

35 Shots of Rum

35 rhums

France/Germany 2008

Cert 12A 99 m

Crew

Director	Claire Denis
Screenplay	Claire Denis & Jean-Pol Fargeau
Cinematography	Agnès Godard
Editor	Guy Lecomte
Art Director	Arnaud de Moïéron
Music	Tindersticks

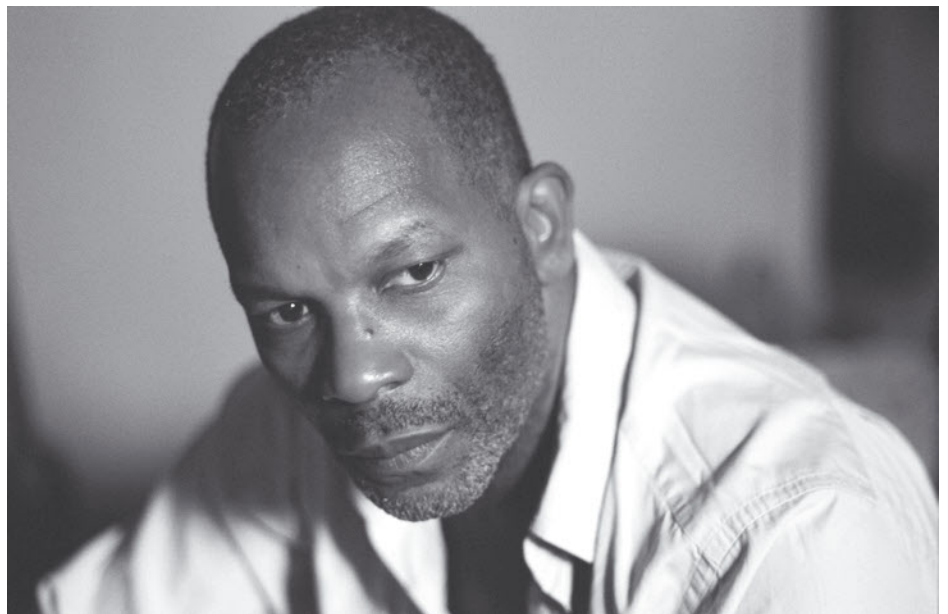
Cast

Alex Descas	Lionel
Mati Diop	Joséphine
Nicole Dogué	Gabrielle
Grégoire Colin	Noé
Julieth Nars	René
Adèle Ado	bar owner

Synopsis

Paris suburbs, the present. Train driver Lionel, a widower in his fifties, lives with his daughter Josephine, a student in her early twenties. Josephine buys a rice cooker but hides it away when Lionel presents her with a similar one that same evening. Gabrielle, a middle-aged taxi driver who lives in the same block, is in love with Lionel. Noé, an orphaned drifter, also lives in the block in his dead parents' flat, which he refuses to change or sell; he is in love with Josephine, but has been unable to tell her. René, a train-driver colleague of Lionel's, retires, but has mixed feelings at leaving his job and friends. Not long after, Lionel runs into René in a cafe; he seems depressed. Lionel, Josephine, Gabrielle and Noé head to a concert one night, but the car breaks down. They seek shelter from the cold in a restaurant.

Abridged from Sight & Sound, August '09



Reviews

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.

Wally Hammond, Time Out London July 2009

Claire Denis was raised in francophone Africa and most of her films are set there or involve people from the former colonies living in France. The best of them is the excellent *Beau Travail*, a loose transposition of Melville's *Billy Budd* to a Foreign Legion barracks in Djibouti. Her fine new film centres on a group of friends, all of African descent and living in a Paris suburb.

The central figures are the widowed engine-driver Lionel, who shares a flat with his pretty student daughter, Jo, in the same block as the handsome taxi-driver Gabrielle, and the good-looking businessman Noé, who inhabits the penthouse apartment left him by his parents. Gabrielle is carrying a torch for Lionel; Noé, who is always on the point of leaving, fancies Jo, who herself feels a need to break away, while Lionel leads a satisfying life on lines as confidently set as those he drives upon. Lionel visits his elderly white mother-in-law in Germany, taking Jo with him. Otherwise nothing very dramatic happens. Yet we are constantly held by this quiet, subtle, elliptical film that observes its characters' moods and their shifting relationships with the same uncloying love and concern the characters show towards each other. The film's title refers to a symbolic drinking ritual between the railwaymen.

Philip French, Observer, July 2009