

35 SHOTS OF RUM

A Film by
Claire Denis



France/ Germany 2008 / 100 minutes / 1.85

Certificate: tbc

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THE COUNTRY

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35 Shots of Rum

Directed by	CLAIRE DENIS
Written by	CLAIRE DENIS AND JEAN-POL FARGEAU
Produced by	BRUNO PESERY
Production Manager	BENOIT PILOT
Cinematography	AGNÈS GODARD
Editing	GUY LECORNE
Music by	TINDERSTICKS
Art Direction	ARNAUD DE MAULERON
Set decoration	BORIS PIOT
Sound	MARTIN BOISSAU
Sound Editing	CHRISTOPHE WINDING
Mixing	DOMINIQUE HENNEQUIN
Costumes	JUDY SHREWSBURY
Co-producers	KARK BAUMGARTNER, CHRISTOPHE FRIEDEL CLAUDIA STEFFEN

A French/German coproduction Soudaine Compagnie - ARTE France Cinéma -
Pandora Film Produktion
in association with Wild Bunch

And Sofica Cofinova 4, Soficinéma 4, with the
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Filmförderungsanstalt (FFA), of Eurimages, the
Région Ile-de-France, of Filmförderungsanstalt
Hamburg Schleswig-Holstein (FFHSH), of
Procirep, and Angoa-Agicoa.

COLOUR – 100 MINUTES - DOLBY DIGITAL – 1.85 - FRANCE / GERMANY

CAST

Lionel	ALEX DESCAS
Joséphine	MATI DIOP
Noé	GRÉGOIRE COLIN
Gabrielle	NICOLE DOGUE
René	JULIETH MARS
With the special participation of	INGRID CAVEN as the Aunt

And with:

Mani and Ozale
Thomas Murviel
Jacqueline Andrieux
Malaïka Marie-Jeanne
Virgile Elana
Eriq Ebouaney
Mary Pie
Stéphane Pocrain
Moulaye Diarra
Jean-Luc Joseph
Paul Bebga
Mario Canonge
Djédjé Apali
Cheikh Touré
Giscard Bouchotte
Tony Mpoudja
Mélanie Petzold
Adama Niane
David Saada
Meyen Ravine
Luvinsky Âtché
Anne Makangila-Lebo
Sylvana Martel

SYNOPSIS

Lionel is a train driver on Paris's rapid-transit rail network. He has been raising his daughter, Joséphine, alone ever since she was a little girl. She has now grown into a young woman. They live side by side, a little bit like a couple, refusing the advances and cares of others. For Lionel, only his daughter counts, and for Joséphine, it's her father who is the most important person in the world.

Little by little, Lionel realizes that time is passing by, even for them. The time to leave each other is perhaps approaching.

Claire Denis

Claire Denis was born in 1946 in Paris. She passed her youth in Djibouti, Cameroon and Burkina Faso. Graduate from IDHEC (La Fémis), she worked as an assistant for directors such as Jacques Rivette, Jim Jarmusch and Wim Wenders. She has been a film director since 1988.

FILMOGRAPHY

Cinema

CHOCOLAT	1988 – 105 min - Feature
MAN NO RUN	1989 – 90 min - Documentary
S'EN FOUT LA MORT	1990 – 97 min – Feature
KEEP IT YOURSELF	1991 – 40 min - Short
J'AI PAS SOMMEIL	1994 – 110 min - Feature
A PROPOS DE NICE, LA SUITE	1995 – Short
NENETTE ET BONI	1996 – 1 h 43 min – Feature Golden Leopard at the Locarno International Film Festival
BEAU TRAVAIL	1999 – 1 h 30 min – Feature
TROUBLE EVERY DAY	2001 – 101 min - Feature
VERS NANCY	2002 - short – 'Ten Minutes Older' Collection
VENDREDI SOIR	2002 – 1 h 30 min - Feature
THE INTRUDER	2004 – 130 min - Feature
VERS MATHILDE	2005 – 84 min - Documentary
35 SHOTS OF RUM	2008 – Feature
WHITE MATERIAL	2009 (In post-production)

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Television

JACQUES RIVETTE, LE VEILLEUR	1990 - 130 min - Documentary (With the collaboration of Serge Daney)
LA ROBE À CERCEAU	1991 – 24 min - Short
US GO HOME	1994 – 68 min - TV feature
UNE DÉCLARATION	1996 - (Cartier Foundation)

Interview with Claire Denis

When did the idea of *35 Shots of Rum* come up for the first time?

