

Cockles and Muscles

(Cruscases et Coquillages)

France 2004

94 mins

Crew and Cast

Directors	Olivier Ducastel Jacques Martineau
Screenplay	Olivier Ducastel Jacques Martineau
Cinematography	Mathieu Poirot-Delpeche
Béatrix	Valéria Bruni Tedeschi
Marc	Gilbert Melki
Didier	Jean-Marc Barr
Mathieu	Jacques Bonnardé

Synopsis

Marc, Béatrix and their teenage children are spending summer by the sea, but the atmosphere becomes erotically charged as young love blossoms, old flames flare up and complications escalate. Valeria Bruni-Tedeschi storms through the film as Béatrix, sexy as only the French know how, whose desires are aroused by something in the Mediterranean breeze. She's not the only one - daughter Laura is pining for her biker boyfriend, and son Charly has won the heart of his best friend Martin, leading Béatrix to assume that he is gay. Meanwhile husband Marc struggles disapprovingly to maintain some gravitas, which soon wilts when an old flame turns up. Behind the farcical set-pieces, the hilarious running gags and the impeccable comic timing, this has something considered to say about families, passion, and the need for honesty. A delicious treat and one of the sunniest French comedies we have had for a long time.



Reviews

Echoes of European masters Rohmer and Vadim reverberate around this winning sex-comedy romp from Olivier Ducastel and Jacques Martineau. As with their debut, *Jeanne And The Perfect Guy*, the action has a musical feel. But this is traditional French farce, as cheating Bruni Tedeschi, bisexual husband Melki and confused son Romain Torres take plenty of showers between assignations with puny paramour Bonnardé, gay schoolboy Edouard Collin and plumber Barr.

The themes of sexual honesty and family expectation are treated delicately, however there's a hint of chauvinism that would have been more damaging were it not for a delightful display of infectious joie de vivre from Bruni Tedeschi, whose singing is as enchanting as her spirit.

Empire

Teenagers are so conventional,' Béatrix (Valéria Bruni-Tedeschi) sighs to Marc (Gilbert Melki) after their mortified son throws yet another strop during their summer sojourn on the Riviera. Shaggy barnet and conspicuously intimate chum notwithstanding, young Charly (Romain Torres) is indeed the spirit of conservatism here – but given the sexual and identity crises buffeting his family at every turn, that hardly qualifies him as a reactionary. With maman taking a languorously laissez-faire attitude towards sex, drugs and all life's wondrous vagaries, the poor lad's got precious little to rebel against.

Setting its adolescent and mid-life ructions in and around Marc's childhood summer house, *'Cockles and Muscles'* fits into the carnivalesque tradition of rural getaways as the site of farcical inversion and deceit: Béatrix's bit on the side Mathieu (Jacques Bonnardé) soon pops up while Marc – who doesn't wholly share his wife's permissive bent – finds himself fixating on Charly's relationship with Martin (Edouard Collin), and then wrong-footed by a blast from his own past.

Plenty of wool pulled over eyes and sticks grabbed by the wrong end, then; but as they're all tolerant, reasonable types (the odd wobbly aside) there's little sense of danger, nor much of the existential angst that characterised Ducastel and Martineau's earlier, equally engaging films *'Drôle de Félix'* and *'Ma Vraie Vie à Rouen'*. Instead everything breezes along in an amiable, leisurely and awfully continental way; indeed, from its liberated sensibility and fetishisation of bivalves to the breathy chanson over the animated titles and climactic colour-coordinated song-and-dance number, this is quite the Frenchest thing you're likely to see all year.

Ben Walters Time Out

You know quality is assured when French actress-of-the-moment Valeria Bruni Tedeschi (seen recently in François Ozon's *5x2*) appears in the cast list and *COCKLES AND MUSCLES*, also featuring Lars von Trier- and Luc Besson-favourite Jean-Marc Barr, is a mini-classic of its kind. For their summer vacation, Marc takes his wife Beatrix and their two children to the seaside house of his youth. The Mediterranean wind blows, the sea churns, and the heat of summer stokes their desires. Their daughter Laura, 19, has a rendezvous with her biker boyfriend, and their son Charly, 17, roams with his best friend Martin, who is in love with him. Beatrix is sensitive to the undisclosed, erotically charged atmosphere that exists between the boys and imagines that her son is gay. When Beatrix's lover Mathieu shows up, and Marc's old flame appears, complications escalate and the vacation collapses into hilarious chaos.... Light-hearted and fluffy in the way only the French can make films, this is the perfect summer evening comedy.

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