

The Singer

France/Belgium 2006 113 mins

Crew and Cast

Director	Xavier Giannoli
Screenplay	Xavier Giannoli
Cinematography	Yorik le Saux
Original Music	Alexandre Desplat

Alain Moreau	G�rard Depardieu
Marion	C�cile de France
Bruno	Mathieu Amalric
Mich�le	Christine Citti
Philippe Mariani	Alain Chanone
Christophe	Himself

Full Synopsis

Central France, the present.

Alain Moreau tours the discotheques, restaurants and casinos of the Clermont-Ferrand area; singing sentimental ballads and pop standards from the 60s and 70s. He is managed by Mich le, his ex-wife, and her partner Daniel. He falls in love with Marion, a young estate agent; they sleep together on the first night, but she is more reticent the next morning. We then follow Alain through a succession of gigs and in his courtship of Marion, a single mother unsuccessfully trying to bond with her young son from a former relationship. Under the pretext of looking for a house, Alain spends a lot of time with Marion and their relationship develops into a closer, though mostly platonic one, to the extent that Mich le becomes jealous. Marion has a brief affair with Bruno, her boss; Alain sleeps with Mich le. Alain has to take a break from singing due to a throat infection. Later he is offered a slot as the opening act to famous pop singer Christophe before a huge audience, but he gets cold feet and flees before the start. He and Marion meet in a caf  where they talk about their separate futures. In the last shot, she returns and they embrace.

from *Sight & Sound* Oct'07



Review

At 58 years old, G rard Depardieu looks extraordinarily similar to the way he did in his 30s. The bulk, and the untended, longish hair, the virile what-the-hell attitude have all survived. This is not to say that he does not, in these latter years, have off moments and off movies. In the 2006 comedy *Last Holiday*, with Queen Latifah, he looked as if he was on heavy medication throughout.

This is a return to form, and a lovely, if self-conscious, performance in a movie directed by the very interesting film-maker Xavier Giannoli, whom I first became aware of with his 2003 film *Eager Bodies*, a fiercely sensual work about love and death, shown at the London Film Festival. *The Singer* requires a certain amount of sentimental indulgence, and indeed a specific fondness for French chansons to be really loved.

But Depardieu is great as Alain, the ageing singer who has a strong local following, and plays in clubs and dance-halls to the over-40s single/divorcee crowd who need his sentimental tunes, even more than booze, to help break the ice. Alain also plays retirement homes, crooningly passing among the audience and gently stroking the cheeks of beaming old ladies, his CDs laid out on a trestle-table for purchase. (These scenes, melancholy yet not nastily satiric, are in fact very different from those in Fabrice du Welz's 2004 horror-comedy *Calvaire*, in which Laurent Lucas's singer, as he plays his tragic gigs at old-folks' homes, is obviously heading for a terrible reckoning.)

Alain is reasonably content with his lot, and his still healthy career is being shrewdly managed by his former wife Mich le (Christine Citti) with whom relations are perfectly amicable. But then he spots a beautiful young woman, Marion (C cile de France), in the audience; he rolls out his roguish charm on her and she, in spite of herself, is flattered and intrigued. Their relationship unfolds from there, bittersweet and painful on both sides, when she, being by trade an estate agent, warily agrees to help him look for a new house.

As they glumly consider the various properties Alain may or may not be interested in acquiring, these become metaphors for all his possible futures - and hers too. Where does he want to live? How does he want to live? Does this faltering infatuation mean Alain actually has a new future, which now needs to be imagined?

For Marion, however, a real love affair with this exotic and faintly absurd older man would mean the opposite. Options would be closed off: for good or ill. She would have no future in that sense, but she might have security and, with a child to look after, that is not to be turned down lightly. Later, the incorrigible Alain hits on another sexy young woman and she brutally turns him down: "I'm not going to settle for a guy like you." Alain is not what Marion imagined for herself, but should she settle for him? And should Alain gamble on the unsettling experience of seriously falling in love? The movie is quietly, and understatedly, about their respective dilemmas. A gentle, autumnal film, with nice performances from Depardieu and De France.

Peter Bradshaw, *The Guardian* Sep'07