Perhaps as early as my first film, because it is my Grandfather's story that I kept hearing as a child. My grandfather was a widower who raised my mother, an only child, on his own and who never remarried. Myself and my brothers and sisters could feel how crucial the moment when my mother left him must have been, as she was his only child. We thought that we, brothers and sisters with a father and a mother, would never have to do such a cruel thing. Years later, there was an Ozu retrospective in Paris, in the summer. I took my mother along, several evenings in a row, to see his films. I could feel that she was touched by the father's presence in Ozu's work. It reminded her of her own father, my grandfather. In Ozu's films, feelings are expressed in a particular way. I could sense that I was making my way to wanting to do a film. I was actually brushing the idea aside because I could not see who could embody that man. I did not want a replica, the story lay somewhere else.

My grandfather was Brazilian. I could sense that he was not from France. Being a foreigner, it was as if his only family was his daughter. I realised from a very young age that my mother was the only one who counted. Even when she got married and had children, he was a very unusual grandfather because he was first and foremost our mother's father, much more than our grandfather. We understood that he loved us much less than he loved her. The film project was stuck inside me as I thought that no one could interpret this man.

No one except for Alex Descas...

Yes, Alex. (...) He can express things with a subdued, silent and unfailing intensity, and as a result I believe in them. To be this man's daughter meant simultaneously trusting him entirely, knowing his fragility, and seeing in him an attractive man. Had he only been a loyal and fragile father, it would already have been a lot, but he was also very attractive.

... In the film, one enters their relationship as one would that of a couple?

Yes, at first sight, it is a very believable couple. To the point where we wrote the first scene in the flat with Jean-Pol [Fargeau, co-scriptwriter] as if it were about a couple reunited after a day at work. It's only towards the end that one realizes that they actually do not sleep in the same bedroom. As soon as we started working with Alex and Mati, I saw Alex changing, withdrawing into himself as if he was asking Mati to come to him. Alex felt that it was better for her to go to him rather than him to her. It allowed him to exercise the paternity link without any ambiguity. She could not question the nature of the kisses and caresses of the actor who was to play her father. I was reassured, I thought there was no ambiguity for Mati.

Except perhaps in the dance scene...

It was ambiguous in essence because he invites his daughter to dance, but he only invites her to dance in order to pass her on to this young man. I think that the scene is disturbing as it is similar to a rite of passage, a kind of ceremony: the father is giving away his daughter. This embarrassment was also felt on set.

Is it because of this embarrassment that Joséphine refuses Noé's kiss?

Josephine does not see her neighbour as a potential lover (he is part of the fabric of the building and of her life, and the kiss in front of her father makes it all the more unexpected). All of a sudden, she has to accept a kiss from someone she has not chosen herself. It is only after this kiss that she questions herself. She is not docile, she wants to make her own decisions, without aggression. She knows that the neighbour is taking advantage of her, like a starving wolf. She senses it and perhaps is annoyed by it. All of a sudden he kisses her for real. Prior to this he's been flirtatious with her in the staircase for years. She realizes at once that he's not just the nice neighbour. She perceives there is something about his desire, linked to the closeness of her father, something that makes it sexually disturbing. Part of her perhaps refuses the idea of leaving her father and sees in Noé a much calmer love, a love that would not separate her from her father or the building as much as a

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passion for someone outside of this situation would. Maybe it is a more rational love, a love she had not thought of before, easier to envision than a passion that could swallow her up.

Noé takes advantage of the situation, so does the father who sleeps out...

Attracted or not, the father wants to signify to his daughter that she is as free as he is, that they are not prisoners of the idea of family that their neighbour Gabrielle is trying so hard to create. It is his own way to be free...Desire also exists. Desire sets free.

Their entire relationship is narrated with anxiety...

Yes, the danger for me was there. To love is to be scared that something might happen to the person you love. That's why we wrote the scene with the horse. It is a bit like Schumann's lied setting Goethe's poem in which the father takes his child on a horse onto the moor to save him because he is feverish. One often thinks that fathers are more casual than mothers with their children, but I am not sure about that. It is very delicate. There can't be as much intimacy as with a mother. A father will be more casual with his daughter because he has to keep some distance.

And at the door of this relationship, all the others are awaiting...

