director of *Beau Travail* and *Vendredi Soir*, demonstrates her fluency and mastery in the kind of movie-language that is rich, quietly complex and subtle - and very un-Hollywood in its refusal to cross the "t"s and dot the "i"s. Its theme is the bond between father and daughter, whose intensity speaks poignantly and paradoxically of loss and absence. (There is a similarity here with Abdel Kechiche's 2007 movie *Couscous*.) Alex Descas is Lionel, a calm and dignified widower who is a train driver in Paris. His daughter, Jo, played by Mati Diop, is a student who lives with him in affectionate, if rather emotionally fraught domestic intimacy.

Both Lionel and Jo have a friendship, which is something more than friendship, with their neighbour Gabrielle, played by Nicole Dogué. She was once Lionel's lover when Jo was a child and appears to yearn, still, for a place in his heart, and to be a mother to Jo. Grégoire Colin plays their moody upstairs neighbour, called Noé, who appears also to have feelings for Lionel's daughter, but seems reluctant to change his chaotic home life and is temperamentally unable to commit himself. And in any case, Jo is being wooed by a charming fellow student.

Lionel's own life is brought to a submerged crisis when one of his colleagues retires, and Lionel, a shrewd observer of his fellow males, instantly sees that not having a job is a catastrophe for this man, like the most appalling bereavement. As with most men, he has chosen to put his work at the centre of his identity. Without any dialogue to underline it explicitly, Denis shows us how Lionel realises that he must invest his own existence in something other than his job. (At the retirement party, he is raucously asked to get in a traditional round of 35 shots of rum - but Lionel demurs, stating that this extravagance is reserved for quite another sort of celebration.) He must refocus his attention on Jo, who is heading towards an old maid's existence in caring for him.

The action of Denis's film, and the themes and ideas attendant on it, are never forced or directed in the conventional way; she manages the succession of scenes in a miraculously understated style so that the audience is immersed in the characters' world and comes to intuit their feelings, and appreciate what is at stake, without having things spelt out. Denis has a brilliant wordless sequence in which Lionel's family group, stymied by a car breakdown, take shelter from the driving rain in a cafe, a stopover that turns into an impromptu party: we see the principals' hidden emotional lives coming to the surface.

Descas and Diop give lovely performances, and their final scene together, apparently at the cusp of that event for which 35 shots are appropriate - a celebration and a farewell - is tremendously moving. A film to be savoured.

From Wally Hammond, Time Out:

French director Claire Denis's marvellous latest feature is a portrait of the close relationship between widowed Parisian train driver Lionel (Alex Descas) and his affectionate student daughter, Joséphine (Mati Diop). Critics have welcomed it as both her warmest movie and, with its quiet observation of small ritual, her most affirmative and Ozu-esque. But though it's true that '35 Shots' demonstrates an extraordinary reflective ease and contains possibly more hugs and smiles than Denis's entire oeuvre to date, that is not to say it is a film free of tribulations, tensions and taboos.

The story is simple, a collection of scenes from the life of this small family who live in a flat in the Rue de la Guadeloupe, a little nest where Lionel escapes from the loneliness of his cab and the memory of his losses, and from which Joséphine, inhibited from fully developing her relationships with her neighbours, surrogate 'mother' Gabrielle (Nicole Dogue) and 'suitor' Noé (Grégoire Colin), must soon fly.

From this, Denis magically evokes a liberal meditation on family, harmony, loyalty and belonging and their corollaries - loss, transgression, loneliness and separation - and achieves a sweet unity, not least through a beautifully discreet use of symbols, motifs and metaphors. Thus as cinematographer Agnès Godard's artful visual correspondences (an RER train and a block of flats shot at night) deepen an understanding of social context, the film's various vehicles - Lionel's train thundering into north Paris, his motorbike, the bicycle blocking the hallway - suggest not only specifics of occupation or class, but also journeys of different speeds. The film's extraordinary economy is typified by a lovely, spontaneous café scene where the principles dance to the Commodores' 'Nightshift', a mini-ballet touchingly evocative of their separate feelings, relationships and destinies.

35 Shots of Rum (35 Rhums) 2008 12A Runtime: 100 mins

Director: Claire Denis. **Cast:** Alex Descas, Gregoire Colin, Ingrid Caven, Jean-Christophe Folly, Julieth Mars, Julieth Mars Toussaint, Mati Diop, Nicole Dogue