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“a woman is a woman”

by Jean-Luc GODARD

**A WOMAN IS A WOMAN (1960)
(Une Femme Est Une Femme)**

Written and Directed by Jean-Luc Godard. Photography by Raoul Coutard. Music by Michel Legrand. With Anna Karina, Jean-Paul Belmondo, Jean-Claude Brialy. French with English subtitles.

In 1961 Godard wrote and directed his first and only “neo-realist” musical, A WOMAN IS A WOMAN. In a free-form, improvisational structure Godard took music by Michel Legrand, added Belmondo, Jean-Claude Brialy and Anna Karina, and brought them all together with the brilliant photography of Raoul Coutard, to give his audience a rare insight into Godard’s view of women, Hollywood musicals, off-beat movies, and love.

“A WOMAN IS A WOMAN is a salute to life, liberty and offbeat movies by Director Jean-Luc Godard (BREATHLESS), whose joy in his work has never been more apparent. In this fresh and giddy free-form improvisation,

Godard weaves all the bright idiocy of a Hollywood musical into some very je me me fishe French rounds involving an ecdysiast (Anna Karina) who sheds her last flimsy inhibition and decides to have a baby with her lover, or if it happens to work out that way—with her lover’s best friend (Jean-Paul Belmondo).”
TIME MAGAZINE

“This love minuet is presented with a fine splashy comic use of color—certainly among one of the best ever—and a razzle-dazzle jumpcutting pace that almost never bogs down. A consciously playful relationship with the cinema audience is established by winks, gestures, sometimes direct address. That this sort of thing has been bastardized in such heavy-handed tripe as TOM JONES does not lessen Godard’s achievement in maintaining a steady light touch which not only brings these moments off unaffectedly but allows him to use a whole herd of devices for disrupting the conventions of a closed fictional story intent on the creation of its own ‘reality.’ Titles are flashed across

the screen while characters freeze into immobility, explaining that Angela and Emile are truly in love but . . . ; music is used arbitrarily for particular comic effects; improvised bits and visual gags come pouring out one after another. All this style distances and cornices the action, creating a wacky never-never land out of a strip-tease joint, a bare apartment, and a neon-lit night-time Paris. But, as in other Godard movies, the camera continually adores two objects: Karina and Paris, which carry the emotional charge of the film. Where Brialy and Belmondo are cast and played as effective stereotypes, of a slightly prissy young lover and an all-around hustler respectively, Karina, with her single-minded concentration on wanting a baby breaks out of the myriad comic framing devices to become a character who betrays. Godard’s anarchism is of the kind that suicidally races toward fatality rather than choosing the dream of the possible elimination of fatality by violence. In Godard, people always betray and vitality dies (Belmondo in BREATHLESS, Karina in VIVRE SA VIE, Sami Frey in BAND A PART). Similarly, the frothy cosmos of partial destruction—whose child will it be?—of the bonds that have been created between Angela and Emile. And incidentally of friendship as well, since Albert betrays Emile through the same act. But this is a comedy and can end happily with Emile and Angela sweaty in bed, a flourish of music, and wide smiles. Yet, amid the sweep of Coutard’s night-time Paris that always seems shining with a nostalgia for lost joy, the fatality has been even here, the betrayal is, and some fragment of emotional vitality has died in the service of something mechanical.”—Henry Heifitz, **FILM QUARTERLY**

“A WOMAN IS A WOMAN, photographed in dazzling color on a wide, widescreen, is the most buoyant and enjoyable movie shown at the (New York Film) festival to date . . . The film has enormous charm, particularly when the characters interrupt the action to imitate actors in Stanley Donen musical, but it has a serious undercurrent.”—Eugene Archer, **NEW YORK TIMES**

Special Jury Prize and Best Actress Award, Berlin Festival, 1961
New York Film Festival, 1964