This type of love is so exclusive that it excludes all others. ..His life is first and foremost his daughter. Their life is a citadel, and his friendships with René as well as with the others cannot go beyond a certain stage.

The spirit of René haunts the film. Through him we understand that getting off the train represents death...

Yes, I often have the impression that life is like that. A man who's made redundant young, or put in early retirement, whether he works for a train company or not, is abandoned on the platform. A love is also a kind of train. Getting off the train is always putting your life at risk. The train story goes back many years. I was convalescing after surgery and I listened to the radio. During an afternoon programme on France Inter, Daniel Mermet was interviewing people who read on the RER [Paris and Suburban intercity railway]: newspapers, novels, files, the Koran or the Bible. On his last show, he visits the RER's driver in his cabin: 'I won't ask you, of course, if you read. One cannot read while driving. The guy replies 'True but reading is very important for me'. 'And what do you read for example?'. The driver replies: 'At the moment I am reading *Mars* by Fritz Zorn'. 'Do you like this book?' The driver

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says: 'Yes, it allows me to question my condition as a human being, and ponder the moments I felt like committing suicide'. He then talks about the temptation of suicide, and he adds that of course the solitude of his cabin predisposes him for introspection. It is true. Now that I have myself been in a RER cabin, I realize to what extent it lends itself to introspection and loneliness. When one has dark ideas, it is not easy to be in control of a moving train. I understand why. This David Mermet programme has become one of my fetishes.

...

The film's routine is threatened twice: by a retirement and by a wedding. These two moments are partly told through empty glasses of rum and through a legend. What is the story of the 35 shots of Rum that punctuates the film, a story that is never unveiled to us?

I was thinking of a legend of a Caribbean pirate. This pirate is supposed to have said 'the day you'll take my daughter, I shall get drunk'. We wanted to write the legend with Jean-Pol, but then we thought, it's better that no one knows it.

We get the feeling that only father and daughter live in the present. All the others seem trapped in the past: Noé, his old cat and his deceased parents' flat, Gabrielle and her past love, René stuck to the job he no longer has. Their eyes are on Lionel and Joséphine, cast towards this closed door behind which the perfection of the everyday is happening...

What's selfish in love, in other people's eyes, is that love is really a machine that fabricates the pleasure of being in the present. Love, not necessarily between two lovers, gives the taste of the present. It is precisely the meaning of the steam coming out of the rice cooker when the father comes back home, little signals telling him 'we really are here and now'. I think that those who love each other know that their love separates them from the others. It is their bastion, their strength. They can't really sacrifice it. Two beings in unison, whatever their reason may be, create an impenetrable circle.

A last journey is required to get out of this circle – going even further, all the way to Germany...

I thought that we needed to know something about the mother in the film. We needed a trace of her, not only a picture, in order to express something about being mixed race. I imagined that she was European but from a very different country. It is

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as if, at the end of the highway, one could encounter another world. I remembered the land (I'd been there before) between Hamburg and Lübeck, on the Baltic... The father does not come from this part of the world where one needs to switch on lamps to create sunlight. His daughter is the product of this fusion.

In *35 Shots of Rum*, music is omnipresent, obsessive...

Stuart (Staples, leader of the Tindersticks), told me in the editing room: "I'll only compose one theme because the film does not need much music". In reality though, music has slowly taken over the film, like growing ivy that takes over an entire wall. I could feel Stuart's presence throughout the film. I didn't tell him anything when I sent him the script. Stuart has a daughter. He never needs any explanation, he understands scripts more or less as I want him to, and often he highlights an angle that I had not noticed. I am very impressed by him... I had the impression – or perhaps I fantasized it- that he told me: 'This story is for me'. As if he wanted to say: I understand it better than you do.

Paris, December 2008

Translation Diane Gabrysiak

MATI DIOP (Joséphine)

Born in Paris on 22 June 1982. She is the daughter of the Senegalese musician Wasis Diop. Her mother, an art dealer, is French.

She directed a first short film, *Last Night*, in 2004. *Last Night* was shown at the Cinémathèque Française in the 'Avant-Garde Cinema' section. She then worked for the director Sharunas Bartas in Vilnius, before being accepted for an artist residency at the Le Fresnoy contemporary arts studios in the North of France. After a month there, Grégoire Colin, a close friend of hers, introduced her to Claire Denis: 'Her link to Africa, her universe, I was connected to her in many ways. I was therefore very happy to meet her, regardless of whether she would hire me for her film or not. I'd already thought of sending her my short film'.

