

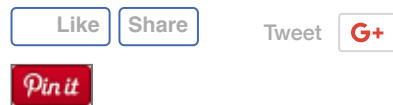


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## VA SAVOIR (WHO KNOWS?)

PG-13

By *Erica Abeel* ([Http://Www.Filmjournal.Com/Taxonomy/Term/93](http://www.filmjournal.com/Taxonomy/Term/93)) Nov 1, 2004



### Reviews

Opening credits have now become as much a part of the show as the film itself. A portal to a world, they cast their own spell, foreshadowing the flavor of the movie to come. The opening credits of Jacques Rivette's delightful *Va Savoir* (Who Knows?) include snatches of ballet-class music that stop, start up, then stop again--to suggest the movie's improvisatory light-handed touch, process rather than completion, a work in progress, subject to indefinite revision.

Rivette, at 73, is a veteran of the fabled Cahiers du Cinema cadre of critics and the '60s New Wave. Along with colleagues Godard, Truffaut, Resnais and Chabrol, he helped pioneer the new auteur esthetic (though, despite an oeuvre that includes the masterful *Celine and Julie Go Boating* and *La Belle Noiseuse*, Rivette remains the least known of the group). Set in a lyrical, postcard Paris, *Va Savoir* (slated to kick off the New York Film Festival this fall) is one of those omnibus tales currently in vogue in French cinema, which follow the interlocking fortunes of several couples. In its buoyancy and amorous heat, it feels like the work of a young man. Anchored in a stage production of *As You Desire Me*, a play by Pirandello about a woman with amnesia who tries to reinvent herself as her mate desires, the film also reflects Rivette's career-long obsession with the interplay of performance and life.

Camille (Jeanne Balibar), a French actress, and her lover Ugo (Sergio Castellitto), director of an Italian theatre troupe, are about to open a production of Pirandello's play in Paris. But Camille's growing aloofness towards Ugo conceals a desire to reconnect with Pierre (Jacques Bonnaff), her boyfriend of three years back. Voicing her obsession out loud to herself, Camille is like an actor rehearsing lines, blurring the distinction between artifice and reality. Meanwhile, Ugo, troubled by

the play's poor attendance, is also hunting for an unpublished work by 18th-century playwright Goldoni, which he longs to direct. His search triggers an encounter with a sinuous goldilocks named Do (Helene De Fougerolles), whose family library may well contain the manuscript. When Camille works up the courage to visit Pierre, she finds him ensconced with Sonia (Marianne Basler), a dancer with a shady past--who in turn is being courted by Do's half-brother, Arthur (Bruno Todeschini). But Pierre seems as nostalgic for Camille as she for him, while Ugo falls under Do's siren spell. The alliances in this roundelay shift and regroup--who will end up with whom? Cueing us is Pirandello's play, which is itself about a rekindled love, suggesting Camille and Pierre's. The spliced-in fragments from the performance also destabilize the film's narrative by proposing that it, no less than the play, is a fiction.

Throughout this aerial confection, 'real life' and artifice are intriguingly intertwined. Some scenes feel improvised in real time, while others turn stagey and stylized, holding us at elbow's length lest we get too friendly with the characters. The darkly svelte Balibar, newly slimmed down, adopts just the right Mona Lisa smile of a woman who's both believable and a theatrical poseur. Helene de Fougerolles, with her jeune fille allure and quattroceto air, seems born to embody a Rivette enchantress. Bonnaffe as Pierre amusingly delivers the philosophy-prof-as-mad-hatter. Castillitto is never not the mustachioed actor he plays in Pirandello, yet he can also project an appealing masculinity and gallantry toward Camille, even during their lovers' quarrels, which must be among the most convincing ever filmed. Rivette flirts with rather un-p.c. attitudes in celebrating Ugo's macho approach to winning back his woman by challenging Pierre to a buffoonish drinking 'duel' on the theatre's catwalk.

The film's whimsical humor is often based on a mix of theatricality with the mundane. When Ugo is tempted to kiss Do during a stroll along the Seine, he smacks himself on the head--ever the actor, he must dramatize his reluctance to be seduced. Parodying boudoir comedy, the film's pace accelerates as lovers enter and exit, the door slamming on one scene serving to open the next. In a hilarious set-piece, all the players converge for a dinner party at Pierre's, everyone too discomfited to eat--except for Ugo, who savagely chomps his food as if pulverizing the other guests with his molars. And in an outlandish gesture to rival Pirandello, Pierre locks Camille in his apartment. His prisoner of love contrives to escape across the Parisian toits (a comic replay of all those toits de Paris shots), because, above all, Camille is a working actress who needs, romance be damned, to make a curtain. Camille and Ugo's professional partnership is the stable base in a gossamer world of games and disguises, where no one is quite what he appears--and it also parallels Pirandello's own liaison with an actress, further mingling fact with fiction. On yet another level of this mind-bending entertainment, Rivette is probing one of life's deeper mysteries: just what it takes to cement a couple.

--Erica Abeel

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