As soon as the shooting of *35 Shots of Rum* ended, Mati went back to Le Fresnoy to get on with her camera work. While *35 Shots of Rum* was being released in France in February, Mati left for Dakar to shoot *1000 Soleils (1000 Suns)*, a film 'on someone who's no longer there and whose traces I follow in order to talk about today's Dakar and about cinema. I am starting to feel like shooting in Senegal, to feel like re-appropriating my own history, my origins, through cinema and behind a camera.'

ALEX DESCAS (Lionel)

Born in 1958 in a family originally from the West Indies, Alex Descas grew up in Paris. His first role was in *L'Arbalète* by Sergio Gobi. After a few appearances in films by Marco Ferreri, Yves Boisset and Gerard Krawczyk, he got a part in *Les Keufs* (1987) by Josiane Balasko with Isaach de Bankolé. He met Claire Denis during this period: 'I was lucky to read her first script, *Chocolat*. I immediately thought: 'I have to be in that film'. She did not have a part for him then.

'After *Chocolat*, she told both Isaach and me: "I have an idea for a film. Would you agree to participate?" Given how little work black actors get in French cinema, we replied without even knowing what the film would be about: "it would be a pleasure"'. The film was *S'en fout la mort*. 'From then on the adventure really started for me'. Alex played his first major role as Jocelyn, a man with a tragic destiny breeding cocks for illegal fights. Alex won the Michel Simon Prize and got a César nomination as best newcomer. *S'en fout la mort* also marked the beginning of a long-term collaboration with Claire Denis. *35 Shots of Rum* is the sixth film they have made together.

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Since *35 Shots of Rum*, Alex Descas has worked with Lucas Belvaux on his latest film *Rapt!*, and with Jim Jarmusch for *The Limits of Control*.

Select Filmography

35 Shots of Rum (2008) by Claire Denis
Négropolitain (2008) by Gary Pierre-Victor
Un couple parfait (2005) by Nobuhiro Suwa
Les Etats-Unis d'Albert (2005) by André Forcier
Boarding Gate (2005) by Olivier Assayas
Nèg Maron (2004) by Jean-Claude Flamand-Barney
The Intruder (2004) by Claire Denis
Close-Up (2004) by Claude Farge
Tiresia (2003) by Bertrand Bonello
Trouble Every Day (2001) by Claire Denis
Lumumba (2000) by Raoul Peck
Late August, Early September (1999) by Olivier Assayas
I Can't Sleep (1994) by Claire Denis
S'en fout la mort (1990) by Claire Denis

GRÉGOIRE COLIN

Select Filmography

Voleurs de chevaux (2006) by Micha Wald
Le Tueur (2006) by Cédric Anger
The lost domain (2004), by Raoul Ruiz
L' Eclairer (2004), by Djibril Glissant
The Intruder (2004), by Claire Denis
La Ravisseuse (2004) by Antoine Santana
Variété Française (2003) by Frédéric Videau
Inquiétudes (2003) by Gilles Bourdos
Sex is Comedy (2002) by Catherine Breillat
Vendredi Soir (2001) by Claire Denis
Sade (2000) by Benoît Jacquot
Beau Travail (1999) by Claire Denis
The Dream Life of Angels (1998) by Erick Zonca
Secret Défense (1998) by Jacques Rivette
Nénette et Boni (1996) by Claire Denis
La Reine Margot (1994) by Patrice Chéreau

INGRID CAVEN (The aunt)

Ingrid Caven is best known for the Fassbinder films in which she appeared, like *Martha* (1974), *Mother Kuster's Trip to Heaven* (1975), *Fox and His Friends* (1975) and *In a Year with 13 Moons* (1978).

JEAN-POL FARGEAU (scriptwriter)

Select Filmography

The Intruder (2004), by Claire Denis
Les Marins perdus (2003) by Claire Devers
Trouble Every Day (2001) by Claire Denis
Le Troisième œil (2001) by Christophe Fraipont
Veloma (2000) by Marie Laubier
Beau Travail (1999) by Claire Denis
Nénette et Boni (1996) by Claire Denis
I Can't Sleep (1994) by Claire Denis
S'en fout la mort (1990) by Claire Denis
Chocolat (1988) by Claire Denis